

Virtual Lab School



Welcome!

Live Webinar will begin at 11:00 EST

Observing With Intention

December 11, 2025

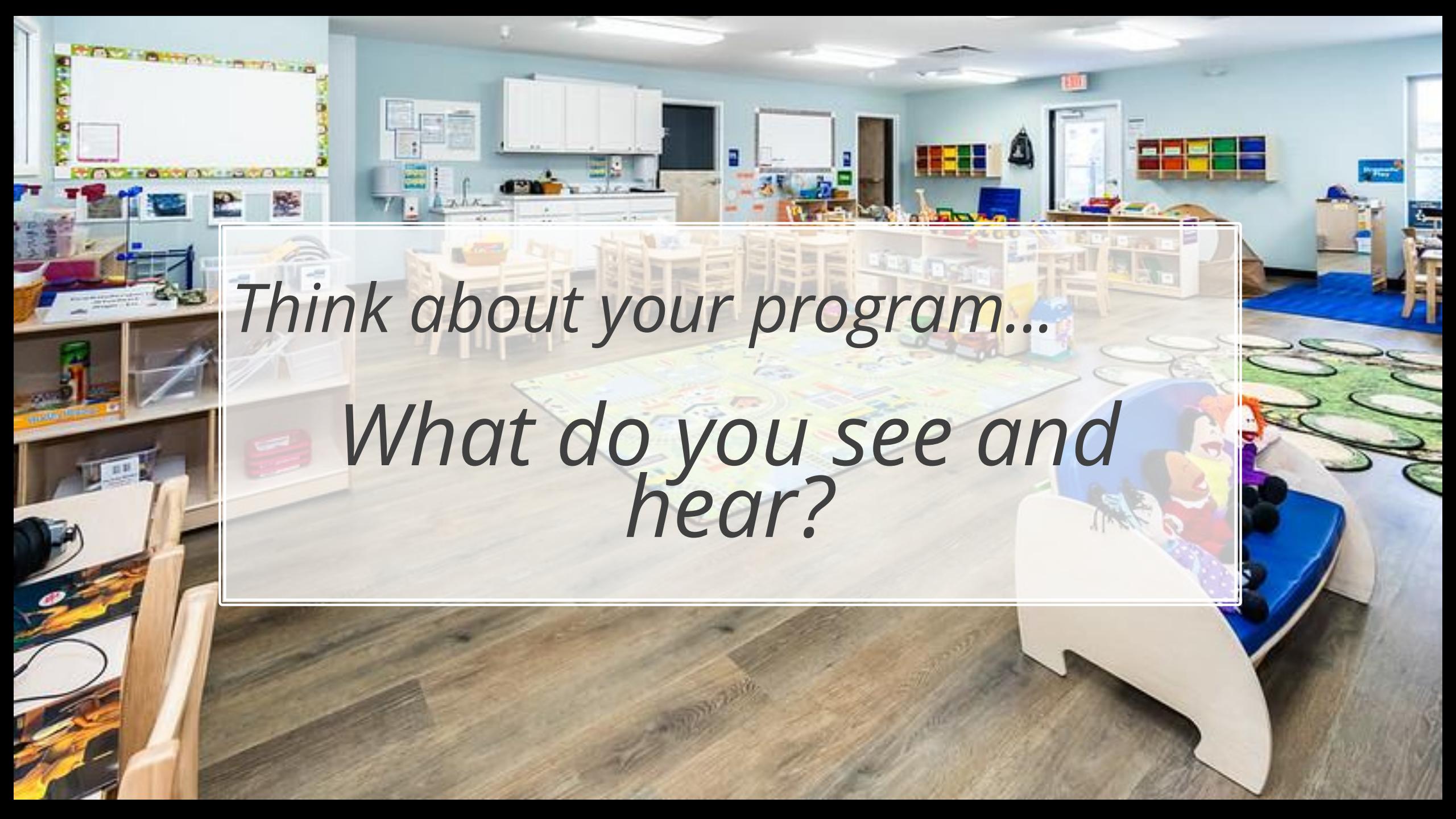
Dr. Sarah Lang, Director of VLS
Kristen Knight, M.S., Associate Director of PD & Training, VLS
Kaleigh Matesick, M.A., Training & Development Content Lead, VLS

To support your learning...

- All participants have been muted
- Please type questions or comments into Chat
- We will monitor the CHAT and answer questions throughout the training
- This session is being recorded to share on the Virtual Lab School site
- We encourage you to participate in the polls throughout the training
- Share your feedback after the training!
- If we disconnect – please log back in

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Reflect on the elements of quality observations, including factors that impact how we see and interact with others
- Discuss evidence-based strategies for conducting strong observations
- Examine available observation tools that foster authentic and meaningful coaching conversations
- Practice and refine observation skills together



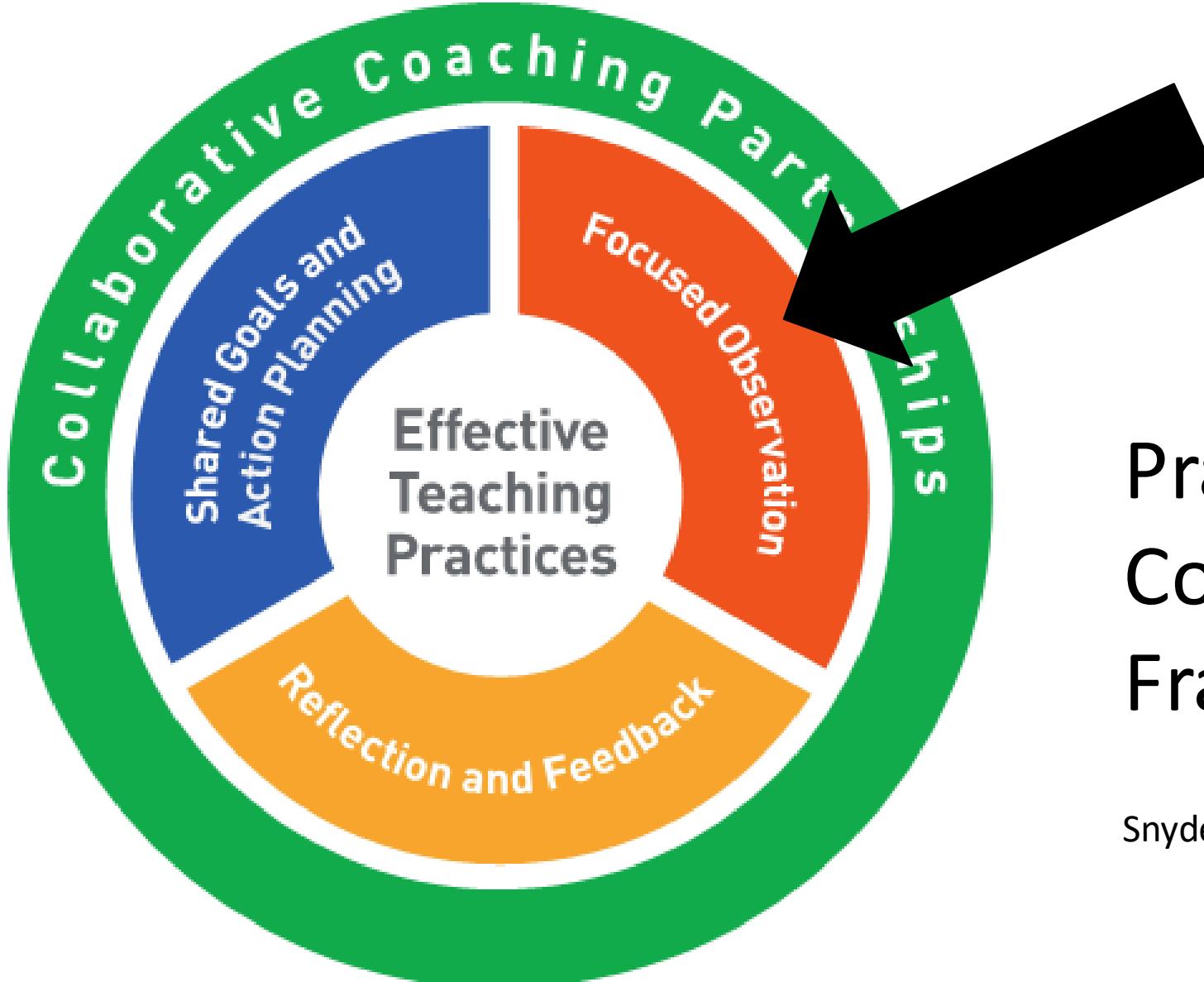
Think about your program...

*What do you see and
hear?*



There are many factors that impact how we see and interact with others...

- Background
- Experiences
- Beliefs
- Perceptions
- Values



Practice-Based Coaching Framework

Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox (2016)

Essential Elements of Observation



Watch and listen



Record information about what
you are seeing and hearing



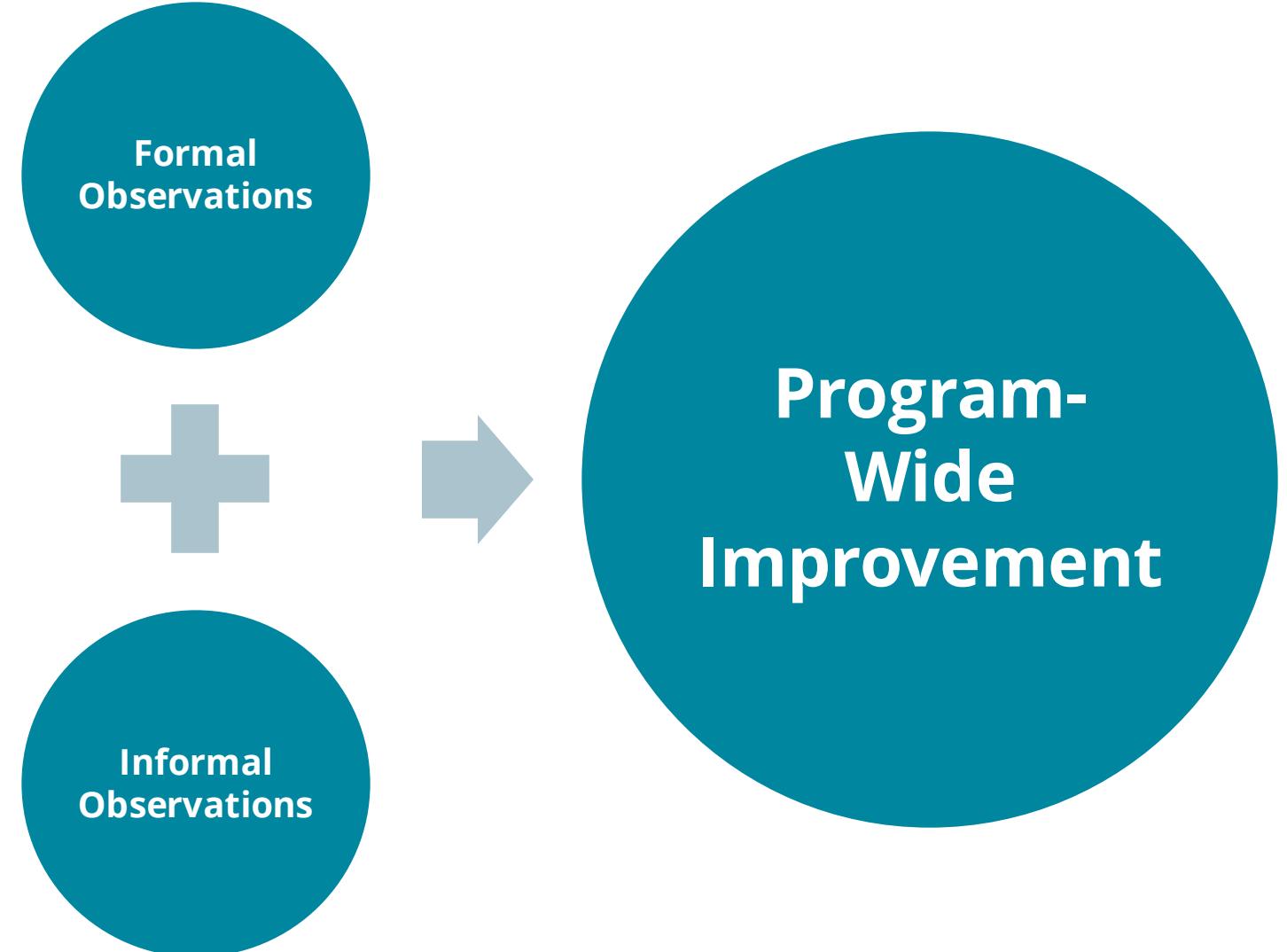
Implement coaching strategies



SHARE OUT- CHAT

*Why do we conduct observations of
teachers and children?*

The Importance of Quality Observations



Why are Focused Observations Important?

- Helps coaches to see caregivers' practices in action
- Provides a supportive context to try out new skills
- Promotes a culture of accountability
- Provides a springboard for reflection and feedback
- Supports data driven decision making

Why Observations are Important for Children

Understand children's development and behavior

Documenting children's progress

Identify strengths and areas of improvement

Inform curricular choices

Build relationships/connection

Support conversations with families

Formal Staff Observations

Evaluate staff quarterly for annual performance review

Informal Staff Observations

Check-in daily with staff

Planning for Observations

Formal Program Environmental Observations

Evaluate program environment annually or bi-annually for measuring growth

Informal Program Environmental Observations

Daily program walk-arounds

Observing with Intention: Let's Practice!

[VIDEO] Cognitive
Development: Infant
Block Play



SHARE OUT- CHAT

What is one observation note you made as you watched the video?

Evidence-based
strategies for
conducting
strong
observations

Atkinson & Bolt (2010); Lam (2001); Archer
et al. (2016); Tarusha & Bushi (2024)

Careful planning

Awareness of assumptions

Objective vs subjective

Be focused

Use detail and be specific

Grow your experience

1. Carefully plan your approach

What will you focus on?

How will you record the information?

When and how will you observe?



SHARE OUT- POLL

Which of these tools do you use to support your observations of staff?

Tools to Support Observation

Direct Care Positive Guidance

Competency Reflection

Each statement below refers to behaviors or attributes staff should demonstrate when interacting with children, families, or colleagues. Many of the competencies are directly observable. Other competencies may be assessed through conversations with the staff member or by examining the environment. Ask the staff member to complete the caregiver version of this competency reflection. For each of the statements, mark the level of mastery the staff member currently displays. Meet to discuss your observations and the staff member's thoughts and comments.

| COMPETENCY | RATE: E/D/M | NOTES |
|---|-------------|-------|
| I Direct Observation | | |
| A Model positive behavior and healthy techniques for expressing strong emotions. | E D M | |
| B Remain close by during play and social interactions. | E D M | |
| C Acknowledge, validate, and respond to children's needs, emotions, and concerns. | E D M | |
| D Include emotion words in conversations with children. | E D M | |
| E Follow children's cues and preferences. | E D M | |
| F Encourage children to use their words to resolve peer conflicts. | E D M | |
| G Engage in frequent, developmentally appropriate social interactions with children and adults throughout the day. | E D M | |
| H Model social skills by making eye contact, using good manners, and showing empathy to others. | E D M | |
| I Show respect for all children. | E D M | |
| J Provide consistent expectations and classroom routines. | E D M | |
| K Minimize wait time during transitions and limit the number of transitions | E D M | |
| L Offer opportunities for exploration and independence. | E D M | |
| M Talk with children about their day, what activities are next, and provide warnings and visual reminders before transitions. | E D M | |
| N Recognize positive accomplishments. | E D M | |
| O Help children feel welcome, comfortable, and supported. | E D M | |
| P Embed activities about emotions into daily routines. | E D M | |

Viewing as: **TCS/Administrator** **Caregiver**

STAFF NAME
DATE(S)
CERTIFER

Program Tool

Focused Topics: Leadership Essentials / Lesson 5

Staff Observation Tool

As a program manager, you are primarily responsible for evaluating staff members' performance. Staff observations and evaluations help staff understand your expectations and provide opportunities for feedback and professional growth. Use the following tool to support your observations of staff members' performance. As you observe, indicate whether the staff member is emerging, developing or has mastered each practice. Provide objective examples during your observation to inform your performance ratings and follow-up discussions with staff.

| E Emerging | D Developing | M Mastered |
|--|--|--|
| Staff member is building their understanding and use of the practice | Staff member understands the practice and is working to consistently or fully implement it | Staff member consistently displays or implements the practice in an appropriate manner |

Planning & Preparation

- Arranges the environment in a way that invites learning exploration. E D M
- Plans developmentally appropriate activities. E D M
- Demonstrates knowledge of child development and interests and abilities of children. E D M
- Prepares activities in advance so that they are ready and available for children upon arrival. E D M

Classroom Practices & Interaction with Children

- Is friendly, warm, nurturing with all children. E D M
- Uses a calm, neutral, appropriate tone of voice while interacting with children, staff and families. E D M
- Interacts and engages all children on their level. E D M
- Encourages children's autonomy & independence. E D M
- Uses a variety of positive guidance & discipline techniques (redirection, limit, positive directions, etc.) E D M
- Participates in classroom tasks, routines, & activities (clean up, transitions, mealtime, free choice, table choices, and circle time). E D M
- Uses age-appropriate communication strategies while engaging with children (asking open ended questions, uses new words, follows children's cues/leads). E D M
- Demonstrates an understanding of child development and developmentally appropriate expectations. E D M
- Implements developmentally appropriate activities in the classroom. E D M
- Balances individual interactions with an awareness of the whole group. E D M
- Ensures the health and safety of all children in indoor and outdoor program spaces. E D M
- Maintains ratios and engages in active supervision at all times. E D M

Family Engagement

- Interacts respectfully and professionally with all families. E D M
- Uses a variety of ways to communicate with families. E D M
- Regularly shares information about the child's progress with families. E D M

CORT: Caregiving Observation & Reflection Tool

Introduction

| E Emerging | D Developing | M Mastered |
|---|--|--|
| Staff member is building an understanding and use of the skill. | Staff member understands the practice but is still working to consistently implement it. | Staff member demonstrates a clear understanding of the skill and implements the practice consistently. |

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Language Literacy

LL1 Quality Reading Materials

Additional Tools to Support Observation

Focused Topics - Valuing & Building Family Child Care - Lesson 5 - Apply

Family Child Care Provider Self-Reflection

Program Tool

This tool is intended to be a companion to the FCC Program Quality Observation Tool that will be completed by the FCC Coordinator in the Home Visit Management System. FCC Providers can use this comprehensive tool to reflect on their own practices related to the quality of their interactions and the experiences provided in the FCC home. For each practice, the provider should indicate their level of mastery as Emerging (E), Developing (D), or Mastered (M).

| E Emerging | D Developing | M Mastered |
|---|---|--|
| You are still building an understanding of and use of the practice indicated. | You understand the practice but are still working to consistently implement it. | You have a clear understanding of the skill and implement the practice consistently. |

Relationships & Interactions

| | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Engages in back-and-forth conversations with children. | E D M |
| 2. Knows children's individual interests, temperaments, and preferences. | E D M |
| 3. Responds to children's non-verbal and verbal cues. | E D M |
| 4. Engages in a warm, nurturing way by smiling, making eye contact, and talking during routines and activities. | E D M |
| 5. Understands the abilities of each child and modifies activities and instruction to meet individual needs. | E D M |
| 6. Uses positive directions to redirect children to appropriate behaviors. | E D M |
| 7. Acknowledges children's positive behaviors and achievements. | E D M |

Learning Activities

| | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Provides a balance of activities and experiences. | E D M |
| 2. Provides both visual and auditory examples of cues & expectations for the schedule, routines, and transitions. | E D M |
| 3. Uses observations of individual abilities to scaffold learning and interactions based on interests and needs. | E D M |
| 4. Maintains an organized, yet flexible environment where materials support mixed-age groups. | E D M |
| 5. Includes developmentally appropriate print throughout learning environment. | E D M |
| 6. Incorporates a variety of reading materials and books across routines and activities. | E D M |
| 7. Responds to and expands on children's sounds, words, sentences, and questions. | E D M |
| 8. Provides safe, open-ended sensory experiences that foster creativity. | E D M |
| 9. Asks open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills. | E D M |
| 10. Plans and engages as a co-explorer in a variety of indoor and outdoor experiences. | E D M |

FT, Valuing & Building Family Child Care, Lesson 5

Focused Topic: Social Emotional Learning for Teachers

STAFF NAME _____
DATE(S) _____
CERTIFIER _____

Direct Care Practice Inventory

Use the following list of practices to assess your ability to identify and manage your own stress and overall well-being. Each statement below refers to behaviors or attributes you should demonstrate when interacting with children, families, or colleagues. For each of the statements, reflect on your own practices and select your current level of mastery. This tool may also be used by your trainer, coach, or administrator to observe your practices in this content area and support professional development goals.

| Emerging | Developing | Mastered |
|--|--|---|
| You believe you need more information to understand or incorporate a particular practice | You believe you have an understanding of the practice, and are working to properly apply it to your work | You believe you consistently apply the practice |

COMPETENCY

| | RATE: E/D/M | NOTES |
|--|-------------|-------|
| A Models and practices stress-reduction strategies. For example, controlled breathing exercises with the children | E D M | |
| B Expresses gratitude to children, families, and colleagues | E D M | |
| C Teaches children how to recognize and label their emotions and appropriate ways to express them | E D M | |
| D Uses emotional regulation strategies to help manage negative emotions | E D M | |
| E Identifies negative or unrealistic thinking and works at replacing negative thoughts with more positive or realistic ones | E D M | |
| F Identifies stress signals and uses positive coping strategies. For example, asks for help or coverage prior to feeling overwhelmed | E D M | |
| G Integrates multicultural materials from children's home cultures as well as other cultures into the environment and activities, such as providing multicultural menus in dramatic play, bilingual books, and multicultural music | E D M | |
| H Incorporates self-care activities with the children, such as yoga poses, breathing exercises, and/or mindfulness techniques | E D M | |
| I Practices self-care strategies in and outside of the classroom | E D M | |
| J Brainstorms and exchanges ideas with co-workers and leadership on incorporating strategies that would help reduce stress | E D M | |
| K Models and labels your own emotions and appropriate ways to express emotions | E D M | |
| L Provides a space that helps support self-care, such as a space where children can listen to soothing music or guided breathing exercise | E D M | |
| M Provides children with the tools and experiences that help label emotions | E D M | |
| N Provides tools or guides for stress reduction activities such as controlled breathing, yoga poses visualization activities | E D M | |

Home Visit Manager > Moira Rose > Home Visits > Observations

Provider Profile | Home Visits | Moira Rose

Setup | Conduct | Conclude Site Visit

Start Date/Time: 7/18/2024, 11:31:58 AM

Manage Reminders

Children Present | Home/Admin | Observations | Programming

Observation has been saved successfully.

Add Observation

Title: Handwashing/Individualized Support to a Preschooler

Component(s): Select...

Observations:

Ted came out of the bathroom and Moira noticed that Ted did not wash his hands. Moira said, "Oh Ted, you forgot to wash your hands after using the bathroom, let's go wash your hands." Moira took Ted's hand and led him back to the bathroom; she starts to ask Ted what do we do first to wash our hands? Ted responds, we turn on the water Ms. Moira. Ted turns on the water. Moira asks what is next? Ted responds we need soap. Moira helps Ted place soap on his hands. Ted says I wash my hands. Moira helps Ted with washing his hands while Moira starts to sing the Handwashing song while Ted joins in and sings too. "Wash, wash, wash your hands..." Moira and Ted sing the song two times as Ted washes his hands. Moira has a pile of individual clean washcloths in a basket and after Ted washes his hands, he takes a washcloth to dry his hands and places the used washcloth in a basket labeled used washcloths. Moira says to Ted - "Ted, good job washing your hands, it is always important after we use the bathroom to wash our hands, now your hands are nice and clean!"

Cancel | Save

Observations

Title: Parents/Drop-off/Pick up Time

Observations: When Ted's mom arrived for pick-up, Moira mentioned his progress interacting with other children. Mo ...

Component(s): Edit | Remove

Reaction to unsafe situation

Observations: Patrick climbed on the chair and stood up and lost his balance and tumbled off and started to cry...

Component(s): Edit | Remove

FCC, HVMS System

FT, Social Emotional Learning for Teachers, Lesson 5

2. Be mindful of assumptions

What things may influence your ability to be objective?

- Have you been here/ in this same situation before?
- How much do you focus on one element, interaction, or person?
- How would you prefer something vs. an emerging practice?
- How are you feeling? Are you stressed?
- Would another person agree about what occurred?



3. Be Focused

- Watch how professionals and children function together for many sustained minutes
- Know the key actions and behaviors you are looking and what quality practices look like



4. Be Objective

Objective Observations

- Focus on the facts- If we don't see or hear it, we don't report it
- Use concrete, evidence-based words and statements
- Are not influenced by feelings or personal assumptions

Subjective Observations

- Are often influenced by feelings or personal assumptions
- Are ambiguous and open to interpretation
- Describe an opinion

Knowing the Difference

| Subjective | Objective |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Alejandro <u>enjoyed</u> playing with the toy boats and water in the sensory table this morning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Alejandro used one hand to submerge the toy boat into the water. He lifted the boat, turned his hand over and dumped the water that filled the boat back into the sensory table. He <u>smiled and laughed</u> as the water splashed into the table. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The transitions in Mr. Jenkins' classroom seemed <u>chaotic</u>. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Mr. Jenkins dimmed the lights, 3 children picked up puzzle pieces and put them into a box, 2 children ran around the snack table, and 4 children stacked blocks to make a tower. |



Did you have similar observations?

- The child balances up on one knee and waves his right arm toward the stack of blocks and knocks them over.
- The caregiver says "Olivia, you gonna get it, get it? You gotta push harder". The child pushes the blocks and they fall. The caregiver says "yea" and claps her hands.
- The caregiver stacks three blocks. A child (Olivia) uses both hands to grab the middle pink block and brings it to her mouth.



5. Be detailed and specific

- Helps check your assumptions
- Document conversations, describe movements and child interactions/responses
- Illuminates patterns

Taking Notes—Examples

Describe

- Caregiver's actions
- Child's actions
- Body language, facial expressions
- Children's responses to caregiver's words or actions

Count/Tally

- Number of reminders
- Number of open-ended questions
- Number of back-and-forth interactions
- Number of children
- Number of challenging behaviors
- Amount of time waiting

Write Down

- Direct quotes
 - What the caregiver said
 - What the children said
- Examples of descriptive vocabulary used
- Vocalizations/babbles

6. Grow Your Skills

Case Study: Schedules and Routines



How would you support the staff member during this activity?

Analyzing Your Observation Notes

1. Look back at your observation notes

2. Do your notes reflect strong, objective observation?

- Are they focused?
- Are there interpretations/assumptions?
- Are there detailed descriptions (facial expressions, direct quotes, actions, behaviors?)
- Are there interpretive words?



Reflection

Focused Topics / Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice / Lesson 4

Quality Observation Checklist

Review your observation notes and evaluate the quality and objectivity of your observations using the checklist provided. Read each indicator and select "yes" or "no" to each question. Reflect on your objectivity and ways to improve your observation skills in the space provided.

1. Are there any interpretations or assumptions included in the observation notes? Yes No
2. Is there a clear area of focus in the observation notes? Yes No
3. Is there a detailed description of the professional's actions? Yes No
4. Are there detailed descriptions of the children's actions? Yes No
5. Do the observation notes describe vocalizations? Yes No
6. Are there direct quotes or examples of language in the observation notes? Yes No
7. Are there detailed descriptions of facial expressions and/or gestures? Yes No
8. Are there interpretive words like *angry, happy, sad, frustrated, wants, loves, enjoys, because, bored, distracted, frustrated, outgoing, enthusiastic, always, or never* included in the observation notes? Yes No

What comes next...

Transforming quality observations
into authentic and meaningful
coaching sessions and performance
reviews

- Supportive/Constructive Feedback
- Reflection
- Collaborative Goal setting

Archer et al. (2016); Tarusha & Bushi (2024)

CORT Action Plan

CAREGIVER
OBSERVER
DATE(S)

Professional's Overall Strengths:

+

Identified Goals for Growth:

Action Steps (including specific training and resources needed to support these goals and plans for follow-up):

Program Professional Signature:

Training & Curriculum Specialist / Observer Signature:

Date:



Additional VLS Supports

If you are interested in learning more about ways the Virtual Lab School supports quality observations, we encourage you review these VLS courses more deeply:

Lessons & activities referenced in today's session:

- SA, Positive Guidance, Competency Reflection, Course Page
- FT, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 4
- FT, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, CORT, Lesson 5, Apply
- FT, Leadership Essentials, Staff Observation Tool, Lesson 5, Apply
- FT, Leadership Essentials, Quality Observation Checklist, Lesson 5, Apply
- FT, Valuing & Building Family Child Care, FCC Provider Self-Reflection, Lesson 5, Apply
- FT, Social Emotional Learning for Teachers, Direct Care Practice Inventory, Lesson 5, Apply

Additional courses for review:

- TPD, Quality Observations: Leadership's Role
- MGT, Communication & Language Development, Lesson 4
- T&CS, Positive Guidance, Lesson 3
- FT, Using the VLS: Coaching to Enhance Practice, Lesson 4
- FT, Leadership Essentials, Lesson 5

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“



SHARE OUT: CHAT

*What has been your biggest
takeaway from today's session?*

”

Thank you again for joining us today!

Any questions?

Please complete the QUICK feedback survey-
What future training topics would be helpful?

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