

Second-Graders Study Their Community

A Project by 7- and 8-Year-Old Children
at Grafton Elementary School, Grafton, Illinois
Length of Project: October 25 to December 18, 2002
Teacher: Dot Schuler

Phase One

Beginning the Project

Because our state standards and district curriculum goals include a study of the community, we always do a community project. Our project began when children created a web revealing their beginning knowledge; they also told personal stories. Each story was written, illustrated, and displayed; our web was placed on a bulletin board for reference. Daily journal entries stimulated discussions and questions. I documented the questions on a chart, noting that the children's interests would lead to investigations that would help us meet state standards of understanding historical events; geographical characteristics; and political, economic, and social systems of our local community.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

Several small groups of children had questions about local buildings, businesses, and government offices, so I planned some walks. We walked to City Hall; and the secretary, chief of police, and a local historian spoke to the children. We also walked to the post office. On each of our walks, we stopped occasionally so the children could sketch places of interest. After each walk, we met as a group to document our notes collectively on charts to be used as resources. Three children investigated the local propane company; the owner (grandfather of a student) visited our classroom to tell about his business. Two children investigated our two rivers using the wall map to locate the source and mouth of each river and find the confluence of the rivers east of our town. One child investigated how the bluffs were formed; a local environmental educator answered her email message to help her with an understanding of the rock formations. Two children studied the new park; three students conducted interviews to see why people like Grafton; three students learned about "numbers" in our town, such as the number of people, houses, businesses, and so forth; another student learned about the founder of our town.

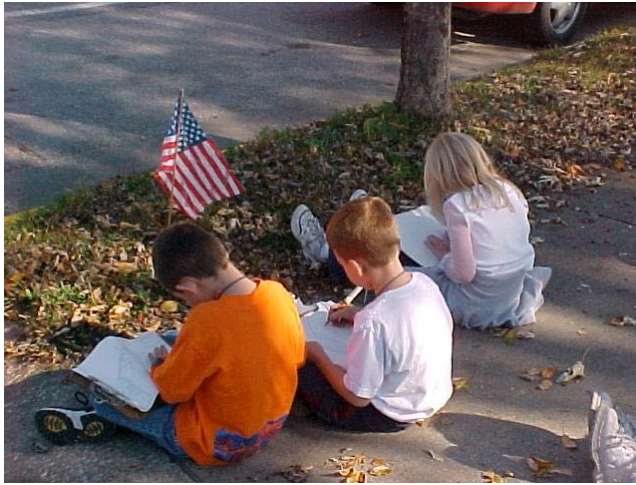
Phase Three

Concluding the Project

Our table display of models was accompanied by written representations of new knowledge (charts, mobiles, books, maps, a time line, webs, a paper-roll movie, and a dichotomy). After our evening culmination, our models were proudly displayed at City Hall so businessmen and women could view the amazing likenesses created by the children. While the models were on display at City Hall, we walked to the building to hear three local people read books. The chief of police, an alderwoman, and a retired librarian each read a book to the children as a part of the Illinois governor's program *Illinois Reads in Special Places*.

Comments

While many state standards were met, another goal was accomplished—to create an interdisciplinary context of learning that complemented all areas of the curriculum, using language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and fine arts to communicate new knowledge. Moreover, as positive dispositions for learning were nurtured, the project, I hope, stimulated students to continue learning the rest of their lives. Studying our community always provides unforeseen surprises in that different community members offer their contributions according to the children’s interests. These varying contributions help shape projects that feature their own uniqueness each year, even though the community topic remains the same.



Children sat on the sidewalk and sketched City Hall across the street.



Compare a student’s sketch to the actual building.



Four boys anxiously await gluing the pieces of the roof together.



The finished model was on the table display, while the web of information was suspended from the ceiling above the model.