

The House Project

A Project by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Children
at University of Alberta Child Study Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
Length of Project: 10 weeks Teachers: Sharman Armfield, Lee Makovichuk

Phase One

Beginning the Project

As we began our school year, we spent time visiting children in their homes. During our home visits, we learned that many families were involved in home renovations, had just moved to a new house, or were in the process of building a new house. Having knowledge of the changes our families were experiencing, we began to plan a project on houses. We felt confident the House Project would provide the opportunity for each child to be an expert and draw in our parent group to share their expertise in the many aspects of a house. As we began to develop a web of the project, we learned that a new roof would be installed on our very own Ring House, the building that houses the pre-K and kindergarten program. After the initial weeks settling into the routine of the school year and developing some familiarity with one another, we began to gather children's stories and experiences with their houses, homes, and families.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

On the day the roofers arrived, we asked the children, "What do you think they are doing up there?" A group discussion unfolded as children readily shared their ideas and asked questions. "They are sweeping the spiders away." "The roof was leaking so they are fixing it." "What are their tools?" "Hey, let's ask them what they are doing up there!" Predicting the children's desire to talk with the roofers, we had arranged a visit with the foreman. Clipboards in hand, we ventured out to interview the roofers—the first of many visits to the roofing site. The children were interested in the progress made and the materials used. Parents came into the class to share their knowledge of plumbing, electrical tools, and house design. With each visitor, the children's constructions showed more detail. Families were invited to share favorite experiences. Some families shared storybooks; others shared cooking experiences. Dramatic play developed as children read to their baby dolls, arranged tea parties, and cooked meals. Block work increased in design as small furniture was added. Rooms, hallways, and staircases emerged as children worked together to construct floor plans and house models. Investigation emerged out of questions the children asked. One child asked, "How many floors does Ring House have?" Looking at the radiators in Ring House led to another investigation to discover how many radiators were in Ring House.

Having been a close observer in the house his uncle had recently built, one child made a photo album of his observations and shared it with the class. As a closure to the renovations in his cabin, one child brought in pieces of materials for his peers to explore, draw, or use in their building. A small group of children explored the "Three Little Pig" story. After many weeks of preparation, the group presented the production to their parents and peers.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

With the coming December holiday, we planned to conclude our project to coincide with the approaching winter break. Many families had shared aspects of celebrations with stories, food, and music. With input from the children, together we planned an event that would allow the children to lead their families in celebrating houses. Groups of children and their families created detailed candy houses, others designed eye-catching chimes constructed from pipes and miscellaneous metal pieces used in the building of a house. Several families created candles using bee's wax. Children proudly showed their work and photos to family members.

Comments

The House Project was a wonderful first project for our year. It allowed each child to be an expert through sharing and discovery. The project developed through the interest of the group, exploring the components of plumbing, electricity, structure, furnishing, heating, and design. With each field experience and visiting expert, the children demonstrated developing knowledge through increasing the detail in their representational work. We learned that children with limited experience required time to explore and manipulate these materials before using them in a representational way. Providing the materials for the children to explore, then providing information and scaffolding their learning resulted in our awareness of their developing knowledge and allowed them time to develop elaborate representations of their understanding. As a teacher, this process was exciting to witness and be involved in.

