

The Kid's Grocery Store

A Project by Kindergarten Students

at Westmere Elementary School, Guilderland Central School District, Guilderland, New York

Length of Project: 3 weeks Teachers: Debra Wing, Debbie Biondo

Phase One

Beginning the Project

Children from Westmere Elementary School live in a traditional suburban community. One of the places everyone visits and can meet neighbors and friends is the local grocery store. The local grocery store is a 2-minute walk from our school. The children often talked about going to the grocery store with their parents. I thought the grocery store was a worthy topic because of the children's experiences and because the store's proximity to the school allowed repeated visits and close examination. I began the project by asking the children to share a grocery store story with one another. Some of those conversations were recorded on a class experience chart with names printed next to each story in case further clarification was needed. After a short modeling and discussion of a memory sketch, each child was asked to draw some part of the grocery store. I told the children that we would be returning to sketching on a number of different occasions throughout our study of the grocery store.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

At our class meeting, children added ideas to a class web that reflected areas of interest and study expressed earlier through discussion. Children were asked to select an area of study that they wanted to find out more about. We divided into six working groups: (1) Cereal Group—"How many kinds? What kinds are kid's favorites?" (2) Chocolate Group—"How many treats are there with chocolate? What are some of the chocolate foods? Where can chocolate be found around the supermarket?" (3) Check Out Area—scanning, bagging, paying at the cash register, and grocery carts; (4) The Video Department—"What movies can you rent? Does the store have favorite kid movies?" (5) Prepared Foods—"What foods could you buy and bring right home for dinner? How were the foods packaged? Did they have kid's favorite take out food?" (6) Ice Cream—"What flavors could you buy? What specialty ice creams were available? Did kids prefer chocolate or vanilla ice cream?"

Two moms accompanied us to the grocery store where we began to observe, photograph, and sketch to obtain information and answers to some of our questions. Prior phone calls to the store allowed some of the different section managers to meet our small groups and share some special information. The children brought back many additional questions to the classroom after that visit, and they were sorted and added to the project web. One of our parents was a chef at a local restaurant, and he came into class to demonstrate cooking for the "Prepared Foods" group. A weekly newsletter was sent home to the parents with many photographs and descriptions of our project work. Parents were asked to send in empty product boxes, cans, packages, and store circulars and coupons. It was decided that each group would re-create their part of the store for our grand opening and celebration of our project work.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

We celebrated all of our information gathering and representation by having a working grocery store in our classroom. The grocery store was open every day while we were involved in the grocery store project. Much rich dramatic play evolved. Our culminating event was a special day to have the parents and our fifth-grade book buddies visit. They were invited to shop at our "Kid's Grocery Store." Much preparation went into creating the shopping baskets, pretend money, check-out counter, aisles where food was displayed, many scrumptious looking prepared dinners, and video selections. The Kid's Grocery Store was open for an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon. We displayed all of the information gathered through direct observation and surveys. We had numerous Venn diagrams showing favorite food selections, bar graphs showing the different choices in food groups, and stuffed replicas of fruits, vegetables, and fish. Many signs were made to label various parts of the store and different food products. The children worked with marked enthusiasm and purpose. Children who could write helped less-developed writers with their signs and displays. There was an extremely purposeful tone in the class as we approached our big guest shopping day!

Comments

It was wonderful to see how such an ordinary experience—grocery shopping—evolved into a topic of such detailed investigation. I felt particularly proud of the way the children began to ask questions and raise further areas of study as we dove deeper into the topic. We did this project when the children were young 5-year-olds, and many of them did not have well-developed writing or drawing skills. Because these skills were woven into the representation of our store, the children, many reluctant and self-doubting writers and sketchers, began to see their contributions as valuable and needed. As in the life of most projects, it is difficult to know when and how to disassemble the project. This class was reluctant to take anything away. On a Friday after our guest shopping day, we discussed and decided on taking down the largest parts of the store, and they were stored away or given to children to take home. After the weekend, when the children arrived back at school, the first thing a group of students proclaimed and got right to work on was re-creating “that great grocery store!”



The “check-out” cash register and office.



The prepared dinners.



The video section.



Blocks representing all of the cereal choices counted at the grocery store.