

APPENDIX E Sample Structures to Support Reflective Teaching

Whatever their dedication to reflective teaching, individual educators can only get so far in their practices without an organizational culture and support systems in place to help them learn together with young children. Creating such structures can be a daunting task and could, indeed, be a book in and of itself as we indicate in our text *The Visionary Director* (2010). Large bureaucratic organizations have some systems in place that could be re-conceptualized to create structures that provide ongoing support and learning opportunities, not merely monitoring for compliance. Appendix E begins with an overview of how Harvest Resources Associates works with large and small groups to revamp their professional learning structures into cohorts or communities of practice.

Smaller organizations tend to have more autonomy but fewer resources. Joining together could afford them the opportunity to share administrative skills and resources. This appendix offers examples of what a shared-services model has to offer as an organizational structure that supports better business and pedagogical practices. Included are documents outlining how shared-services can work, along with examples of pedagogical support systems from a specific shared-services consortium.

Finally, you'll find a series of documents from a standalone, independent, non-profit early childhood program outlining the components of systems put in place over a decade of creating support systems for their educators.

Facilitated Cohorts for Professional Learning

Aligning core values with professional learning experiences

Harvest Resources Associates was founded to inspire early care and education professionals to engage fully in their own learning. When educators become thoughtful, competent decision makers they take leadership to transform and advance the profession. In an era of standardization and prescription we stand for creative and critical thinking.

- We believe teachers and children should be emotionally and intellectually engaged with each other in learning.
- We believe ECE professionals deserve the time and resources to nourish their hearts and challenge their thinking.
- We believe seeking diverse perspectives is central to education for democracy.
- We design trainings and resources to actively engage ECE professionals in ideas and reflective practices, which bring theory to life and real life to theory.

Overview of Professional Development in Reflective Teaching Cohorts or Communities of Practice (COP)

Reflective Teaching Cohort sessions are designed to offer small groups of six to eight early childhood teachers who work with similar age children and in similar settings, time and planned activities to share experiences and deepen their understandings about their work.

Orientation Meeting

The Reflective Teaching participants come together for an initial four-hour orientation where they begin to build a Community of Practice. The group has a facilitator who leads them in the following:

- Reflecting on their own strengths, learning styles, and strategies for collaborating with others in learning together in a group.
- Listening and learning about group members' strengths and preferences for working in a group.
- Identifying guidelines and agreements for working together in the cohort.
- Learning about and practicing with the Thinking Lens[®] protocol to reflect together on work with children and families.
- Planning future gatherings to cohort members' classrooms for Observation/Reflection sessions. We will decide on a focus for our observations and an engaging invitation of the materials to present to a small group of children.

Observation/Reflection Sessions—6 hours

The cohort group meets before the session to discuss the focus of the observation, explore the collection of materials the group plans to offer the children and how to approach the observation/documentation process. This meeting usually lasts an hour to an hour and a half.

During the observation session, one of the children's teachers from the classroom, along with our facilitator, works with the small group of children as they play and explore the materials offered. Their role is to help the children stay focused by noticing and describing the children's actions. The rest of the group will unobtrusively stay on the outskirts, observing and documenting by taking notes and photos focused on the children's engagement with

the materials. The session lasts approximately an hour in the classroom depending on the children's interest.

After the observations the cohort group meets for three to four hours to study the documentation together using the Thinking Lens[®] Protocol. (This includes a working lunch.) From the study and discussion, the facilitator guides individuals or the group to collaboratively develop learning stories describing what happened and identifying the learning outcomes observed and the possibilities for next steps for the children's learning and for cohort member's professional learning. Teachers use available technology to create the learning stories.

The session ends with a discussion of follow-up assignments that participants will do in their own settings. These assignments focus on continuing the work and learning in the observations session, along with related reading.

Space and Equipment Needed for Observation Sessions

- Meeting room with large table for exploring materials, studying photos using the LCD monitor
- Space in a classroom or adjoining room where a small group of children can work without interruption and the group of adults can observe without overwhelming the children.
- Permission forms for children and adults who will be observed and photographed and reflected in documentation displays and learning stories.
- iPads or iPhone for each of the observing teachers and connecting devices to hook up to the monitor.
- LCD monitor

Follow Up

The facilitator gathers the teachers' documentation to create a group learning story with an introduction to the process as well as the final reflections of the cohort at the end of the session. This document is sent to all participants.

A Shared Services Professional Development Model for Reflective Teaching

Sound Child Care Solutions (SCCS) is a consortium of seven child care centers that have joined together to share the business and professional learning functions of early childhood centers while each keeping our own name and community identity. By sharing administrative, human resource, accounting, and professional development costs and functions, we spend more of every dollar on child care programming. Our shared services model allows us to improve educational quality for all, and serve more children that come from lower-income families. The consortium model also helps free center directors from administrative requirements, and allows them to focus on their educational vision and work more closely with teachers and families. Being program-focused administrators allows for better quality achievements.

SCCS uses a multi-prong approach for professional development across our organization to develop reflective teachers and pedagogical leadership, guided by a senior pedagogical leader serving as an overall mentor and facilitator. Components include:

- **Meeting in Communities of Reflection and Practice (CORP)**

Teachers and directors apply to participate in monthly meetings to develop themselves as reflective teachers or pedagogical leaders. These meetings are guided by our senior pedagogical leader who develops an agenda to deepen understanding of the content topic and the role of the teacher as researcher, and to practice pedagogical documentation using the Thinking Lens® Protocol.

- **Having a shared focus for teacher research for those in CORP**

For instance, children's active body-brain development connection; math learning in play, and so on

- **Mentoring in center-based settings for side by side observing and pedagogical documentation**

Our senior pedagogical leader travels to centers with a sub group from the CORP to practice observing, studying documentation with the Thinking Lens®, and writing learning stories.

- **Assigning readings and reflective writing**

Participants choose a book to study from a targeted selection in our professional library with a commitment to read a chapter a month. Each person chooses a quote from the chapter as a focus for some short reflective writing. Then, in our center-based meetings, teachers are asked how readings illuminate understandings and can be incorporated into writing learning stories.