

Our School

A Project by Grade 1 Students

at University of Alberta Child Study Centre, Edmonton, Alberta

Length of Project: 8 weeks Teachers: Diane Mellott, Margaret Brooks, Angela Farmer

Phase One

Beginning the Project

The teachers developed an initial topic web based on the children's interest and the social studies curriculum. The project began with readings from a book called *The Littles Go to School*. The children noted that The Littles' school experience was very different from their own. They raised many questions about Our School in response to the book. The class began their study within the classroom, only later to consider the very large University Education Building. They were invited to share their previous experiences with school. They wrote about their kindergarten experiences and drew pictures of their memories. They wondered about the roles of the adults. The teachers recorded the children's questions. Children were encouraged to ask their parents and grandparents about their grade one school experience.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

The children made careful recordings of different areas of the classroom. As they investigated the classroom, they noticed that the equipment, games, and supplies were logically organized into various areas and shelves. A natural extension of the math concepts of collections and sorting began to develop. Soon they were able to develop their field notes into three-dimensional representations. The children chose paper models, shoe box models, blocks, Legos, and woodworking for their representations. They were able to check and recheck their constructions against the actual structures, and found it challenging to build representations on a smaller scale. Their understanding of spatial relationships developed at an astounding rate as they struggled to fit all the components of the area that they were reconstructing within the parameters set out by the media that they were using. Some children visited the grade 2/3 room and took careful field notes, returning to report their findings to their classmates. Others (using a video camera) interviewed the custodians, the secretary, and our visiting principal. The children were eager to continue exploring more spaces within the education building. The children had previously visited a student lounge located in a far-off corner of the building and drew a map to the fourth floor in order to show the rest of the children the way. Later the class tested the maps, then returned to the classroom to try again. When they finally located the lounge, the class celebrated by bringing their snacks to enjoy under the beautifully vaulted glassed-in ceiling.

The class also visited another school. The children predicted what they thought the school would be like. Their ideas were related to their previous experiences. Upon their arrival, the children compared notes on their first impressions. They tried out the students' desks, and they took copious field notes as they were keen to begin building once they arrived back at their own school. Later, the children wrote a book about their experiences and developed a Venn diagram comparing the two schools.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

The children invited their parents to tour the classroom and then to join them in the fourth floor lounge for a campfire and evening pot luck. The evening was very much anticipated, and the children ensured that their classroom was up to careful scrutiny of their parents. When the evening finally arrived, the children were very confident tour guides as they shared their representations with parents, grandparents, and friends.

Comments

As the teachers reflected on the successes of the "Our School" project, they found it to be a wonderful way to blend prescribed curriculum with a very meaningful and relevant project work topic. In the process, the teachers were able to gain many insights into the children's thinking, their strengths, and their personalities.



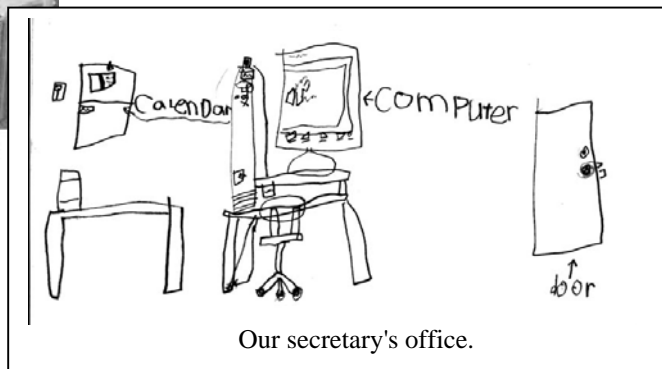
We built the classroom with Legos.



'Birds-eye view' of the classroom



Block representation of the auditorium



Our secretary's office.