

Resources for Implementation

The Early Education Leader's Guide

Chapter and Case Study Discussion Activities

Chapter 1: An Early Educator for the 21st Century

In this chapter, we learned about today's landscape of early education and care, looked at features of high-quality early learning environments, and considered the professional demands on today's educator. Use the following case study from Chapter 1, along with the questions below, to reflect on how concepts and key takeaways from the chapter apply to your professional work and setting.

Melinda, the director of the Explorations Early Learning Center, pokes her head into the Pre-K room during one of her morning walk-throughs of the Center. She sees Jada, a second-year teacher, greeting children and helping them pull off their hats and mittens. The classroom is already abuzz with chatter and movement. Melinda is reminded of last week's Professional Learning Community meeting, where Jada had verbally expressed some frustration over implementing the new changes in the curriculum. "I wonder how Jada is doing," Melinda thinks to herself. "I know she has been struggling with managing her son's asthma. She looks tired." As Melinda looks around and takes in the activity in the room, she pauses and considers Jada's class this year; she has a group that feels especially "young," with several children exhibiting consistently challenging behaviors. Jada is also only in her second year of teaching, still learning about effective management strategies. Melinda greets Jada with a smile and a wave. Jada ekes out a smile and says, "Good morning!" as children tumble out of their coats toward the breakfast awaiting them. "What can I do to better support the teaching and learning in this room?" Melinda wonders, as she steps out to greet the next classroom of children and educators.

Questions for Leaders to Consider

In this chapter, we read about how it is common skip over the adults and focus on children without consideration for educators' capacity and needs.

- How have you seen this in your setting?
- What can get in the way of prioritizing the adults?
- What mindsets and values contribute to this reality?
- What could you do to better meet educators' needs in your setting?

We also learned how educators need to be cognizant of simultaneously building children's academic and social-emotional competencies.

- How does your role as a leader mirror this approach when working with adults?
- How is it different?

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Case Questions for Leaders to Use in Professional Learning Discussions

- In this case study, Jada experiences stress from work-related causes and circumstances outside of work. What are common work-related sources of stress for early educators? What are common non-work sources of stress?
- This chapter highlighted that, “good teaching demands a lot from the educator in terms of skill and stamina” and “the early childhood classroom is one of the most taxing professional settings.” What makes these environments so taxing?
- We see Melinda interact with Jada with sensitivity and compassion. How do you think this approach impacts Jada? How can adults engage with one another to decrease their colleagues' stress? In what ways can they amplify stress?
- What assumptions do you think Melinda makes about Jada? How do these assumptions influence Melinda's behavior? How have you seen your own assumptions influence your behavior? How have you seen assumptions influence others' behavior?
- What role does curiosity play in Melinda's approach with Jada? How does curiosity help people develop and maintain relationships?
- We learned about essential educator competencies for quality teaching and learning in this chapter: executive functions, self-regulation strategies, emotion awareness, and relationship skills. Which competencies does Melinda use in this case study? How do these competencies play a role in Melinda and Jada's behavior?
- We also read about how it is common to skip over the adults and focus on children without consideration for educator capacity and needs. What strategies can improve educator capacity? What decreases capacity?

Self-Study Activity

This discussion highlighted three essential competencies for early educators: executive functions, self-regulation strategies, emotion awareness and relationship skills.

- Which of these competencies do you feel is your greatest strength? Which do you feel is your greatest challenge and area for growth?
- How can you strengthen the competency that is most challenging for you?
- Write down one way you plan to strengthen this competency.