

HOUSES AND HOMES

Key Focus: Language Development

Observation: Ms. Mary taught a unit on homes and houses. She borrowed new books from the library to share with the children and searched for vocabulary to introduce throughout the unit. She created a checklist of the new words and some codes to easily gather information on what words the children were picking up in context. She asked her teaching assistant to note when she heard children using or responding to these words during group time or free play time. During free play/center time she kept the checklist close to the block area where she expected to hear most of the talk about homes. She developed codes so she could easily keep track of what children did:

Codes used: P = pointed to a picture/representation
 + = used word in correct context in a sentence
 - = used word incorrectly in a sentence; or gave incorrect response to question
 Q = responded correctly to a question with the word in it

On Wednesday the checklist looked like this:

WEEK OF OCTOBER 25-29

Child	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Con-struction	Elevator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor
Anna								
Alisha						Q		
Ari		+	-		+			
Jana	Q	P						
Jose				+				
Manuel			-	++	+	+		Q
Sui								
Tommy	+						Q	

At the end of the first week, she noted that she had not had the opportunity to hear what many of the children had learned about homes. She decided to add some home decorating magazines to the art area for children to use in drawing/designing their own houses. She introduced the roles of "realtor" and "interior designer" into the dramatic play area by providing "For Sale" signs and business cards. Because this introduced additional new words, she added words that she heard children begin to use to her checklist:

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 1-5

Child	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Con-struction	Elev-ator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor	Decorate	Interior designer	Furniture
Anna	Q								+		
Alisha		+				Q		+	+	+	
Ari		+	Q		+			+			
Jana	Q	P	-		+	+		+			+
Jose				+			Q				
Manuel			-	++	+	+		Q			
Sui											
Tommy	+	P			Q		Q				

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 is the advantage of using a coding system as Ms. Mary does here? What potential difficulties might a coding system like this bring?

Sample Responses: A coding system helps make observations quick and efficient. Instead of writing notes, the shorthand method makes observations quick and easy to analyze. In addition, it ensures that all teachers in the class who are making observations are “on the same page.” Everyone is focusing their observations in the same direction and coming up with similar coding sheets.

At first, coding sheets like this might be difficult, as the observer needs to “learn the codes.” Thus, it might take a few minutes to get prepared to make sure that the teacher knows exactly what he or she is looking for.

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 patterns do you notice here?

Sample Responses: An analysis by individual child reveals the following patterns:

Girls

- Anna does not seem to say much in the block area. She only answers one question and uses one word correctly (decorate).
- Alisha responds to one question in the block area (about mansions) and one question in the dramatic play area (also about mansions). In the dramatic play area she also uses four words correctly.
- Jana answers one question and points (1x) in the block area, and points (1x) in the dramatic play area. She incorrectly responds to a question about or incorrectly uses the word “condominium.” In dramatic play she also uses four words correctly.
- Sui makes no gestures or vocalizations in either the dramatic play area or block area.

Thus, some concern emerges about Sui (the teacher will know whether English is her first language). Although Anna does not talk in the block area, she is able to respond to questions and use words correctly in dramatic play. Alisha and Jana both use four words correctly in dramatic play and both girls are able to answer questions, although Jana does not show understanding of “condominium.” Jana does the most pointing.

Boys

- Ari uses two words correctly in the block area, answers one question correctly in dramatic play and uses three words correctly in dramatic play. He did not show understanding of “condominium” the first week, but responded correctly the second week.

- Jose uses one word correctly twice in the block area, and in dramatic play he correctly answers one question.
- Manuel uses three words correctly (one twice) and one word incorrectly (two times) in the block area. The same pattern emerges in dramatic play.
- Tommy uses one word correctly in the block area and answers one question. In dramatic play, he points (1x), answers two questions and uses one word correctly.

Thus, Ari is correctly using the most words, followed by Manuel. Jose correctly uses words and is able to answer questions. Tommy points and answers questions.

An analysis by content words also helps to reveal new patterns.

- **Construction:** Used correctly 6x [Used the most often spontaneously and correctly]
- **Elevator:** Used correctly 5x, one question [Used the second most often spontaneously and correctly]
- **Balcony:** Used correctly 3x, three points [Used the third most often spontaneously and correctly; also receives the most pointing]
- **Realtor:** Used correctly 3x, two questions [Used correctly and children are also able to respond to questions]
- **Mansion:** Used correctly 2x, two questions [Used correctly and children are also able to respond to questions]
- **Decorate:** Used 2x correctly
- **Architect:** Used correctly 1x, three questions [Used most in questions]
- **Condominium:** One question [Never noted as being correctly used in spontaneous speech]; 4x incorrectly [Most often to be used incorrectly]
- **Neighbor:** Three questions [Never noted in spontaneous use; responded to correctly in questions]
- **Interior Design:** One correct
- **Furniture:** One correct

Thus, “construction” is correctly used most often, followed by “elevator.” “Balcony” is often used correctly and also receives the most pointing. “Realtor” is used correctly and incorrectly (although by the same child). “Decorate,” “interior design,” and “furniture” are all used correctly but not with high frequency (but they were also introduced later). “Architect” and “neighbor” are correctly used in response to questions, but never heard being used spontaneously. There is evidence that children are learning words that indicate parts of something (elevator, balcony, and furniture) and words that indicate roles (neighbor, architect, realtor, interior designer). “Condominium” is difficult for children. One wonders how they are using the word or whether they are confusing it with “apartment.”

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.

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

5D1 (Creative Arts/Dramatic Play): Participates in a variety of dramatic play activities that become more extended and complex.

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 Ms. Mary do as a result of what she sees here for the class overall?

**Responses will vary but might include:*

- I would continue using the words to help children remember them. I would perhaps read a book (perhaps a fairytale) where someone is standing on a balcony. I would use this word throughout the day and maybe take a tour of the neighborhood looking for balconies. You could also build a model balcony in the classroom. I would try to use certain words ("decorate," "interior design," and "furniture") more throughout the day (perhaps talking about the word "interior" vs. "exterior"). If a volunteer or parents have any of the jobs involved in the unit (architect, construction worker, realtor, interior designer), I might ask them to visit the classroom and talk about what they do.
- I might also make a more concerted effort to give girls more opportunities to talk and participate in the block area, perhaps adding some furniture and allowing a few girls to be first in selecting centers some of the days.
- I could also extend the unit in different ways. For example, talk about different types of construction workers, or different types of homes and the different materials used to construct homes.

Next steps for individualized instruction:

Ask: What would you recommend that Ms. Mary do as a result of what she sees here for individual students?

** Responses will vary but might include:*

I would rely on my interpretation of an individual child's abilities:

- For Sui, I would pair her with a confident English-speaker and work with her on thinking about vocabulary words in English (beginning with the ones that are more visual, like balcony, furniture, and elevator). If she is not a native English-language speaker, I would try to find the words that we are using in her native language and have her enrich her knowledge of these concepts.
- For Anna, I would sit with her in the block area and use parallel talk with her

as she builds different structures.

- Similarly, for Jose, I might want to use more parallel language and ask more questions to see if he knows more of the words.

Additional Notes:

The teacher might plan to show children individually (one child at a time) pictures of each of the words and see how many of the pictures each child names.

Teachers might also plan to involve parents by sending home a list of the words and asking them to use these words where appropriate at home, or asking them to check the words that they hear their child use at home. The teacher might also involve parents in the next steps in instruction, asking them to help their child make a map of their home and label things in their home. Perhaps you could also bring parents and families into the classroom to talk about the types of homes and houses they live in. If many children live in apartments, perhaps include “apartment” as a new vocabulary word and talk about some words that might be relevant to apartments (for example, laundry room, stairwell, lobby, etc.).

To prepare to share information with parents, teachers can redesign the checklist by repeating the header row with the list of new vocabulary words before each child’s row. Once the activities are complete, the checklist can be cut into strips to be stored in each child’s folder.

Child	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Constru-ction	Elevator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor	Decorate	Interior designer	Furniture
Anna	Q								+		
	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Constru-ction	Elevator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor	Decorate	Interior designer	Furniture
Alisha		+				Q		+	+	+	
	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Constru-ction	Elevator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor	Decorate	Interior designer	Furniture
Ari		+	Q		+			+			
	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Constru-ction	Elevator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor	Decorate	Interior designer	Furniture
Jana	Q	P	-		+	+		+			+
	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Constru-ction	Elevator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor	Decorate	Interior designer	Furniture
Jose				+			Q				
	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Constru-ction	Elevator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor	Decorate	Interior designer	Furniture
Manuel			-	++	+	+		Q			
	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Constru-ction	Elevator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor	Decorate	Interior designer	Furniture
Sui											
	Architect	Balcony	Condo-minium	Constru-ction	Elevator	Mansion	Neighbor	Realtor	Decorate	Interior designer	Furniture
Tommy	+	P			Q		Q				

Alternatively, the teachers can make a summary table for each child. The columns would represent the weeks and the rows would represent correct and incorrect responses.

Child Name: Manuel		
Unit: Houses and Homes		
	Oct. 25-29	Nov. 1-5
Correctly pointed		
Correctly used	4	4

Correctly responded	1	1
Incorrectly used/responded	1	1

Finally, the teacher can use a checklist to track whether children are learning and using words in either English or the language they speak at home, using codes for each language; for example, write “S” for a word in Spanish and “E” for English.

Codes used: E = English word used
S = Spanish word used

Child	Architect / Arquitecto	Condominium / Condominio	Construction / Construcción	Elevator / Ascensor or Elevador	Mansion / Mansión	Neighbor / Vecino	Furniture/ Muebles
Anna							
Alisha							
Ari							
Jana							
Jose							
Manuel							
Sui							
Tommy							