**How to Use Practice Vignettes**

Each practice vignette is between approximately 2-4 minutes long. The vignettes are unscripted interactions that occurred in an early childhood setting in New Mexico, either a childcare/early education classroom or a home setting. There is no narration provided. This allows the user to decide what they would like to focus on and which reflective practice skills they would most like to practice.

Some ideas follow:

**Enhancing Observation Skills**

Careful observation is essential to reflective practice. Movie clips of early childhood interactions provide us with a unique opportunity to fine tune our observation skills because we can focus with more intentionality than when we are in the setting and responsible for the interaction. When we fine-tune our skills through viewing short movie clips, we are more able to transfer those skills to the busier, less controlled settings in which we often work.

**Observing without judgment -** For purposes of reflection, it is important to resist the urge to evaluate or judge an interaction as “good” or “bad”. Instead, observe for details, reactions, and patterns that emerge. Stay open, humble and curious about what you are seeing as well as what you think and feel as you are watching.

Ask yourself:

* “Why might this be happening in this way?”
* “Why do I have this reaction as I watch this?”
* “What more would I like to know about this situation?”
* “What questions does this raise for me?”
* “What can I learn from this?”

When you find yourself making a judgment about a professional, a child, or a parent, ***turn the judgment into a question*** and then use your questions to guide further observation.

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| **Judgment** | **Examples of Questions** |
| The teacher uses too many negative comments. | Is this typical? How might the teacher be feeling right now? Is this the end of the day? Does she have the support she needs in the classroom? |
| Jayden wants the teacher all to himself. He needs to learn to be more independent. | I wonder if Jayden always needs this much one-on-one attention from his teachers? Why might that be? |
| That parent is not very interested in her child or what’s happening in this visit. | Is this typical? What else might be going on in this mom’s life right now? What has the professional done to invite and support the mom’s involvement in the visit? How did that seem to work? |
| The supervisor or consultant is not really being reflective. | What might the intention of this consultant be when she makes this comment or asks this question?  Why might this interaction look this way? |

**Observing non-verbal cues** in both children and adults - watch carefully to identify:

* + - **Facial expressions** including position of eye brows, /mouth/lips, nose
    - **Body posture** including position of shoulders, tension in muscles, slouching, changes in skin color (pale, mottled or speckled, flushed)
    - **Breathing** – rapid, regular, breath holding, irregular
    - **Gestures** – reaching, pointing, turning head or body toward or away from something
    - **Body movements** including smoothness of movements, coordination, moving toward or away from something, moving with confidence or moving tentatively as if unsure
    - Other non-verbal cues

**Observing both verbal and non-verbal communication** - watch for the following:

* + - Clarity of signals or cues
    - Accuracy in making sense of signals
    - Turn-taking or reciprocity – the back-and-forth of communication
    - Intensity
    - Volume
    - Rate or speed
    - Pacing
    - Variety of communication strategies used
    - Reaction when the communication seems to be accurately understood and responded to with sensitivity
    - Reaction if communication is not noticed or understood by the other person
    - Persistence – does the child/adult keep trying to communicate if not noticed or understood or does he give up?

**Observing with curiosity and openness** – often we are required to be objective in our observations. While objectivity is important when we are reporting or recording our observations, our ability to observe the many details of an interaction can be improved if we observe carefully without deciding in the moment whether or not our observation is objective. For purposes of becoming more reflective in our interactions, it is important to observe with true curiosity and openness. Then, as we reflect on what we’ve observed, we can ask ourselves, “What made me think this?” or “What did I see and hear that led me to believe this is what was happening?”

Try this:

First, write what comes to mind as you are observing. Notice and write down as many details as you can. Stop the movie clips as often as you need to in order to make your notes. ***Then go back after the fact to assess objectivity***. If your note was an inference or guess about something, ask yourself, “What did I see or hear that made me think this?” Go back as needed to the movie clip to review and better understand your observations.

How does this process support your ability to observe with openness and curiosity?

**Enhancing Reflection Skills**

Our ability to be reflective, or to “think about the thinking of one’s self and others” is influenced by many things. Movie clips of interactions among children, parents and other professionals provide us with a more calm and focused opportunity to reflect on:

* The interactions of others;
* The thoughts and feelings we both experience ourselves and perceive in others as we watch interactions; and
* Our own tendencies, strengths and possible “blind spots” when thinking about thinking.

The goal is not to be self-critical (or critical of others) so much as to increase one’s self-awareness. When we are more aware of our observational and reflective strengths and how we tend to see and react to things in the moment, we provide ourselves with opportunities to make more intentional choices during our interactions.

Some reflection strategies to try out when using the practice vignettes, include:

* **Wonder with true curiosity** about what you are seeing and hearing. Put aside “knowing” and open your mind to all that you do not know about what is going on and why things look as they do to you.
* **Watch the movies from as many different perspectives as you can** – you might want to watch the same movie, first from the perspective of the child(ren), then from the perspective of the adult, and finally through your own eyes. What is different? What is similar? What perspective or information might you be missing?
* **Reflect on the likely intentions of the people** in the movie clip – why do you think each person did what they did? What might their intention have been? Could it have been something else (alternative possibilities)? What cues do you use to better understand the likely intentions of others?
* **Be as mind-minded** as you can about each person in the movie –
  + What might each person be thinking and feeling?
  + If you were to use comments or questions to show that you are trying to make sense of the minds of the people in the movie, what might you say or ask?
  + Would you use different tones of voice and verbal expressions to try to match the feeling you believe the person is experiencing?
    - “Ughhh! That is so hard. You keep trying to fit that in the hole.
    - “Hmmmm! You are being so careful about how you word that question. Why might that be?”