

The Veterinarian Project

A Project by 3-, 4-, 5-, and 6-Year-Old Children
at Donald C. Parker Early Education Center, Machesney Park, Illinois
Length of Project: 2 months
Teacher: Susan Andrews

Phase One

Beginning the Project

This project started when we got a new classroom pet—"Prince Charming" the water frog! I shared a story with the class about how our new friend had recently been sick. He had eaten a bunch of aquarium rocks and had a belly like a beanbag. I had to call the veterinarian and find out how to save our new friend. Many children shared stories about their experiences with their own pets and veterinarians. I could see the high interest in this topic, and the Veterinarian Project began. As a class, we webbed, read many books about pets and vets, and even created a veterinarian office in our dramatic play area. The level of play in this area increased as the weeks went on. The children were ready for a more in-depth investigation.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

The children were ready to extend and deepen their knowledge about veterinarians. Field visits were arranged to allow the children to experience real objects, processes, and roles. The children who came in the morning were able to visit a "Mobile Veterinarian Practice," and the children who came in the afternoon visited "Hillcrest Animal Hospital." On the actual field visits, the children were divided into small interest groups. It was their responsibility to interview the experts, record answers to their questions, and to sketch tools and various parts of the clinics. Parents were used on each field visit to assist the children in this ongoing investigation.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

The children were anxious to return to our room and share all of their new knowledge. Each group decided on a way to represent what they had learned. Several groups decided to make books, other groups chose to sketch or paint. One group made a movie documentary about their visit to the vet. Each group had the opportunity to present their information to all classmates and parents. Dramatic play continued in our classroom "Veterinarian Office" until the end of our school year.

Comments

I have been using the Project Approach in my classroom for several years, and I felt that this particular project was one of the best. The topic was very meaningful to the students. They had lots of background information, and I feel this information helped fuel the project's longevity. The interest level of the children was high and remained that way throughout the entire project. I received positive feedback from many parents. This project confirmed that small group work around a purposeful topic creates many opportunities for children to pay attention, practice skills of communication, and reflect about themselves and others. My active presence—through observation, questioning, and documentation—helped the children see that I value their thinking and trust and believe in them.

