

Letters from the teacher, letters from the parent

3 August – Teacher's letter to mother

... You mentioned that Angel loves to read the books by herself, by looking at and interpreting the pictures, and she loves to role-play many of the stories. Today, I have sent you our information sheet, Let's Pretend. You will see that dramatic or pretend play is an important part of development at this age. Angel must be able to act out situations that she is familiar with and feels comfortable with and those that she does not understand. Sit and watch as she plays, and you will find out a lot about what she is thinking and feeling. Do you have a box of dress-up clothes, some hats, some blankets or sheets, and some large cardboard boxes for Angel to play with? All these items and anything else you may find will add to Angel's games and her development.

11 August – Mother's comments – Let's Pretend

We built a house with the couch and blankets, and Mummy didn't pull it down until bedtime. It was resurrected a lot. She pretended to bake with her play dough and her toy oven. She also used old grocery boxes for a train, and her dress-up stuff was cargo. She didn't play dress-ups much, only putting a fairy dress on her head for fun.

The other day, she tried to pick some flowers and leaned on a branch, which snapped. She first pretended the branch was a Christmas tree. When she got bored with that, she tried to plant it again. It's still there because I'm not allowed to touch it, even though it will not grow.

She pretended to be a puppy and tried to get the adults to have turns, too. She carried a soft toy in her mouth and barked. She's got a good imagination. Sometimes she pretends her little sister is a tiger and runs away from her screaming, "It's a tiger! Oh no, a tiger!"

21 September – Teacher's letter to mother

Thank you for all the helpful and informative feedback. I can see that you are observant, aware, and involved in all Angel's learning. What a lot of fun Angel has with pretend dramatic play, and I can see that you have included some of the ideas and information from the Let's Pretend leaflet to help further develop her characters and games. I see that she also loves art activities and working with collage. Thank you for the pieces you have sent in.

29 October – Mother's letter to teacher

Well, it's been an interesting few weeks. We've had strange weather – hot one minute, thunderstorms the next. The sunflower (only one remaining) is doing well and getting very tall. Angel has been pretending more. She becomes different characters – "running girl", "walking girl", and "raining girl" – and after I've hung towels on the washing line, she'll pretend they are doors and say, "Knock, knock, knock." Then she'll have a pretend drink – water, juice, or a cup of tea, depending on how she feels – and a biscuit, also pretend, and she'll go and come back as someone else. It's a lot of fun.

Angel is also looking forward to Christmas and is helping make chocolate truffles and papier mâché photo frames. I have found that she is very good at papier mâché, so we will do another junk construction using papier mâché as well.

Oh, well, that's about all I can think of. Thank you for sending the packs. I can see Angel changing and getting more enthusiastic and outgoing each time. It's marvellous.

10 December – Teacher’s letter to mother

Wow! Another posting returned full of exciting and interesting information about Angel and her development. I do love reading all about you all, and I can see that Angel is full of life and imagination and wonderful dramatic play. I loved her different characters and her pretend doors with the clothes on the line. How neat to have a baby duckling to watch grow and care for. Yes, Christmas is not far away, and it is fun and helpful for Angel to be helping with the preparations.

What’s happening here?

This is part of a lengthy correspondence in which the teacher and mother are developing curriculum ideas that will be appropriate for Angel and her family. In this case, the assessment conversation is in the form of letters between a teacher at The Correspondence School and Angel’s mother, and the topic is pretend play.

What aspects of family and community involvement does this assessment exemplify?

In distance education, teachers use letters, emails, and other forms of correspondence to ensure that:

- assessment practices are accessible to families and whānau;
- assessments invite families and whānau into the curriculum (the parent here describing her involvement in Angel’s play);
- families and whānau participate in assessment. (The mother describes an episode and adds, “She’s got a good imagination.” Later she comments, “I can see Angel changing and getting more enthusiastic and outgoing each time [there is a posting]. It’s marvellous.”)

How might this documented assessment contribute to participation by family and community?

Documented assessments can take the form of conversations about assessment and curriculum between teachers and families who do not have the time or the opportunity to talk together. The resources and the discussion, as well as the parent’s observations and intuition, inform a continual cycle of noticing, recognising, and responding.

The comments that are included here about the development of Angel’s pretend play cover a span of five months and provide a record over time for all three participants (Angel, her mother, and her teacher) to refer to. They can pick up ideas from earlier events.

What might this tell us about informal noticing, recognising, and responding in this place?

In this case, both the teacher and the parent are teaching, and the letters record their mutual noticing, recognising, and responding. In these examples, the parent comments on one of Angel’s interests (she loves to role-play), and the teacher responds with a pack of ideas (Let’s Pretend). The parent then responds to these resources. In the October letter, Angel’s mother describes Angel’s pretend play during an everyday activity (hanging out the washing). She records her own pleasure in seeing this: “It’s a lot of fun.”