

The Construction Project

A Project by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Children
at Discovery Preschool, Peoria, Illinois
Length of Project: 2 months

Teachers: Pam Scranton, Lora Taylor, & Terra Shelton

Phase One

Beginning the Project

When school started in early September, there was major construction happening on the road in front of our classroom. Each day, the children would come in full of comments about what they had seen outside. Questions came fast and furious: "How does that dump truck work? How come those big shovels go up and down? Where are the wheels for that tractor?" Very quickly, we realized that we couldn't ignore the children's interest, even though it was only the second week of school, and we began listing their questions, webbing their ideas about what they wanted to learn, and exploring options for experts and field sites.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

One of our families had a grandpa who was the road commissioner of a small town and arranged for the children to visit. "Papa Pete" became our expert for their investigations of construction. He encouraged the children to climb all over the different tractors and explore them, sketch them, and graph them; they even got to drive them! They came back from the field site with lots of information about construction machines. With the construction going on right outside our classroom, we also had a site that we could continuously visit for new information. Once back in the classroom, a small group of children began constructing a large dump truck and backhoe loader. During the construction of the tractors, another small group was involved in re-drawing, using their field sketches as a reference; these same drawers later began mural work, again using their time-2 sketches and blowing them up using an overhead projector. As the tractor group was finishing their construction, they began labeling the parts of their tractors and solving the problem of how to get the arms of the backhoe to move up and down.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

The children decided they wanted to invite their families to school to see all their project work, so they wrote an invitation; arranged their constructions, paintings, drawings, and stories; and held the Construction Project Night. Our expert, "Papa Pete," also came to project night, and the children delighted in telling him and showing him all they had learned during the construction project!

Comments

We were in no way ready to begin a project the second week of school, but we just couldn't ignore the children's interest and their excitement. The availability of our constant field site for revisiting and our wonderful expert made this project a success.

