

ALL NEWTS ARE GOOD NEWTS

Key Focus: Approaches to Learning

Observation: As part of her unit on newts, Ms. Bond has placed at the “creation station” paint, newspaper, masking tape, and toilet paper rolls. She calls over a group of four students and explains that their job at this center is to create a replica of a newt (like the one in their classroom) using the materials on the table (they have already been to the museum and have been talking about models not being actual size). Ms. Bond guides the activity and records what children say during the process:

Jason: Let’s bring the newts over here so that we can see them better; What if we cut the toilet paper roll?

Nikki: This is cool; I’ll get the scissors; We need brown paint—newts are brown; They move!! Can we make it move?!

Alicia: Newts are small; The tape won’t stay; I can do it like this (shows how she stuffs the toilet paper roll with newspaper).

Wendy: I need the tape; It worked!! Let’s take a picture.

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 advantage does a verbal vignette like this offer?

Sample Responses: Allows the teacher to directly record the exact words that the children are using.

Ask: What would other methods have recorded that this observation lacks?

Sample Responses: A photograph or running record could have recorded the nonverbal interactions (facial expressions, gestures); the context of the activity (for example, size of the space; how closely the children were working; presence of children who did not speak or who were onlookers); more of the description of their actions, whether any children were working independently on their own model or if they were all working on the joint model; the amount of time they spent working on this together.

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 their statements?

Sample Responses: Children appeared motivated and interested in this task. They seemed to be working together and talked about their end product, and tested ideas out. They showed concentration over the period of the task, and approached it with flexibility, imagination, and inventiveness. Children also used language to express what they were thinking. Nikki and Alicia showed that they observed specific characteristics of newts (small and brown). Children were expanding knowledge of and abilities to observe, describe, and discuss the world around them.

Relating your observation to the Child Outcomes Framework:

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

7A3 (Approaches to Learning/Initiative & Curiosity): Approaches tasks and activities with increased flexibility, imagination, and inventiveness.

7A4 (Approaches to Learning/Initiative & Curiosity): Grows in eagerness to learn about and discuss a growing range of topics, ideas, and tasks.

7B3 (Approaches to Learning/Engagement & Persistence): Shows growing capacity to maintain concentration over time on a task, question, set of directions, or interactions, despite distractions and interruptions.

7C2 (Approaches to Learning/Reasoning and Problem Solving): Grows in recognizing and solving problems through active exploration, including trial and error, and interactions and discussions with peers and adults.

1B1 (Language Development/Speaking and Communicating): Develops increasing abilities to understand and use language to communicate information, experiences, ideas, feelings, opinions, needs, and questions, and for other varied purposes.

4B1 (Science/Scientific Knowledge): Expands knowledge of and abilities to observe, describe, and discuss the natural world, materials, living things, and natural processes.

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:*

- Give all children in the class an opportunity to create a newt in small groups. Then as a group, document on large paper the process that different groups used to create their models. Take pictures of the models as evidence of what properties of the newt they included, with any needed notes. Perhaps take notes to indicate whether other groups showed similar levels of engagement.

Next steps for individualized instruction:

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

**Responses will vary but might include:*

- Work with Jason and others on observations. Ask them to represent different science-related objects in the classroom, perhaps moving on to adding labels to a model or sketch or asking the children about differences in what you can learn from a model and what you learn from a drawing. Perhaps have them sketch the

newt from different angles Use the work samples as evidence of their progress in documenting observations.

Additional Notes: