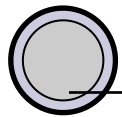## What is 'Simple Interactions'?

Simple Interactions is an approach to professional development for adults who work with children or youth. The goal is to support staff in developing skills that encourage more **developmental interactions** with children and youth. Recent research focuses on four essential ingredients present in the most productive developmental interactions: (1) **connection**, adults and youth connecting; (2) **reciprocity**, back-and-forth interactions, a balance of give and take; (3) **progression**, providing challenge and giving appropriate support; and (4) **participation**, inviting and involving all children, especially those who may be least likely or able to participate.

Using inexpensive video cameras, coordinators/staff capture short video clips of staff engaged in positive developmental interactions with children. Then, the clips are shared in the context of short workshops, emphasizing those four elements. These clips become conversation starters for discussing effective interaction strategies. By its very nature, SI training is unique to each site. The long-term goal is to empower teachers, afterschool staff, childcare workers, etc., to continue this professional development strategy independently.
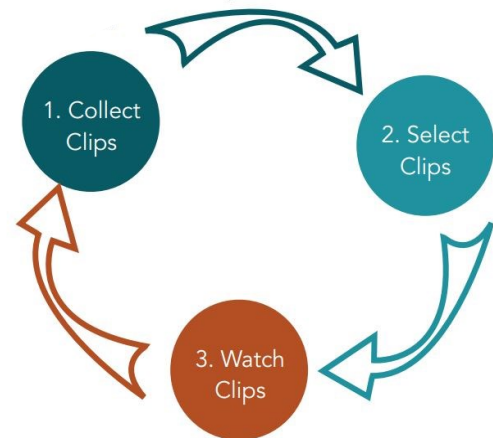
> *"Seeing us on the film was really helpful. Throughout the sessions we talked about how important that interaction is."*
>
> -Youth Program Director
> *after participating in SI*

How does it work?

The SI process is summarized by this **3**-step visualization. First, participating staff and/or our team of trainers collect video clips of adult-youth interactions. These clips are usually very short, like **2-3** minutes long. Next, using the Simple Interaction Scale (see next page) as a guide for identifying quality interactions, videos are selected to share and discuss. This final step -- watching the clips -- takes place in the context of professional development workshops. We recommend completing this 3-step process three times.

1. Collect Clips
2. Select Clips
3. Watch Clips

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Neighborhood Learning Alliance

Pittsburgh Public Schools
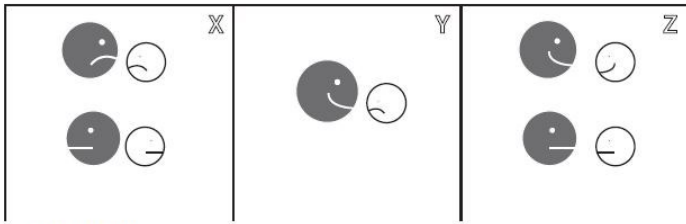
Schenley Heights Afterschool Program

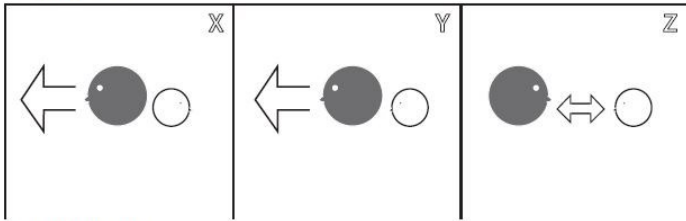Family Resources of Pittsburgh

Methodist Union of Social Agencies

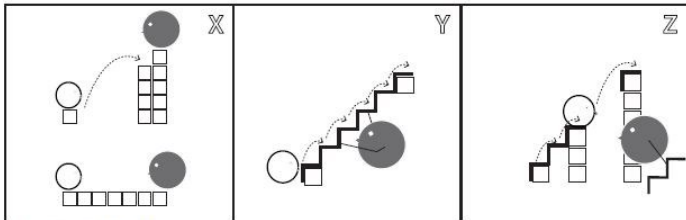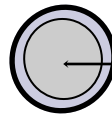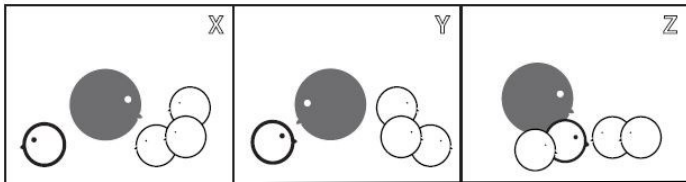The Pittsburgh Project

www.simpleinteractions.org

CONNECTION — X, Y, Z
RECIPROCITY — X, Y, Z
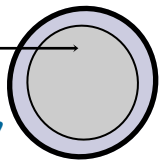PROGRESSION — X, Y, Z
PARTICIPATION — X, Y, Z

The Simple Interaction Scale

The Simple Interaction Scale was designed to be, well, really simple. It provides a way to guide conversation when watching video clips of interaction, specifically, in the areas of connection, reciprocity, progression, and participation. The scale is a productive tool for assessing the video clips; by identifying these four domains, staff can become more mindful of their strengths and their areas for improvement. Some 'conversation starters' help to facilitate reflective conversation at the workshops, for example:

- What did you notice?
- What did you do well in this clip?
- How would you rate the reciprocity?
- For anything rated as an X or a Y, was there an opportunity to move it into the Z category?

Results: It works, and people like it!

We filmed 20 afterschool staff for 10 minutes, twice: once before participating in SI and then once after participating. Trained coders (blind to whether the videos were pre or post) scored the staff members on these four dimensions. Staff showed improvements in their developmental interactions after participating in just three workshops.
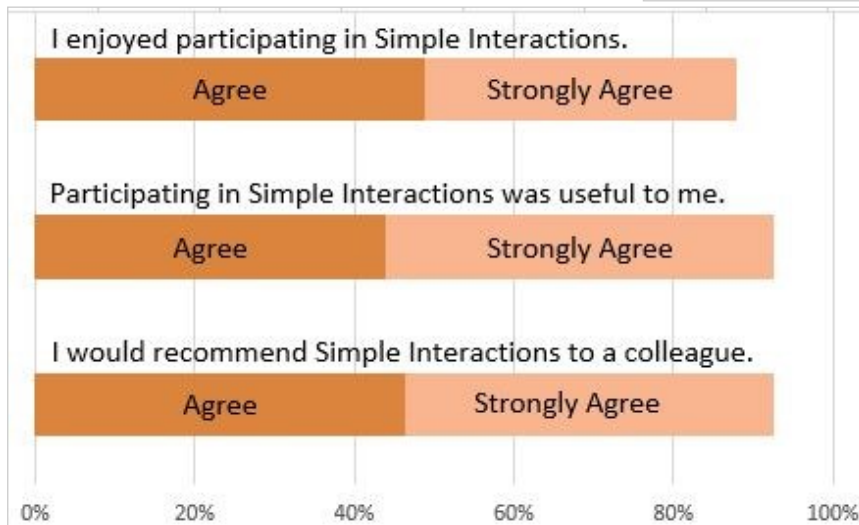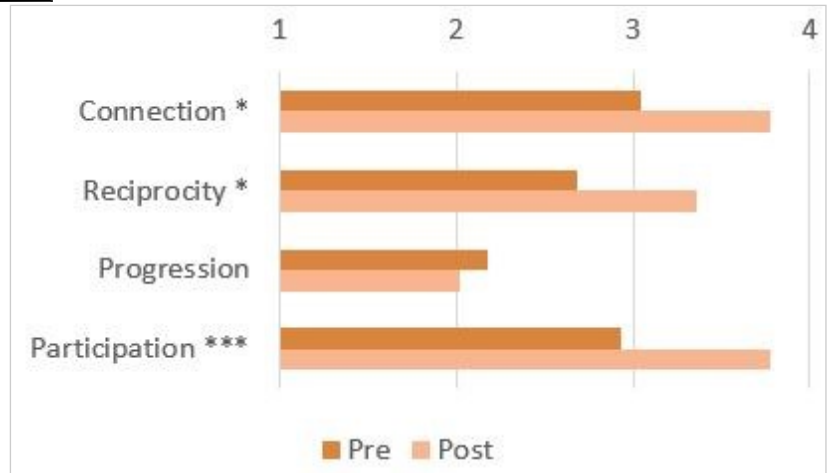

Figure shows results from multivariate repeated measures ANOVA (figure uses estimated marginal means). Pre-post differences for connection and reciprocity significant at $p < .05$, for participation at $p < .001$, no significant difference for progression.

After the final workshop, we asked participants to evaluate the SI process. A total of 41 respondents reported overwhelmingly that they enjoyed professional development strategy and believed it to be useful. Results from three questions on the SI evaluation are displayed in the figure to the left.