Linda Warren: Welcome back. Effective accurate assessment starts with a question or a set of questions about a child's growth and development. Questions can help you learn about a child's interests, skills and abilities. They help you understand the child's approach to learning, use of language and social interactions. Developing specific questions about a child gives a focus for observation.

The questions and their answers provide rich information about individual children and classroom practices. Mentor-coaches can support their protégés' understanding of their role in asking assessment questions and choosing appropriate questions for each child. Susan and Carol, what can mentor-coaches and protégés keep in mind as they develop questions about specific children?

Susan Fordice: I think things to keep in mind are what are the goals that you have in mind for a particular child? And also what are the child's interests, what kinds of things that you can do to hook the child into the activity that you want to use? And then, also, you need to keep in mind ways to purpose, purposefully set up the environment so that you can get the child to show you what they know. One example that I can think of is a child that we had who we wanted to communicate with us. Because she had autism, she wasn't using communication in meaningful ways.

She really liked horses, so we took her favorite horses and we put them in a basket and put them out of her reach thinking that she would come to us then and ask for the horses, or some way let us know that she wanted them. Well, it was rather disastrous the first time because she tipped the whole shelf over and got the horses herself.

So we had to rethink a different way to set up the environment and so we put the horses in a big plastic jar with a lid that she couldn't get off. And by doing that, she eventually had to come to us and, and hand us the jar to open it for her. So we set up the environment that way, keeping in mind what her goals are, what her interests were, and a way that we could get her to respond in the way that we wanted her to do.

Carol Bellamy: I had a similar situation. I have, I had an autistic child as well and in order for him to communicate, we used a system called board-maker where we set up pictures with, that showed things that he might want – a drink of water. And we first demonstrated how to use those pictures. You know, if he wanted some water, I'd take the picture off of his board and show him, "Would you like some water?" Eventually, he took the pictures and would bring them to us to show us what his needs were. It was a wonderful way for him to communicate.

Linda: Good point, so Susan, what's the question here? Susan: The question is, how can we get these children in this in these two instances, how can we get them to communicate with us in a meaningful way?

Linda: And I want to end this this conversation by really reinforcing this notion that if you really want to get a complete picture of a child that you need to observe in different settings and across time. Okay, we will see this process in action in a toddler classroom in Massachusetts. We are going to see a mentor-coach, Susan, and her protégé, Sandy, discuss an observation, answer their question and make plans to reinforce emerging communication skills.

[Video begins] Narrator: Children's play has so much to tell us but full understanding requires careful observation. It starts with planning. Sandy Kunz: ...whole idea of using the props. Sue Twombly: So tell me a little bit about what happened when you put the tape recorder in your room to capture some vocalizations.

Sandy: Well first we had put out on the floor some musical instruments we were going to explore and we had done that before. And we started the tape playing and we heard a lot of the banging and clunking noises and then as well as some of the sitting down babies exploring.

We have some young toddlers who are mobile and one of them walked over to me and picked up she had picked up one of these little dollies on her way over and we sing with these a song called Zoom Dolly Dolly and as we're singing we bounce the dolly up and down. And this child was bouncing her dolly and she said "da da da" to me and looked at

me kind of with a question in her eyes and I thought, "Perhaps she's actually asking me to sing Zoom Dolly Dolly" which hasn't happened before. Sue: Interesting, interesting.

Sandy: Usually it's been teachers beginning the song and then we would give everyone a dolly and they might bounce them with us or put the dolly up, but we hadn't had an actual vocalization yet or a solicitation and so we were kind of excited about it. And I thought, "Well, how can I know for sure if she's really asking to sing that?" It seems pretty likely that she is but I wasn't sure that it wasn't just, you know, her exploring the sound da da da. So...

Sue: So you weren't absolutely sure. Sandy: I wasn't absolutely sure. Sue: It's pretty remarkable that she would pick out of Zoom Dolly Dolly she'd pick out the da sound which is pretty amazing.

Sandy: Although it did seem like it was most likely because she had the doll, she was doing the motion, there were a lot of signs and props. And then it began making me wonder, "How else could we know that for sure or how else could we help a child in the room ask us to do something that they knew?"

Sue: Interesting, so you've got a question there to do some more observation. Sandy: Right. Sue: So what do you think you might try? So if you have a question, your question is how might we help children to ask us for... Sandy: Right, to ask since they don't have a lot of language yet how can we help prompt them to use some of the sounds to communicate?

Sue: Right, right. Sandy: Not not just explore them out loud but how can we help them begin to link up the vocalization with an idea or a wish or to satisfy a desire? Sue: Right, right, right, right.

Sandy: So one of the thoughts I had, I did bring this other book, she likes this book Fiddle-I-Fee and we sing along to it. And one of the teachers noticed that she's beginning to hand it to people. So we're beginning to think that maybe we need to have more songs or more finger plays that we do more repetitively, more than we have been. Certain ones, and if there is some way we can link it up with a prop, whether it's a book or, you know, the dolly or some kind of hand motion because they will be able to use that to let us know - more than just their language.

Sue: Sure, yeah, I think I'd keep it small first and you might want to focus on Emma and maybe someone else who's beginning to do some vocalization so, so it doesn't get so scattered that you can't figure out. Sandy: Okay, right, so maybe just zoom in on a couple of songs and some of the mobile children so they can actually get the things and bring them to us or show them to us. Sue: Right, right, right, right, that's right.

Sandy: So maybe a sign or a prop with the sound is gonna, and teacher's are gonna be looking for that. But I think that if we have that extra information, that extra tool, it will it will be a definite sign that they're using that language in a purposeful way, not just an exploratory way. Sue: Exactly, I think that's exciting, I think you've got a good plan and I'll be really interested to hear what happens next. I think that's exciting.

Sandy: Okay, okay, well we'll let you know. [Video ends]

Linda: Sandy's ongoing observation of the children in her class led her to pick up on Emma's spontaneous new skill and create new assessment questions to be answered. Together Susan and Sandy planned for next steps to continue supporting Emma's development. Susan, what were some of the things that you liked most about the video?

Susan: I like the way the mentor-coach was giving a lot of really positive feedback to the teacher and using the guided discussion and the reflective questions to get her to think about what was happening in her classroom and how she could further support Emma's development. I thought she did a very nice job of reaffirming the protégé and helping her to feel like she could control the situation in a way that would have good outcomes.

Linda: That felt as if it was a very comfortable relationship. Carol, do you want to add any ideas for new activities or for individualizing?

Carol: Yes, I wanted to just emphasize it's so important that teachers realize that they can get a lot from these

spontaneous activities. A lot of teachers try to plan activities for children but if they'll do a lot more observation, they get more from the child. They get, they are able to get more for their ongoing assessments so it's - I can't emphasize enough how important it is for children to have those spontaneous moments.

Linda: And that was what was particularly striking about this particular video clip is that it was a totally unplanned observation and, you know, they happened to notice the child. And based on what they observed, they tried to think of of what they would do next and then formulated some some questions for framing that observation. That's really good. I know that there are some other resources that we probably should mention here that would be important to consider. One is the Child's Developmental Continuum and the other is the Head Start Child Outcomes Frameworks.

And I think that these are so useful in suggesting new activities and ways for individualizing. Now we want you to take some time to talk about your own experiences with ongoing assessment. You will continue reading the vignettes about Cindy and Cheryl, Lee and Leanna that you started in Module One. Stop the tape now, resume the tape when you have completed your discussions.
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