

Instructional Activity: What Do You Notice?

Children *notice*. They notice color, texture, and size and compare similar things to one another. They like to tell you about what they notice. Finding ways to support children in talking about what they notice can create openings to work on math concepts, including measurement and data.

What Do You Notice? is an Instructional Activity that invites children to consider and communicate about a range of content. For this activity, the teacher typically displays an image, asks children to think

silently about what they notice, and then invites them to engage in conversation about what they've noticed. By listening to and picking up on what children notice, teachers can draw out, extend, and connect children's ideas and support them in making sense of and building on one another's ideas. The following examples of this Instructional Activity in Ms. Recinos's preschool classroom illustrate ways you might elicit and explore children's ideas about measurement and data. Depending on the image, what captures children's interest, and the teacher's goal, this activity can also be used to seed conversations about spatial relations, numbers, patterns, and more.

Noticing Dogs in Ms. Recinos's Classroom

The children in Ms. Recinos's class have gathered on the carpet, all facing the blank white board. Ms. Recinos is ready to project an image of a group of different-sized dogs onto the board.

Ms. Recinos: Okay, everyone, I'm going to show you a picture, and I want you to look at it and think about what you notice. I'm going to ask you to think quietly to yourself so that everyone has plenty of time to look and think. Are you ready?

Children: Yes! (*Nod.*)

Ms. Recinos: All right, here we go. (*Reveals image of a group of different-sized dogs.*) Think silently to yourself. What do you notice?

Children: Ooh! Dogs! (*Several immediately raise their hands.*)

Ms. Recinos: Let's just look with our eyes for a minute. (*Smiles and motions for the children to put their hands down.*) Think to yourself about what you notice. See if you can come up with at least two ideas.

About a minute passes while children silently look at the image. Ms. Recinos sits down on the rug and looks at the image with them. She sees children gazing up and down and across the whole group of dogs. A couple of children begin to point at the dogs, gesturing first toward the bottom left then diagonally upwards to the right.

..... While there are many things that children (and adults) might notice about the dogs in the photograph (seen on page 55), Ms. Recinos hopes to use it as a way of learning about the children's informal ideas about measurement. She is particularly interested in how they may communicate their ideas of *big* or *little* and compare the dogs in terms of their "bigness." She expects that some children will attend to the dogs' relative heights but is wondering if anyone will raise the notion of weight.

Ms. Recinos: Okay, I think we're ready to share with each other what we noticed. When you're ready, you can ask the person next to you about what they noticed. Go ahead.

There is a burst of excited chatter as the children turn and talk to one another about what they notice. Many point to the image and exclaim in enthusiasm as they listen and share. Ms. Recinos leans in to listen to Zayra and Alyssa's conversation. Alyssa is pointing to the dog near the middle, saying it has "pointy ears." Zayra points at the grey dog on the right and says, "That one's not in order. My grandma has a dog like that. It's so soft and I like to hug it." Nearby, Daniel gestures at the brown dog with a tilted head and leans his own head over to the side. His partner César says, "Oh yeah! Like this!" and mirrors Daniel's movement. Ms. Recinos then sees that Clarise, who rarely speaks, is smiling and talking with her partner. Ms. Recinos decides to call the class back together and calls on Clarise to begin the conversation.

Ms. Recinos: I can't wait to hear what you noticed about our picture. Clarise, would you like to tell us what you noticed?

Clarise: Doggies.

Esmerelda: *iHay perritos!*

Ms. Recinos: *Si, hay perritos*—there are doggies. What did you notice about the doggies, Clarise?

Clarise: Mmm. . . . (*Pauses, then continues softly.*) Puppies.

Massimo: A chihuahua!

Ms. Recinos: Ah yes! Some of the dogs are puppies—

Massimo: (*Interjects.*) A chihuahua!

Ms. Recinos: —and one of them is a chihuahua. What else do you notice?

Jaya: That one looks like my dog.

Ms. Recinos: Yeah, one of them looks like my dog too.

Kierra: There's one, two, three, four, five, six.

Ms. Recinos: Okay, there's six dogs. What else do you notice?

Leo: There's big pippies.

Zayra: The grey one has a fluffy tail!

César: That one is sad. It's going like this. (*Tips his head to the side and frowns.*)

Ms. Recinos: That one does look sad. Leo, can you say that again?

..... Ms. Recinos always makes sure to listen in and observe as children talk to each other. This is a prime opportunity for her to learn a lot about the range of ideas that might surface in the coming conversation and how children communicate about these ideas. She is particularly excited to see how the children are not just sharing their own noticings—they are also listening to and engaging with one another's ideas!

..... As usual, Ms. Recinos wants to elicit a wide range of children's ideas, but today, she is particularly interested in listening for and extending ideas related to size in terms of height and weight. With this in mind, she acknowledges Kierra's idea about counting the dogs but, in this moment, chooses to pursue other children's ideas.