

SEEING THE WHOLE CASCADE

A Reflective Observation Lens for WAIMH 2026

No developmental moment stands alone.

Observe first. Interpret provisionally. Follow the cascade.

Developmental categories help us notice important aspects of development, but children do not experience development in separate domains. Use this lens to notice what is happening within the moment, across processes, in relationship and context, and through time.

1

OBSERVE: What happened?

Stay close to what you could actually see, hear, or otherwise observe. What did the child do? What did others do? What changed? What remains uncertain? **Describe before explaining.**

Notes

2

CONNECT: What is happening together?

What developmental processes appear to be participating? Body & physiology • movement • regulation • attention & perception • communication • emotion • relationship • thinking & learning • agency & initiative • sensory experience. **How might these processes be related here?**

These are observational lenses, not separate compartments within the child.

Notes

3

LOCATE: What is this moment embedded within?

Consider relationship, environment, culture, developmental history, current conditions, and responsibility & necessity. **What shaping factors may be participating?**

Do not assume in advance whether a shaping factor is helpful, limiting, important, or unimportant. Notice what it appears to do here.

Notes

4

FOLLOW: What is changing through time?

What happened before? What changed in response to what? What happened next? Where are the transitions? Who changed whom? **Working interpretation:** What did the adult think was happening, and how did that interpretation shape what happened next? Notice whether effects open, amplify, dampen, redirect, stabilize, interrupt, repair, branch, or stop. **A cascade does not have to continue.**

Notes

5

WONDER: What might this be shaping?

Move toward interpretation while keeping interpretation open. **I wonder whether... Another possible interpretation is...** What supports this interpretation? What might challenge it? What would I need to observe again? What capacities are already present, and are they being organized in a new way? **What might be becoming more—or less—possible next?**

Notes

6

REFLECT TOGETHER: What becomes visible from another position?

What might the caregiver notice that I cannot? What do they know about this child's history, signals, routines, and meanings? How might my role, culture, expectations, relationship, or theoretical lens shape what I noticed? What changes when another person describes the same event? **What understanding can we build together without requiring premature certainty?**

Notes

7

RETURN: What should we look for next?

FOLLOW AGAIN: What deserves another observation?
CHANGE PERSPECTIVE: Would another person, setting, context, or timescale reveal something different?
SEEK COUNTEREXAMPLES: When does the expected pattern not occur?
HOLD OPEN: What should remain unresolved for now? ***The story can always catch up later.***

Notes

OPTIONAL • LOOK ACROSS SCALE

After repeated observations—not from a single event:

Does an organizing relationship remain recognizable as its expression changes across moments, routines, relationships, settings, or time?

What changes? What persists? Where does the pattern not appear?

Fractal-like organization is a question to investigate, not something to assume.

Notes

Stay close to what happened • Hold interpretation open • Preserve the relations

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