D3 — Talking Informatively

8. Expression of Understanding

Today you showed us in your Project that you can convey to others what this module is about. In part two, the challenge is to convey your deep understanding of what you have done in this work in an Expression of Understanding.

Assignment

Your task is to communicate the deep significance for you of this topic. You have investigated informative rather than directive talk; you have provided rich vocabulary; you have shared your experience with others here; you have seen the children change. Now it is time to express what this means. This is a work of personal expression for an audience of other participants here and, if possible, for parents or others to see.

Through the work you have done, you have attained both an understanding and an ability to positively influence the language and sense of personal responsibility of children. Who you are now is the possibility of being a rich, informative, language model, as well as being a less demanding and more open adult who enables children to assume more responsibility for themselves and each other. This is a major achievement.

You can create a poem, dance, story, letter, chart, song, or any other expression you find that enables you to convey your understanding of what it means to talk informatively to enhance children's lives. You can use any expressive medium you choose to convey, in your unique way, your understanding of how rich vocabulary and being less directive, benefits each and every child.

D4 — Attending to Initiative, Cooperation, and Perseverance

1. Concept of Initiative

Observation: We begin the final Module of Connecting to Children by examining that brief instant of time when a child begins to do something new, spontaneously, without a cue from others. Initiations start from within. Our challenge is to be keenly aware when it happens.

Assignment

Watch for One Child's Initiative: Your task is to select a child you know less well than others. Watching him or her carefully for 15 minutes, you write down each action that child begins without a cue or direction from others. Although the child can initiate talk, we want to focus upon what the child begins to do.

For example: *Mark gets an apron and walks to the easel; Mark goes to the puzzle rack; Mark walks into the book corner. Mark picks up the pillow.*

Watch for a Second Child's Initiative: Then your task is to do the same with a different child, making the difference between the children as extreme as you can. If you watched a quiet boy the first time, watch an active girl this time; if you watched a younger child, watch an older child. The object is to gather as many initiations as you can find in a 15-minute period.

Here are the questions to answer in your portfolio.

    a)   *What do these children choose to do?*

    b)   *What kinds of initiative do you like to see?*

    c)   *What does it mean when we say a child has initiative or takes initiative?*

D4 — Attending to Initiative, Cooperation, and Perseverance

2. Initiative Study

Observation: This investigation is similar to the first one you did in *D1 Expressing Warmth to Children*. In that first Module you wrote down actions by children that you valued and organized them in a way that made sense to you. This time you are collecting sets of actions that you see all children initiate at different times of the day. We are looking for children starting to do something, spontaneously, without a cue from others or in imitation of others. Initiative comes from within.

Assignment

The first step is to make a list of each time of the day you have with the children: entry, group time, free time, transition time, cleanup time, toileting time, meal time, music time, leaving time, nap time, wakeup time, etc. Use these words to title separate sheets of paper.

Collect: Then the task is to collect examples of initiative in each of those times of the day. The task is to collect what you like to see children start to do, independently, without being told or without following the lead of another child. You write each act of desirable initiative on a sticky note and put it on the time-of-day page. The page is complete when it is full; that will be enough for our purposes.

For example: *Mark gets his blanket and mat ready for nap; Reiko selects a puzzle from the rack; Angela enters the book corner and picks out a book. Edmundo returns a pillow to its proper place. Sheyla passes out the cups.*

We have no required number for each time of the day. The goal is to gather a sufficient number of different examples at each time of the day until we meet again.

Sort: Before that next meeting, your final task is to put all of them together and sort them into similar categories. It is as if each of these times of the day is a different bag of seashells gathered from separate beaches, which we pour out into one pile. Now we sort the pile into categories that seem sensible to you. Then you attach a name to the category.

This sorted and named list is what we share next time.

3. Concept of Cooperation

Observation: This investigation is another collection of examples, this time of what we might say are actions of children that are positive, pro-social, nice-to-each-other, one-child-doing-with-another-child actions. Watch children and note things that you would call cooperative. These notes will form the basis for figuring out what we would like the word "cooperation" to mean.

Sometimes we see cooperation occurring by what children say: "We're making garages, right?" "Yeah! For all the trucks." The common end is sustained mutual play.

Sometimes we see obvious cooperation in two-person actions, such as carrying a box together. The common end is a moved box.

Sometimes the cooperation is subtle, such as one child sliding along the bench to make room for another child to sit. The common end is access to the table.

We are looking for events that we could call acting for, or working toward, a common end or purpose, for mutual benefit.

Which of these would you say involve a common end or purpose with mutual benefit?

a) Two children wash their hands side by side in separate sinks looking at each other and talking back and forth about Batman.

b) Two children wash mud off their hands in the same water tub, allowing space for each other, but never talking to each other.

c) Two children wash their hands in the same faucet and one is holding the water handle on so the other can rinse her hands.

d) Two children are getting paper towels to dry their hands, alternating turns to get a towel from the dispenser. First one child takes a towel, then the other. They watch each other dry their hands, and take turns to get another towel each.

Assignment

The task is to collect short descriptions of cooperative acts you see children do and bring your list next time to share with the others.

D4 — Attending to Initiative, Cooperation, and Perseverance

4. Cooperation Study

With this shared understanding of what cooperation means for young children, we are more likely to agree when it occurs. The task now is to see if all children you work with engage in cooperation.
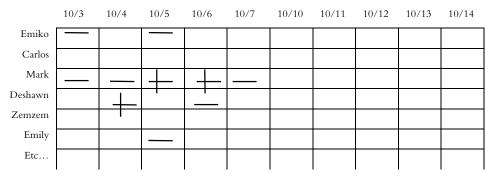
Assignment

This task is to tally cooperative acts as we have defined them. With a chart that lists the names of each of the children you work with on one axis and the days of the next two weeks on the other axis, you put a code mark in the day box for any child you see cooperating with another child. You can choose one of these systems.

Instance Count: a check mark √ or tally mark indicates each time a child acts cooperatively with another child. Any instance gets a check and you can put as many marks in the box as you see instances. This works better for younger children.

	10/3	10/4	10/5	10/6	10/7	10/10	10/11	10/12	10/13	10/14
Emiko	√√√	√	√√√√	√√√	√√√					
Carlos	√	√√√√	√							
Mark			√	√√						
Deshawn	√	√√			√√√					
Zemzem										
Emily	√√√√	√√√√	√	√√√√	√					
Etc…										

Duration Count: a horizontal line (—) in a box indicates a child acts cooperatively with another for about 4 minutes. This gives an idea of duration. Add a vertical line (|) if the child continues the cooperation longer, beyond 10 minutes. One instance per day is all that is marked. This usually works better for older children who cooperate a lot and length of time becomes a more significant indicator.

	10/3	10/4	10/5	10/6	10/7	10/10	10/11	10/12	10/13	10/14
Emiko	—		—							
Carlos										
Mark	—	—	┼	┼	—					
Deshawn		┼		—						
Zemzem										
Emily			—							
Etc…										

Next time we are sharing these charts with each other.

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D4 — Attending to Initiative, Cooperation, and Perseverance

5. Concept of Perseverance

We define perseverance as the length of time a learner is willing to spend at a specific activity. You do not have to co-construct this idea. It is a simple definition that incorporates its own measure: time. So now we are going to examine the amount of time your most active child is willing to spend, independent of adults, at activities he or she chooses.

Assignment

After selecting a child who changes activities more often than the other children, your task is to time the number of minutes and seconds the child is engaged. We are looking for focused, purposeful engagement, however you want to define that.

With a stopwatch or a smart phone timer you record each start time of purposeful, focused engagement in an activity and then the stop time. Continue cataloguing the length of activity times for a 20-minute period of free playtime.

We are watching only during free playtime, when the child is able to choose to start and stop activities at will. We are not measuring those in-between activity times such as toileting, walking around, hand washing, or getting dressed. Likewise, we do not care about watching, waiting, or wandering.

For example, these are some collected times:

Start time: 10:25 a.m. (the time of day the observation started)
0:15, 0:43. 0:12, 1:45, 3:15, 0:39, 2:11 (minutes: seconds noting each focused segment)
Stop time: 10:45 a.m. (the time of day the observation ended)

The total of all these short times is 9 minutes. The total time of the observation was 20 minutes. You can count activity changes and compute the percent of time of involvement if you wish.

The times you recorded and the answers to these questions go in your portfolio:

a) *Why did the child stay longer at certain times compared to others?*

b) *If you had been available, what might you have done to support this child's perseverance at activities you considered important?*

D4 — Attending to Initiative, Cooperation, and Perseverance

6. Perseverance Study

This investigation is fascinating: this last investigation is a treat. We are creating something that is too hard for children to do easily. We are making a situation that elicits frustration and watching what happens. Here are some ideas for ways to observe perseverance.

1. You can set out puzzles or other self-corrective materials that are often found in classrooms, such as shape-sorters, floor puzzles, or nesting cups. You can make puzzles by cutting up the faces of cereal or cracker boxes, with easy ones to get children started and then hard ones to challenge their skills.

2. For younger children you can gather a large number of items to put in a container.

3. Another option might be scissors, or any tool, with difficult things to do. For scissors, you might try cutting ribbon, string, twine, paper plates, strips of thin cardboard, tag board, or cloth. The intention is to provide choices that make it intriguing as well as difficult for any child.

4. Locks and keys or complex fasteners can be tough, too.

The goal is to prepare an attractive activity that is difficult for a child to do easily, where he or she would be likely to be attracted to try it and encounter trouble and want help, want to cry, or want to quit.

Assignment

Your task is to be with a child as they engage in the activity and keep track of the struggle time. We are are focusing upon the duration of time when the child is not successful but keeps at it. When you can see it isn't working, it is time to watch closely.

We are looking for how long the child will persevere without any assistance from you. If the child succeeds, you can respond warmly, as in *Module D1 Expressing Warmth to Children*. "You did it." You can provide non-verbal, vocal, or factual descriptions when the child is successful if you want to.

But success isn't our focus here. We want struggle. Our task is to watch carefully when it is not working and **do not help at all**!!!! This is not a time to assist. Simply watch. The child does what she or he does: quit, cry, leave, return, ask for help, etc. This may be uncomfortable, but this is the center of this unique investigation.

We want to see what the child does when the adult remains silent and does not help during the struggle. The idea is to intentionally wait to support accomplishment, not to support the child in frustration. No comments such as "You're trying hard." Or "You're working hard." Or "You can do it." Or "Keep trying." If he or she quits, that is fine for now. You can, if you find yourself pressed, say, "I'm watching you."

Here are the questions to address in your portfolio:

a) *What did you set up for the children to do?*
b) *What did you notice?*
c) *What do you want children to do, ideally, when they encounter trouble?*

D4 — Attending to Initiative, Cooperation, and Perseverance

7. Project of Understanding

In order to complete this module successfully each participant demonstrates the ability to attend to the initiative of one child and see how that relates to cooperation or perseverance. This project involves the telling of a story about one child's actions, at his or her initiative, that results in cooperation or perseverance. It begins with initiative: you attend to what the child naturally chooses to do, not prompting or directing in any way. Your role is to capture this child's initiative in words and pictures as the child engages in cooperation or perseveres at a challenge. The aim is to show to the child and the child's parents an event in this child's life that represents these dispositions to learn — initiative, cooperation and perseverance — and in the documentation of these events transform that child's view of himself or herself and convey this to the child's family.

Assignment

Document: As with all the other projects, you keep records of what happens, starting with a way to show the current situation and continuing to show the events as they occur.

Learning Story: Your task is to put this story in a form that you can share with all the audiences that care. The most usual way is to create a book that adults can read aloud. If you make two copies, you can give one to the child and family, and you can keep the other copy for your portfolio. It is possible also to create a poster, letter with pictures included, or computer slide show. Whatever form you choose, the basis for making this work of documentation tell a transformative story is to have photographs of the event you are retelling and write down exactly what the child actually said and did.

The story contains these five components.

- ✓ **Title:** as if this were truly a book.

- ✓ **Initiative:** how you (the observer) came to notice, in the very beginning, the child's initiative to cooperate or the child's initiative to take on a challenge. **"I" voice —** *Often people write this part in a personal voice, "I saw…" "I thought…" "I got my camera and…" "I wondered what…"*

- ✓ **The events of the story:** details of what happened: engagement (evidence of interest) and intentionality (trying to cause a particular effect). You are telling a story with a beginning (characters and setting), middle (problems and struggles to overcome), and an end (resolution and closure).

- ✓ **What it means:** from an adult perspective, what do the events of this story mean for this child? **"You" voice —** *Often people write this part as if they are talking to the child, "Your decision to…" "When you did…" "You chose to…"*

- ✓ **Opportunities and possibilities:** this is what might be made available next and what might happen in the future if this child did more of this kind of thing.

Choosing a Child: People often choose a child who is passive, isolate, or gives up easily in some aspect of his or her life. If you act right away to choose something to focus upon, you may be able to bring photos of the child to the next meeting to help communicate this project to others here before you actually create the Learning Story.

Sharing with Parents: Once your story is complete, this project requires you to share it with the child and someone in the child's family. If possible, add their thoughts onto an additional page of the book or an additional slide in the slide show.

D4 — Attending to Initiative, Cooperation, and Perseverance

8. Expression of Understanding

You showed us in your Project of Understanding that you could document the transformation of a child. In part two of your Performance of Understanding, the challenge is to convey your personal understanding of what you have done in all your work in these four modules in one, final Expression of Understanding.

Assignment

Your task is to communicate the deep significance to you of the work you have done on how you are being with children. This personal expression conveys your understanding to an audience of other participants here and, if possible, for others to see.

Express Yourself: Through the work you have done, you have attained an ability to positively attend to the development of the basic dispositions to learn, in addition to the other abilities you have documented in the previous modules. Who you are now is the possibility of being an early educator — warm, playful, informative, and enhancing of learning. This is a major achievement. You have also now completed all four of the Connecting to Children modules and seen your life with children change over the course of this study.

You can create a poem, dance, story, letter, chart, song, or any other expression you find that enables you to convey your understanding of what all this means to you. You can use any expressive medium you choose to convey, in your unique way, how it is to really understand.