

Jack's interest in puzzles

Jack enjoys doing puzzles. He will search them out until he finds them and will spend relatively long periods of time working at completing them. The stacker puzzle remains Jack's favourite puzzle.



The stacker puzzle

Jack searched out the stacker puzzle, which was on the middle shelf. He took it down and made a noise to get attention.

Jack took the puzzle pieces off. He looked up to see if anyone was watching. He smiled and continued to put the puzzle pieces on the baseboard.

Jack shows great concentration. When he concentrates, he usually lies on the floor with his tongue out.



What's happening here?

This entry is one of many observations of Jack's sustained interest in a range of things, including play materials, as well as his growing interest in playing with other toddlers. This item describes Jack's enjoyment of puzzles. The photographs show him working with a flat puzzle, placing pieces into the holes in the board. The teacher comments that his favourite is the stacker puzzle, and there is a photograph of him with this.

What aspects of children's contribution to assessments does this exemplify?

This is an example of an activity in which the material provides the assessment. Although the commentary says that Jack "looked up to see if anyone was watching", it may be that the satisfaction of completing these tasks comes from the materials themselves. They "tell" him that he has succeeded. It is a particular kind of self-assessment, in which the child does not need the adult to tell him that he has done well.

How might this assessment develop children's capacity to contribute to assessments?

Some of the "autotelic" activities and tasks (in which the materials do the "teaching") that children enjoy will encourage them to at least occasionally evaluate their own achievement and not to depend on adult praise to assess their performance. Recording Jack's activities over time

will enable the teachers to keep this possible development in mind.

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

These activities are standard fare in early childhood settings. Montessori programmes are particularly characterised by materials that do the teaching. They provide children with clear goals and criteria for success (as well as fine motor, spatial, and colour- and picture-matching skills).

The teacher notes that "Jack shows great concentration" and suggests that the staff know when he is concentrating because he "lies on the floor with his tongue out". The teacher attempts to write the assessment as if from his viewpoint.

In this commentary, the teacher appears to know Jack's special interests and to read his body language. Knowing children well enables staff to notice, recognise, and respond intuitively as well as deliberately, recognising learning opportunities for particular children. Deliberate responses on some occasions might include: inviting a child to attempt a more difficult puzzle, drawing a child's attention to features of the puzzle that he or she should attend to, and providing encouragement for the child to stay involved. (See the commentary on interactions between an adult and a child doing a jigsaw in Wood et al., 1980, pages 111–112.)