

The Clothing Project: Where Do We Get Our Clothes From?

A Project by 4-Year-Old Children (preschool)
at Freeburg Early Childhood Program, Cedar Falls, Iowa
Length of Project: 4 weeks
Teachers: Marsha Gwen Harmon & Julie Schutte

Phase One

Beginning the Project

A visit from local firefighters spurred Jamell to ask, "Who invented firefighters' uniforms?" As his classmates responded to this question, Shamia inquired, "Where do we get our clothes from?" A lively discussion ensued that included responses such as *the store* and *sheep*. Afterwards, Gwen (classroom teacher) and Julie (student teacher) brainstormed how the children could investigate Shamia's question. They started by webbing about sheep and their role in the making of clothing. We read *Charlie Needs a Cloak* by Tomie DePaola and set out other informational books.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

Children read about sheep, recorded their findings, and examined wool clothing. Some children were interested in sheep and developed new questions such as, "Do sheep get milk from a bottle?" Others washed a wool sweater to see if wool really shrinks and also learned about color fading. An expert spinner visited and expanded children's knowledge of different types of materials and modeled spinning on two different types of spinning wheels. Other experts demonstrated using a loom, knitting, and crocheting.

The children encountered new vocabulary. For example, *dye* was a confusing word. They used a *die* in playing classroom games, had some understanding of the word *die* as in *death*, but they really didn't understand *dye*. Teachers provided opportunities for children to dye using beet juice, Kool Aid, and special watercolors. Children's understandings were documented through time-1 and time-2 drawings, videotapes, photos, and class discussions.

Children's interest in materials changed to sewing when the family worker brought her sewing machine to class. With assistance, children cut out fabric using simple patterns, and they sewed tops and pants with simple straight seams. They were so excited about their outfits that they would not take them off at the end of the day.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

This project did not really conclude; it just changed directions. Presently, the preschoolers are filling clothing orders for the newly established department store in the kindergarten class. The Clothing Project was a rich experience that allowed children to gain a better understanding of their world and teachers to integrate meaningful experiences across all curriculum domains. For example, children developed literacy skills by constructing a vocabulary glossary and becoming familiar with informational books. Children extended mathematics knowledge by examining and designing patterns through weaving, sewing, and art activities. Using simple tools and carrying out experiments with dyes developed scientific thinking. Cutting fabric, weaving paper, and threading plastic needles honed fine-motor skills. Throughout all of these experiences, children shared ideas and exchanged perspectives.

Comments

The Clothing Project was a wonderful experience for the children and us. The topic, which genuinely emerged from the children, was meaningful and relevant to their daily lives. It provided an opportunity for children to actively explore a variety of questions and participate at different levels of involvement. Equally as important, this project allowed us to implement integrated curriculum in meaningful and purposeful ways. We found the most difficult aspects of project work to be allowing children to join us as co-constructors in planning curriculum and posing questions that challenged children's thinking.

