



Using Open-Ended Questions in Inquiry Learning

Key Takeaways and Ideas to Think About

Notice how the children responded with more than a “yes” or “no” answer. What are the benefits of encouraging the children to respond with more than a “yes” or “no” answer?

When children have the opportunity to provide more than a one- or two-word answer, it allows them to think more deeply and critically about their response and to use extended language and vocabulary to express their ideas.

In the video, the children are exploring the concept of “sink and float” while playing in the water. Reflect on how, during play, asking open-ended questions supports children’s inquiry learning.

Hands-on experiences that promote inquiry learning provide opportunities for children to construct knowledge about topics. Teachers can encourage children to explore, question, and try out new discoveries by asking thought-provoking, open-ended questions, such as “What might happen if you try this?” or “How do you know...?” Even deeper and more critical thinking can be scaffolded by inviting children to “show you” what they mean and “tell you more” about what they are doing.

How did the teacher’s use of open-ended questions challenge the children and encourage them to think like scientists?

Open-ended questions challenge children to think like scientists as they observe, describe, make predictions, provide explanations, use their senses, communicate, and share ideas. These are the same methods that scientists use in their investigations. Continuing to ask questions based on children’s responses validates what each child has said and encourages them to think more deeply about the topic. The goal is to encourage children to think reflectively, express their ideas, and expand the conversation.