

## AT THE POST OFFICE

**Key Focus:** Language Development

**Observation:** After a visit to the post office, the teacher asks children to draw a picture of a post office. What might their drawings tell you about (1) their memory of the trip and (2) their artistic expression?

The teacher is also interested in what new vocabulary the children picked up from the visit. During circle time she says to the children, "Tell me about your picture." She writes what the children say on mailing labels along with their initials so she can place the words on the pictures after circle time. Here are some of their responses:

- *Here's the mail carrier delivering the mail.*
- *This is the post office box.*
- *Esta es la carta [This is the letter].*
- *These are all the mail.*
- *This is the post office.*
- *It's a mail lady.*
- *This is where you put the mail in a bag.*
- *I wrote my address on the letter.*
- *I put a stamp on the letter.*
- *I went to the post office with my grandma and then we went to the grocery store.*

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:** What are the benefits to having children draw pictures to help assess learning?

**Sample Responses:** The drawing samples give you insight into the details and the aspects of the environment that children notice. Although drawings might not represent the full extent of children's understanding, art is an easy medium for children to begin to express their ideas and capture memories. Moreover, for children who are not highly verbal, drawings can be a gateway into their perceptions. Drawing gives practice in visual motor skills and teaches children about representing ideas visually. Drawing provides time for each child to think about what he or she saw and may help visual memory skills develop.

**Ask:** What are the benefits to having children describe pictures orally to assess learning?

**Sample Responses:** Oral communications let children demonstrate ideas they might not be able to put to paper because of limited drawing ability. They also allow for an assessment of children's growth in new vocabulary, as well as use of sentence structure. You can also look at how long

sentences are, and if they include descriptive words and other aspects of language development.

**Ask:** How might the two approaches enrich one another?

**Sample Responses:** Both approaches together provide greater understanding of children's learning and development. Pictures sometimes serve to spark children's vocabulary and words; conversely, new words might stimulate memories for details to add to pictures.

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 the materials tell us about children's growth?

**Sample Responses:**

Children are using a number of vocabulary words related to the Post Office (probably introduced in the context of preparing for and going on the field trip) including:

1. delivering
2. mail carrier
3. post office
4. mailbox
5. address
6. stamp
7. letter
8. card

Children used complete sentences about their work.

Some words suggest development of new concepts. For example, "delivering," "address," and "stamp" are more likely to be newer vocabulary than "mail" and "card." The teacher in the class would know which words are new vocabulary for these children.

One child was able to express his thoughts completely in Spanish using proper Spanish grammar and vocabulary.

One child related a sentence with 17 words and tied the recent trip to a previous visit with a family member.

By examining the children's pictures, you could determine whether children are creating drawings that are detailed and realistic.

Children all discussed things relevant to the post office, suggesting some understanding of this part of their community.

Relating Your Observation to the Child Outcomes Framework:

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

**5B2 (Creative Arts/Art):** Progresses in abilities to create drawings, paintings, models, and other art creations that are more detailed, creative, or realistic.

**1B3 (Language Development/Speaking and Communicating):** Uses an increasingly complex and varied spoken vocabulary.

**6E3/4 (Social and Emotional Development/Knowledge of Communities):** Develops growing awareness of jobs and what is required to perform them. Begins to express and understand concepts and language of geography in the contexts of their classroom, home, and community.

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:** How would you respond to facilitate vocabulary development?

*\*Responses will vary but might include:*

- Use the new words two to three times a day during the week. Act out the words silently, and have the children guess what you are doing (mail a letter, deliver the mail, sort the mail, and so on).
- Talk about words that have similar meanings. Discuss each word's meaning—how they are similar and how they are different. Perhaps talk about how letters and email are different and how they are the same.

#### Synonyms

1. letter
2. mail
3. card

- Talk about compound words or phrases—mailbox, mailman, mail-carrier, mail-truck. This could extend to talking about aspects of phonemic awareness. Clap the number of syllables; what is the same about these words (all begin with "mail;" all have two syllables).
- Build a post office in the dramatic play area and post the new words with the objects.
- Talk about the "postal workers" who sort the mail using "zipcodes." Put numbers on index cards or envelopes and have them sort by "zipcode."

- Talk about Spanish translations of some of these words.

**Ask:** How would you use the children’s responses to help expand their conversation skills?

**Sample Responses:** One of the first elements of narrative that children develop is routine scripts (ways to talk about set procedures and processes that occur in their daily lives). Perhaps ask children to recount what happened on the trip to the post office, ask children to explain the role of the mail carrier, or tell from beginning to end the steps in writing and mailing a letter (for example, getting paper and pencil, writing it, putting it into an envelope, putting on a stamp, writing the address, mailing it).

Next steps for individualized instruction:

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

*\* Responses will vary but might include:*

- After discussions of the new mail-related words, children can revisit their original drawings and add more detail to them.
- Work in a small group with the child who responded in Spanish along with other Spanish-speakers and English-speakers to talk about “mail” vocabulary in both English and Spanish.

Additional Notes:

This is a great opportunity for teachers to link their classroom instruction and assessment to families. Teachers might send home an activity asking parents and children to write a letter and mail one in the nearest mailbox or to go to the post office together. Families might also mail a letter or card home from a mailbox near the school.

Children and their parents might also take a walk around their neighborhood, drawing a map of all the mailboxes in the area, or in more rural areas, wait for the mail carrier and hand the (outgoing) mail to the mail carrier.