

SAND TABLE SELFLESSNESS

Key Focus: Social and Emotional Development

Observation: Flora, Alicia, and Roberto are at the sand table and you observe the following:

Flora uses the shovel to scoop sand into a pail. Alicia is filling the sea star shape with sand and flipping it over. "I made a starfish." Roberto is using the rake to scoop up sand. "I need a shovel." "Aqui, Tu puedes usar este [Here, you can use this one]," says Flora and hands him her shovel. She uses her hands to continue filling her pail with sand.

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 advantages are there to including what the children "say" along with their actions?

Sample Responses: By including snippets of children's language, we are better able to understand children's motivation for their actions. For example, if we just noted actions, "Flora gave her shovel to Roberto and used her hands to fill her pail," we would not know that Roberto expressed his needs, and Flora is not only handing over her shovel to help her friend, but does so in a way that is socially responsive.

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 can you learn about the children from this observation?

Sample Responses: This interaction among three children at the sand table tells us much about their social, motor, and language skills. Flora takes turns in using materials and in interactions with Roberto. These children show the dexterity and control needed to use sand tools. All children use language to communicate information.

Flora speaks Spanish but also understands English and shows she understands the use of tools like a shovel and how her hands can also function in the same way as a shovel. Flora responds sympathetically to a peer who needs something.

Roberto expresses his needs. Rather than grabbing the shovel from one of his peers, he explains what he wants. Moreover, he uses the proper noun for what he wants, rather than saying, "I want that."

Alicia is able to use the starfish mold. She knows the shape of the sea star and calls it by the commonly used (though technically inaccurate) name. Alicia uses a complete sentence. She doesn't say, "I made this" but rather, is able to use a concrete noun.

Relating Your Observation to the Child Outcomes Framework:

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

6C3 (Social and Emotional Development/Cooperation): Develops increasing abilities to give and take in interactions, to take turns in games or using materials, and to interact without being overly submissive or directive.

6D3 (Social and Emotional Development/Social Relationships): Progresses in responding sympathetically to peers who are in need, upset, hurt, or angry; and in expressing empathy or caring for others.

1A4 (Language Development/Listening and Understanding): For non-English-speaking children, progresses in listening to and understanding English.

1B1 (Language Development/Speaking & Communicating): Shows increasing ability to discriminate and identify sounds in spoken language.

8A1 (Physical Health and Development/Fine Motor): Develops growing strength, dexterity, and control needed to use tools such as scissors, paper punch, stapler, and hammer.

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 recommend that the teacher do next for the class as a whole?

**Responses will vary but might include:*

- Talk with the class about turn-taking. Tell the class about what you observed and ask them to comment on Flora’s actions. Think with the class about what Roberto could have said back (for example, “Thank you” or “Gracias”). Discuss different ways children can solve problems if two people want to use the same toy, such as by trading, setting a timer for turn-taking, asking a friend to give you the toy when he or she is finished, and playing with something else while you wait.
- Commend Flora’s alternative way to meet her need. Brainstorm about other things that could be used as a shovel.
- Add other tools to the sand table: ladles, mixing spoons, funnels, slotted spoons, some other molds, various containers of different sizes, and some with narrow openings. Observe children’s fine motor and problem-solving skills.

Next steps for individualized instruction:

Ask: What would you say to the children during their explorations to promote conversation?

** Responses will vary but might include:*

- After Alicia says, “I made a starfish” say, “Yes, I see that. It is also

called a sea star.” You might ask her to describe the starfish (for example, “How many legs does a sea star have? What shape is a starfish? Where do you think a sea star lives? Does he swim at the top of the sea or live on the bottom of the sea?”).

- When Flora responds to Roberto in Spanish, you might comment positively in English. “That was very kind to let Roberto use your shovel.” You might prompt her to try English. “Roberto doesn’t understand Spanish. Can you tell him “You can use this shovel”?”
- You might also ask Roberto to say “thank you” or “gracias” to Flora and perhaps explain when he will give it back.

Ask: What would you say to the children during their explorations to promote sharing?

Sample Response: To promote sharing you might ask Flora if there is any other material in the sand table she would like to use and whether she can ask one of the other children to borrow it.

Ask: What would you say to the children during their explorations to promote different ways of using the materials?

Sample Response: Point out that Flora is using her hands instead of a shovel. Ask what else you can use besides a shovel to scoop sand. Ask them to find something else in the classroom that can serve as a scooper.

Additional Notes:

**Note to presenter: Discuss with the group how Flora understood Roberto’s English request but responded in Spanish. Explain how this is an important part of the bilingual language development process and how by grouping English and non-English speakers together, spontaneous language interactions like this might occur.*

You might also try to track, using a checklist, the number of times in a day you hear Flora appropriately responding in Spanish to a statement or question in English, or keep track of the English words she responds to in different contexts (sand table - shovel; lunch - milk; cleanup - milk carton).