

## The Clubhouse

A Project by 4-Year-Old Children  
at Preschool for the Arts, Madison, Wisconsin  
Length of Project: All Year  
Teachers: Nicole Smith & Elizabeth Raymond

### Phase One

#### *Beginning the Project*

The Copper Room Class started as an intimate group of only eight 4-year-old children, all of whom were new to the school, in a very large classroom. The children were very interested in exploring the school and became very excited about the lofts and structures that many of the rooms had. They wanted room to have a cozy, special place; they wanted to build a clubhouse. The children built small- and large-block clubhouses, but they were not satisfied. They were very determined that they wanted to build a "real" clubhouse with nails and wood. Although their interest began during the first week of school, the project the children started would last the whole year and grow as the class size grew to 18 children.

### Phase Two

#### *Developing the Project*

The clubhouse became a frequent topic of conversation, play, and drawings for the rest of the year. The children decided that it would have a pitched roof with pinecones, be big enough for them to all fit inside, and have openings for light to come in. While working on plans and drawings, the children started practicing running a bakery to do a real one as a fundraiser. Bakery Eat It was a big success, so we started looking for an expert to help us figure out what we should buy and to help us build. We spent a lot of time measuring and decided to make a cardboard clubhouse to test out the size. It was not big enough for our growing class, but we enjoyed the cardboard version for two months while we explored using tools. We built several individual and group wood projects, including a small model of the clubhouse, to get lots of practice. Finally, we were ready! The building committee began meeting with our volunteer carpenter to finalize plans and make a list of needed materials. Several small groups went to lumberyards and hardware stores to buy different needed materials. Two at a time, children helped with all aspects of the construction. We soon had an 8-by-10-foot clubhouse in our room!

### Phase Three

#### *Concluding the Project*

When construction was over, we were not finished. The children painted and decorated the clubhouse. They finally got to move furniture in and play in it (although at several points in the building process, we did halt for a few days to let them play and explore in it). They were so proud of their work that they wanted everyone to see it and play in it. They planned a Clubhouse Warming Party and invited parents, administrators, and anyone who had helped them along the way. They used their new baking skills to make refreshments, which they served out of the "drive-up windows" that they had designed.

Comments

This project not only impressed the children, but very much impressed the teachers. I was amazed at the determination of the children in seeing that their vision became a reality. The children were able to figure out that they needed an enclosed space to help overcome the vastness of the classroom. Their planning process was filled with constant compromises and pushed their representational drawing skills, understanding of numbers and measuring, emergent writing (the children made many letters and signs to make this project happen), comfort working with other adults (they made several of the planning phone calls themselves) far beyond what we would have imagined possible. Underlying all of the project, though, the predominant learning was social in nature. They needed a space to feel comfortable in and to be with a small number of children, and as each new child arrived, the group welcomed them by pulling them into the project. They became not only a class, but a true team.

