

The Greenhouse Project

A Project by 3- through 5-Year-Old Children

at Illinois Valley Community College Early Childhood Education Center, Oglesby, Illinois

Length of Project: 13 weeks in the spring and 3 weeks of revisiting in the summer

Teachers: Marilyn Worsley, Kathie Zecca, & Mary Ann Vollmer

Phase One

Beginning the Project

When the teachers learned that a greenhouse was to be built next to the playground, they thought that greenhouses might be a project topic. During the months before, the children had shown an interest in growing and caring for plants. We also realized that there could be daily opportunities for hands-on learning directly from the experts and their materials. We didn't know when the construction was to begin, so we were happily surprised when we discovered tall metal posts sticking in the ground. When trucks carrying boxes and equipment arrived, the children were curious and ready to investigate. They asked for clipboards and began formulating questions and theories about the events. A group eagerly approached one of the workers to find out what they were building.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

While the construction workers were at the site, the children took advantage of their close proximity to question them often about their work and equipment. After the children were allowed to sit in the all-terrain forklift, the teachers thought the children would want to build their own. Instead, they began making their own greenhouse, using the real one as a reference. We visited a fully functioning greenhouse to further their understanding. Several parents helped guide the children through the enormous greenhouse, documenting the children's representations. After the trip, the children's interest shifted more to growing and caring of plants. The children created murals, clay tools, and paper plants to supply their greenhouse. Toward the end of the project, another shift in the investigation took place as the children began noticing the classroom plants dying. We arranged to visit the horticulture instructor to find the answers to the children's many questions concerning our plants' deaths. Some of the children then decided to make a book about the life cycle of plants. They dictated each page, starting with the buying of the seeds and ending with the plant going back into the ground to become fertilizer for a new plant.

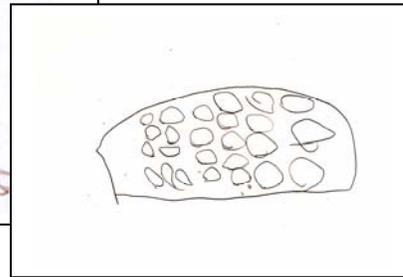
Phase Three

Concluding the Project

The children decided to share their knowledge and experiences with their parents and the college community by displaying the greenhouse and the book in the lobby of the "big school." A list was created of the exact items they wanted to display, including signs that labeled the greenhouse and some of its contents. The main greenhouse group set it up, and the children shared their experiences with the different community members.

Comments

This project turned out to be so wonderful for all, just as we had hoped. The children's vocabulary expanded (such as "polycarbonate sheets") during the investigation of the various jobs and materials. The children gained so much by this experience that we revisited the project for a few weeks during the summer when the workers returned to finish the inside work. This topic provided many social studies experiences for the children that are sometimes difficult for teachers to provide.



THAN YOU FOR SHOWING
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