

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Key Focus: Language Development

Observation: Ms. Mary created a checklist that listed the types of “wh” questions (who, what, when, where, why, how many) she planned to ask the children after reading stories. She assigned a code to each of the stories that she planned to read that week. Because Ms. Mary needed to focus on reading and asking questions during story time, she asked her teaching assistant to note the types of questions children answered correctly and the book to which the question referred (using the letter assigned to the story from the list below). If a child appropriately answered a question about a particular story, the letter indicating that story would be placed in the column indicating the question type. If they answered incorrectly, the teaching assistant would then put an X over that letter. Because several of the books had some number concepts in them, Ms. Mary also asked her teaching assistant to note the number correctly identified in the “How many?” column. They used the checklist during story time each day.

CODE STORY

- A. *Oso pardo, oso pardo, ¿qué ves ahí?* (*Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*; Martin, Bill; translated by Teresa Mlawer, 2002)
- B. *Over On The Farm: A Counting Picture Book Rhyme* (Gunson, Christopher, 1995)
- C. *Fall Is Here! I Love It!* (Good, Elaine W., 1990)
- D. *Snow Comes To the Farm* (Tripp, Nathaniel, 2001)
- E. *Spring Thaw* (Schnur, Steven, 2000)
- F. *La oruga muy hambrienta* (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*; Carle, Eric, 1994)
- G. *Two of Everything: A Chinese Folktale* (Hong, Lily Toy, 1993)
- H. *Picture Book of George Washington Carver* (Adler, David A., 1999)

Child	WHO	WHAT	WHEN	WHERE	HOW	WHY	HOW MANY
Anna		F, G, H,					4, 3, 8
Alisha		D, G, B	C,D,E		D,G		5, 7, 9
Ari		C, G, B					2,3
Jana	D	D,G,H					2,3
Jose	H	A,B,C,F,G	F		G		X , X , 2,3
Manuel		B,D,G					1, 2
Sui		B, G					2
Tommy		B,B,D,G,					1, 2

The “what” question that everyone answered for *Two of Everything* involved making a connection to their own lives (“What would you put into the hole so that you would get two of them?”). Everyone answered something that they would put into the hole. Ms. Mary made a note of their responses on the back of the checklist sheet so that she would remember them later.

Reflecting on the Documentation:

**Participants may quickly shift from reflecting on the documentation to interpreting the observation or suggesting strategies for extending learning. Remind participants to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the documentation technique.*

Ask: How does this type of record keeping help inform the teacher about children's knowledge as well as about her practice?

Sample Responses: This method not only tells you which children appropriately respond to questions, but it also tells you how often the teacher uses different types of questions. The chart also allows for an easy analysis both across rows (by child) and up and down columns (by question type). It is helpful to know which books elicited children's responses so the teacher can consider content when reflecting on the activity at a later time.

Ask: How does this type of record keeping help the teacher plan for her next lesson?

Sample Responses: The documentation can capture the teacher's own behavior. Because the teacher can see what kind of questions she is asking most often and which children need more chances to respond, she can plan to use question types that have not been asked in the past and to engage children who are not speaking up.

Ask: How could you use this type of documentation in order to look at change over time?

Sample Responses: You could collect this information each month and look at whether children are answering more "when," "how," or "why" questions as the year progresses. When more challenging questions are asked, it will be helpful to see where children are *incorrectly* answering questions. As the checklist is now, it appears they are not answering certain types of questions only because they are not given an opportunity to do so. For example, we have no information about their ability to answer "why" questions.

Teachers might also adapt a checklist like this to keep track of the language in which a child responds (see below for an alternative version of an individual checklist that a home visitor might use, indicating the language of the response).

Ask: How does a teacher collect this information when he/she is reading the story?

Sample Responses: The teacher can ask the assistant teacher to document while the story is being shared with the large group. If the teacher reads to a small group of children, the teacher can keep a checklist at the back of the book and note which child answered a question as the child finishes answering.

A home visitor can also use this checklist. If the checklist is only being used for one family, the parent or home visitor can fill out the table by indicating the types of questions to which each child responds in the checklist (who, what, when, where, why, how many). If the same list is used for different families, the home visitor can fill it out while the parent reads the stories.

Interpretation of the Observation: **Remind participants that in their interpretation they are looking for patterns, critical incidents, or errors. It is important to stick to the data.*

Ask: What do you notice about the information collected? What can the information tell you about how individual children are doing?

- “What” and “how many” questions are the most commonly asked and answered questions in this class.
- No “where” and “why” questions were asked and very few “who,” “when” and “how” questions were asked; however, the books might not have been good sources of such questions.
- Ms. Mary noticed that the books she used this week were not good sources of questions about “who” (for example, stories only include one or two people). Even though three of the stories were about a season, Ms. Mary only asked a “when” question once for each of the books, and usually Alisha answered it.
- Alisha, Jana, and Jose seemed to answer the most questions. Alisha answered the most difficult questions. Jose had trouble with the “how many” questions, answering incorrectly on two occasions. Perhaps Jose likes to volunteer answers to questions even if he does not know the correct answer.
- Sui spoke least often.
- Ms. Mary noticed that Tommy answered the “what” questions from the books that named animals and animal tracks; the teacher is able to hypothesize about the child’s interest in animals, because she knows the content of the books.

Relating Your Observation to the Child Outcomes Framework:

**Although participants can defend other interpretations, there should be general consensus that this observation demonstrates:*

1A3 (Language Development/Listening and Understanding): Understands an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary.

2BA (Literacy/Book Knowledge and Appreciation): Shows growing interest and involvement in listening to and discussing a variety of fiction and non-fiction books and poetry.

3A6 (Mathematics/Number and Operations): Develops increased abilities to combine, separate, and name “how many” objects.

Next steps for large group instruction:

**Help participants make connections between what they learn from the assessment and the next steps they want to take in instruction. If suggestions for instruction extend activities to new areas of learning, ask participants to consider what aspects of children’s progress they would assess and how they would do so during those extension activities.*

Ask: What would you do next as a teacher for the whole class?

Sample Responses:

- Look for literature that allows for other types of questions. For example, the teacher could read *Who Took the Farmer's Hat?* (Nodset, Joan L., 1988). In this story, a farmer looks for his hat and asks animals rather than people for help (the animals answer like people). This book would allow the teacher to repeatedly ask about “who” the farmer had already asked, who the farmer might ask next, and who they thought might have taken the farmer’s hat. She could also ask “where” the hat went as the animals described the strange things that they had seen. After the story, she could ask “why” certain things might have occurred in the story. It would also provide additional review of animal names and fit in well with the farm theme.

Next steps for individualized instruction:

Ask: What would you recommend that the teacher do next for individual children?

**Responses will vary but may include:*

- During center time, Ms. Mary might work with Jana, Jose, and Alisha on more complex texts that continue to build on their vocabulary and analytical abilities. She might ask children to describe how they do something as they work on it or how they did something after completing the task.
- During center time, Ms. Mary might pair Sui with different English speakers to help build Sui’s confidence and English-speaking abilities. She could introduce questions that begin “who” or “where” and help Sui to differentiate those questions from “what” questions.

Additional Notes: What is another way that Ms. Mary could collect information about children’s understanding of questions? For example, would it have helped for Ms. Mary to list the questions that she planned to ask each day and note children’s answers next to them? What would a language sample or tape recording of the conversation provide that you do not learn here? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches.

This checklist could also be used by home visitors both to collect information and to engage the parent in observation of what the child knows and can do. When visiting families, a home visitor can bring books to share with parents and children. The home visitor can fill out the checklist while a parent reads to the child and asks questions, or the parent can fill out the checklist while the home visitor reads. The home visitor could also reorganize the checklist and bring a different story or two to each visit.

If the checklist is only being used for one family, the parent or home visitor can fill out the table by indicating the name of the story and the types of questions to which each child responds in the checklist (who, what, when, where, why, how many). In the case of dual language learners, the checklist might also be used to collect the language in which the child responds.

Other codes that might be used include indicating whether the child answered a “what” question by naming an object (“what is this?”) or naming an action (“what happened?”), and whether he or she described a sequence of two events (“before”

or “after”) or elaborated on a longer sequence (telling three to five events in order). The instructional planning and the assessment should support one another.

Depending on what they learn about what the children can do, the parents and home visitor can use the same strategies as Ms. Mary for individualized instruction.

Here is an alternate version of an individual checklist that a home visitor might use, indicating the language of the response:

Jose	WHO	WHAT	WHEN	WHERE	HOW	WHY	HOW MANY
<i>Oso pardo, oso pardo, ¿qué ves ahí?</i>		E					
<i>Over On The Farm: A Counting Picture Book Rhyme</i>		S					10 10
<i>Fall Is Here! I Love It!</i>		S					
<i>Snow Comes To The Farm</i>							
<i>Spring Thaw</i>							
<i>La oruga muy hambrienta</i>		S					3
<i>Two of Everything: A Chinese Folktale</i>		E			S		2
<i>Picture Book of George Washington Carver</i>	E						