

APPENDIX 2

Suggested Observation Questions

When time is spent observing at centres that actively engage children in learning, an educator can gather a great deal of information about children's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and how they express and construct knowledge. The following observation questions may serve to frame observations for educators. They are in no way meant to be prescriptive or exclusive of others.³⁷

Observing Oral Language at All Centres

Some starting questions to guide observations:

Social/Emotional Development

- Who is using language extensively and who is quiet in the classroom?
- When, where, and with whom does the child talk?

Cognitive Development

- How does the child communicate needs/wants? Through words? Through nonverbal communication such as gestures, facial expressions, noises?
- How does the child speak? (words, phrases or sentences.)
- How does the child use language? (to self-maintain, direct, report on present and past experiences, toward logical reasoning, predict, project, imagine.)
- How are the child's ideas organized? (clearly and logically, randomly or as disconnected ideas.)
- What is the nature of the child's vocabulary?

Physical Development

- Can the child be easily understood? Is there a lisp, blurred, or garbled speech?
- Are there behaviours that might indicate the child is having difficulty hearing? (unduly watches others, responses are consistently delayed, directions aren't followed, seems to work in isolation, extensive use of nonverbal communication.)

Observing at the Book/Reading or Literacy Centre

Some starting questions to guide observations:

Social/Emotional Development

- What interest does the child show in literacy activities during learning centre time?
- What preferences does the child have for reading materials?
- How does the child feel about himself or herself as a reader?

Language/Cognitive Development

- What is the child 'noticing' about print/ the text?
- What knowledge or understanding does the child have about print/books? (pictures tell a story, print goes from left to right, book is held the right way, there is a title on the cover.)
- What information does the child recall?
- How does the child retell? (with props, pictures, own words, in logical sequence, with detail, with expression.)
- What connections is the child making with the texts?
- What skills or strategies does the child use when 'reading'? (uses memory, uses picture clues, predicts, goes back and checks for understanding, asks a friend, knows some familiar words, attaches sounds to letters.)
- What does the child know about letters/sounds/ words? (recognizes own name and friends' names, recognizes print in the environment, recognizes similarities and differences in letters, sounds, words, knows letters of the alphabet, and attaches sounds to letters.)

Physical Development

- Are physical skills in place to support literacy learning? (grasping and turning pages with control, holding a book within comfort zone without squinting, frowning, or excessive blinking.)

Observing at the Writing Centre/Writing Activities

Some starting questions to guide observations:

Social/Emotional Development

- What interest does the child show in writing?
- Where does the child choose to write? (only at the writing centre, in other centres.)
- When does the child choose to write? (in response to an experience, for a social purpose, when assisted.)
- How does the child view the task of writing? (as an independent activity, easily frustrated, needs constant support.)
- How does the child view his/her writing capabilities? (I'll show you how to do it, I can do that, that's too hard for me, I can't make it right.)

Language/Cognitive Development

- What kinds of 'writing' does the child generate? (pictures, labels for pictures, messages, stories, lists.)
- What stage of writing is evident?
- What strategies does the child use when writing? (knowledge of familiar words, using classroom resources, asking a friend, sounding out and stretching out the sounds.)
- How does the child organize the writing on the paper?
- What is the stage of spelling in independent writing?

Physical Development

- How is fine motor control developing?
- Does the child hold writing tools in an efficient manner?
- How does the child orient writing/drawing on paper?

Observing at the Science/Technology Centre

Some starting questions to guide observations:

Social/Emotional Development

- What interest does the child show in the natural world?

- How does the child react to new experiences? (digging in the dirt, getting hands muddy, encountering a new creature.)
- Does the child tend to work alone or with others in investigations?
- What strategies does the child use when working with others?
- How does the child share materials?
- How does the child handle the materials/creatures? (with care, with respect, with knowledge.)

Language/Cognitive Development

- How does the child communicate observations? (verbally, nonverbally, through drawings/writing, building.)
- What scientific/mathematical vocabulary does the child use? (the water is frozen, this one is higher, it's steep so it goes faster.)
- What is the child 'noticing,' paying attention to?
- What science/technology concepts has the child developed?
- Is the child curious? How is curiosity expressed?
- What inquiry skills does the child use? (comparing, predicting, hypothesizing, drawing conclusions.)
- What knowledge does the child have about the topic?
- What connections is the child making?
- What strategies does the child use for problem-solving when engaged in inquiry or design and technology experiences? (trial and error, uses past experiences, tries a new idea/material, seeks help from others.)

Physical Development

- How is fine motor control when handling materials? Are movements becoming more precise and controlled? (pouring from containers, using an eyedropper.)
- How is eye-hand coordination developing? (using a hammer and nails, a screwdriver, placing materials when designing.)

Observing at the Visual Arts Centre

Some starting questions to guide observations:

Social and Emotional Development

- What interest does the child show in visual arts experiences?
- How does the child view himself/herself as an artist?
- How does the child approach the activity? (takes time and effort, works quickly, returns to it.)
- Does the child share materials?
- Does the child show a preference for a medium? (painting, drawing, collage work, three dimensional, modeling or mixing media.)
- Does the child show a preference for materials? (paint, tempera blocks, crayons, chalk, clay.)
- Will the child experiment? (with the use of colour, shape, texture, design.)
- Does the child follow the routines?

Language/Cognitive Development

- What does the child 'notice' or pay attention to when viewing art?
- What visual arts vocabulary does the child use? (the colours are all muddy, I made a zigzag line, that feels really bumpy.)
- What knowledge does the child have of the materials?
- What connections does the child make to the art?
- What is the child's knowledge of the different elements of art? (shape, colour, texture, line.)
- What stage is the child at for drawing/painting?
- What is the motivation for the child's art? (to respond, to make something for someone else, to work with a friend, to create something which can be used elsewhere, to decorate.)

Physical Development

- Does the child demonstrate coordinated eye-hand movements?
- How does the child use tools? (scissors, paint brushes, modeling tools.)

Observing at the Sand Centre

Some starting questions to guide observations:

Social and Emotional Development

- What stage of play does the child demonstrate most often?
- What does the child do at the sand centre? (explores the sand as a material and uses the tools, discovers some math and science concepts, talks about discoveries, begins own investigations and engages in problem-solving, engages in dramatic play.)
- How does the child work with others?
- How does the child share materials?
- Does the child follow the routines for the centre?
- Will the child take risks and try something new?

Language and Cognitive Development

- What mathematical and scientific vocabulary is the child using?
- What mathematical and scientific concepts does the child use in the play? (mass, volume, speed, distance.)
- What does the child do with the sand? (sift, mound, pour, create dramatizations, investigations.)
- What knowledge does the child have of sand as a material?
- What inquiry skills does the child use at the sand centre? (observing, comparing, predicting, drawing conclusions.)
- What connections does the child make with sand and the 'real world'?
- What problem-solving strategies does the child use at the sand centre?
- How does the child communicate observations at the sand centre? (verbally, pictures, writing, recording.)

Physical Development

- Is the child showing increasing fine motor control when using tools? (pouring from measuring cups, managing funnel and tubing.)

Observing at the Water Centre

Some starting questions to guide observations:

Social and Emotional Development

- Will the child choose the water centre? (afraid to get wet, take risks...)
- How does the child play? (alone, with someone else, enter into group play.)
- How does the child follow the routines for the centre?

Language and Cognitive Development

- What does the child do at the water centre? (explore the materials and the water itself, discover mathematical and scientific concepts and use of materials, problem-solve and begin own investigations, engage in dramatic play.)
- What mathematical and scientific vocabulary does the child use and understand? (deeper, floats, freezing...)
- What knowledge does the child have about the properties of water? (takes the shape of container it is in, has different states, water flows...)
- What are the child's observations?
- What connections is the child making to 'real world' or past experiences?
- What inquiry skills are developing? (observing, predicting, comparing, drawing conclusions...)
- How does the child reflect on the learning? (through showing and demonstrating, through drawings/writings, describing a photo, sharing in the group...)

Physical Development

- Is there evidence of controlled fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination? (pouring water, squeezing baster, using eyedroppers, managing funnels...)

Observing at the Blocks and Construction Materials

Some starting questions to guide observations:

Social and Emotional Development

- What interest does the child show in building?
- What social skills is the child developing? Does the child lead or follow, adapt to the ideas of others, voice ideas, show respect for others, use language to express needs and follow routines?
- How does the child play? (alone, beside others, with a partner, or with a group.)

Language and Cognitive Development

- Does the child name, label, describe, or tell a story about the construction?
- What drama does the child incorporate into the building?
- What mathematical or scientific vocabulary does the child use? (higher, triangle, has more, faster...)
- What questions does the child pose?
- What mathematical, scientific concepts does the child incorporate into play? (size, sorting, order, shape, symmetry, pattern, stability.)
- What inquiry skills does the child use while constructing? (observing, comparing, predicting, drawing conclusions...)
- How does child represent learning? (verbally, through drawings, writings, gestures, using numbers...)
- What strategies does the child have to solve problems? (watching others, using past experience, trial and error, seeking assistance...)
- What connections does the child make? (to real life - buildings need to be strong at the bottom so they won't fall down; to pictures - that's just like the one in the book.)

Physical Development

- How is fine motor and eye-hand coordination developing?
- What size of material can the child efficiently use?
- How does the child use the physical space?

Observing at the Math Centre

Some starting questions for observation:

Social and Emotional Development

- How interested is the child in using math materials?
- Does the child engage with materials alone or with others?
- How interested is the child in solving mathematical problems? Does the child persist?

Language and Cognitive Development

- What mathematical vocabulary does the child use? (higher, more/less, triangle, behind.)
- What is the child 'noticing' about numbers in every day situations in the classroom?
- What mathematical concepts does the child demonstrate through the use of materials? (order, pattern, symmetry, data management.)
- How does the child use mathematics in other areas of the program? (matching one to one with plates for each person in the dramatic play, measuring the height of a bean plant, making patterns with materials at painting, sorting the boxes at the classroom store, ordering the shells at the science table.)
- What concepts of mathematics does the child demonstrate with the materials? (one to one, cardinality, stable order.)
- How does the child demonstrate evidence of spatial awareness? (finding own space in the gym, organizing collage materials at the visual arts centre, establishing an area for building materials, organizing self on paper.)
- How does the child use language? (to describe how to solve a problem, to explain a solution, to create a story problem, retell a number story.)

Physical Development

- Does the child show fine motor control in picking up and placing materials?
- Is the child able to find her or his own place in space?

Observing Dramatic Play

Some starting questions to guide observations:

Social and Emotional Development

- Does the child choose to engage in dramatic play? (alone or with another child or group.)
- How does the child deal with social problems?
- What types of worries, emotions, or experiences are expressed through the child's dramatic play?
- How does the child interact with peers? (an onlooker, solitary, cooperative.)
- What role does the child take in the play? (initiator, follower, the baby or animal.)
- Is the child able to read the social cues of peers?
- How does the child enter the play? (asking or engaging with others, seeing attention, with assistance from educator.)
- How well can the child stay involved or sustain the play?
- Is the child able to read the social cues of peers?

Language and Cognitive Development

- How does the child use language in the play? (self-maintaining, directing, reporting on present and past experiences, toward logical reasoning, predicting, projecting, imagining.)
- Does the child 'play' with language?
- What scripts does the child develop? How are they extended?
- How does the child use voice during the play? (takes on voice of roles/characters, varies tone, uses expression.)
- Can the child make himself or herself understood by others?
- How does the child speak? (in words, phrases, simple sentences, more complex sentences.)
- What background knowledge does the child have to bring to the drama?
- Does the child know and use the vocabulary associated with the role or theme of the play?
- How does the child incorporate literacy in the play?

- What mathematics are used in the play? (setting the table one to one, sorting materials in the class store, counting out change.)
- What themes emerge during the play?

Physical Development

- How does the child incorporate movement into the drama?
- How does the child perform the movements?
- How is fine motor control developing? (able to do buttons on dress-up clothes, dress the dolls.)