

Exploring Butterflies

A Project by 2-Year-Old Children
at Illinois State University Child Care Center, Normal, Illinois

Length of Project: 7 weeks

Teacher: **Scott Brouette**

Phase One

Beginning the Project

Every time we went for a walk, we would see many, many butterflies! The children talked about the butterflies and tried to catch them. One day, we caught a bee, a large crane fly, and a Common Sulfur butterfly. The children focused on the butterfly. They discussed butterflies that they had observed at home as well as at school. A few days into our discussion, we constructed an idea web. As we made the web, we discovered that most of the children's prior knowledge involved parts of a butterfly. This aspect of butterflies became the focus of our investigation. Usually when I am working with 2-year-olds, my expectations at the beginning of the year are simple; however, this group of 2-year-olds dove right into project work and proved to me that they were eager for more information.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

The main focus of our investigation was butterfly anatomy. The butterfly bodies and movements fascinated the children. We were lucky to have a butterfly garden right on the school grounds, which we visited often. In order to observe butterflies more closely, we constructed a habitat in our classroom, using mosquito netting hung from the ceiling.

We used factual books as well as the Internet to gather information. The butterfly garden provided a great place for observing butterfly behavior. The children made many sketches of butterflies out in the garden as well as in our classroom. The children also designed their own butterfly wings to become butterflies. We also pretended to be butterflies by using straws to drink like butterflies do. Through our investigation, the children strengthened their knowledge of butterflies as well as dispelled some of the misinformation they had. The children discovered that butterflies do not wear shoes or shirts, which some believed at the start of the project. Parents were encouraged to observe butterflies at home with their children. They would share many stories of butterfly encounters with the group.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

The children voted to write and illustrate a book to conclude our project. They chose to include many of the facts we discovered through our investigations. Each child recited a page and illustrated that particular fact. The book took several days to finish, and the children were excited to see it all put together. Each family was allowed to check out the book and take it home to share with the whole family. The children were truly excited to share what they had learned. We all acquired new knowledge of butterfly behavior, anatomy, and environments.

Comments

I was amazed that the children had so much prior knowledge about butterflies. It was exciting to see them apply newly acquired information to prior knowledge. Each day, the children's interest showed that the study of butterflies was a valid topic. The children came in everyday and showed their parents our butterflies and explained what they were doing. One child who spoke little English was a main contributor to discussions at the end. If I did this project again, we would start earlier so we would have a longer period to observe butterflies. Our new project is investigating plant growth. One of the children's first thoughts on plants was, "Butterflies eat on plants!"

