

The Valeska Hinton Health Center Project

A Project by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Students
at Valeska Hinton Early Childhood Education Center, Peoria, Illinois
Length of Project: 2 months Teachers: Judy Cagle, Mary Ann Gottlieb

Phase One

Beginning the Project

Because many children in the two classes (one class of 3- and 4-year-olds and one class of 4- and 5-year-olds) were new to the center, it seemed important to investigate the school, and the children found many areas that were unfamiliar. One 4-year-old boy said that he got shots "at the doctor's office, not at school." Additional interest in the health center was generated when the son of the nurse practitioner became a volunteer in one of the classrooms.

Initial drawings were made and questions were posed before the classes visited the in-school health center. As questions were asked informally, the teachers recorded them for future investigation. The teachers expected the children to learn how the health center helped them at school and to possibly construct a health center in one or both of the classrooms.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

The children decided to find out why a health center was in their school. They learned about school physicals, inoculations, nurse practitioners, and doctors, as well as how and when to use the health center. They visited our own health center and one located in a nearby school. Health center staff provided additional information and were interviewed by the children. Parents supported their children's efforts by supplying materials for the construction of the classroom health centers and by accompanying the classes to the field site.

Children represented their learning through drawings, paintings, block constructions, and dramatic play. A group of children helped to create a videotape of a classmate visiting the health center and used this videotape as a reference in constructing the classroom health centers. Because groups of children from the two classrooms met and shared ideas, some of their constructed objects were similar. Other children helped write letters to health center staff, parents, and others at Valeska Hinton inviting them to the grand opening of the health centers constructed in the two classrooms. The older children in the 4- and 5-year-old classroom made books about the in-school health center to share with the younger children in the 3- and 4-year-old classroom.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

The children in the project rooms invited other classrooms to see the health centers that they had constructed. Individual children explained the functions of various areas in the constructed health centers and the roles of health center staff. Parents, health personnel, and other school staff were invited to visit and hear the children talk about the project. Within the framework of the Work Sampling System, Valeska Hinton's assessment tool, the children showed development in several domains. Growth was observed in individual children in their disposition toward learning as they were engaged for significant periods of time while investigating the Valeska Hinton's health center and while constructing the dramatic play environment.

Comments

Early visits to the field sites helped the children increase their experiences so that they had knowledge on which to build later research in the project. This project was meaningful because it helped the children become familiar with their school's health center. This project was unique because the children involved were from a multiage classroom of 3- and 4-year-olds and a multiage classroom of 4- and 5-year-olds; friendships developed between the two classrooms as the children worked on this common topic. The teachers found the collaboration to be helpful to the children and to themselves. This project was especially pertinent for these two classes of children because most of them were new to the school.

