

## The Book Project

**A Project by Second- and Third-Grade Students  
at the University of Alberta Child Care Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada**

*Length of Project: 12 weeks Teachers: Julie Gellner, Carmen Strydorst,  
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Phase One

### *Beginning the Project*

The seeds of the Book Project were sown the year before it was launched. At that time as part of a comprehensive writing experience, the children wrote and illustrated original stories, and then we published each book in hardcover editions. On a "Meet the Author" evening, Dr. Chard and Julie Gellner started to talk about the possibility of extending this experience from the writing and illustrating of a book to an in-depth study of all aspects of books. As we talked, it became evident how rich this study could be. The possibilities for areas of inquiry were vast. During the early phase of the project, the children represented their existing knowledge of books in many ways, including surveys and graphs of their favorite books, authors, and genres; webs about the life of authors they had read; detailed maps of local bookstores; comprehensive lists of what they already knew about books; and drawings of scenes from favorite books.

Phase Two

### *Developing the Project*

As the research in phase two began, the children's interests led them to diverse explorations. One group looked at illustrations and found that illustrations come in many forms and materials. They created illustrations using a variety of materials. In the research process, they interviewed a local illustrator. Some of the questions they asked were whether the text or the story comes first, what kind of equipment is used to reproduce 3D pictures such as collage, and do authors and illustrators meet in the process of collaborating on a book. Another group, spurred on by their love of specific books, decided to do an in-depth study of the works or life of Laura Ingalls Wilder and Mary Pope Osborne. A contingent of Harry Potter enthusiasts came up with the idea of creating a display based on the Potter series. They highlighted characters, artifacts, and a fantasy game called "Quidditch" central to the action of these books. Flying brooms were fashioned of raffia and dowels, and the magical winged balls were built of clay and pipe cleaners. Modified rules for the flying sport were listed and carefully outlined. Finally, the builders in our class worked together to construct a small library that would be the future home of the wonderful novels the children were writing at this time and would later publish as a culmination to the entire project. Throughout this phase, we had visiting experts and field visits to help the children with their research. Some highlights were our visit to a bookstore, the public library, and a local printing company. Our visitors included the children's book illustrator mentioned above, a content editor who had recently completed a children's sports series, one of our fathers who "dissected" a book so that we could examine how it was "built," and Dr. Chard, the Director of the Centre, who shared a collection of her original watercolor images chronicling her day-to-day life. These paintings form the borders for letters to her grandchildren who live in other parts of the world.

Phase Three

### *Concluding the Project*

The Book Project concluded as it began—with a celebration of the children's published writing. In this last stage of the study, we worked on the publishing process as stories were brought to publication standard, illustrations were completed, books were formatted, and children had the experience of experimenting with many designs for binding their work. Parents enthusiastically took part in this culminating experience by joining together one evening for a work bee to create the hardbound copies of the books that would be shared on the Meet the Author night. On the night of this celebration, the children wore several hats. As authors, they shared their unique publications with great pride, accomplishment, and tenacity—reading and rereading for the many visitors who delighted in the stories. As researchers, they took guests around to the various bulletin boards and display cases showing their own work and the work of their classmates. They graciously answered questions that arose about the work displayed and the process of writing a book. And as guides, they walked their guests through the impressive gallery of images and constructions highlighting the illustrations made of plasticene, fabric, found objects, natural objects, watercolor, and colored pencil.

Comments

Because the Child Study Centre has had a grade 3 group for two years and a grade 2 group for three years, many of the learners who participated in the Book Project have spent as many as four to five years—all the years of their formal schooling—working with the Project Approach. Visitors to the site were impressed with the ease with which the children suggested and carried out ideas for multiple representations to show what they already knew about the subject of books. The sophistication and number of high-level questions generated to guide their own study was a revelation to both outsiders and our team as well. As the research process developed and deepened, the children's abilities for collaboration, negotiation, risk taking, and creativity indicated the possibilities that can occur when children are seen and valued as co-creators in the learning environment.

