

The Salt Truck Project

A Project by 4-Year-Old Children in a Dual-Language Head Start Classroom
at West Liberty Community Schools, West Liberty, Iowa

Length of Project: Late January–March

Teachers: Rebecca A. Wilson, Sylvia Frausto, & Jen Buysse

Phase One

Beginning the Project

Our window faces a street, and I had noticed children were interested in watching vehicles. When the school bus or garbage truck passed, they were very excited. I provided several focusing experiences to better determine children's interest, including examining my car, the school bus, a teacher's bicycle, and a grain semi truck. After the visits, we made a web with the children about all of the vehicles they had seen. Interest was highest following the semi truck visit. I brought in nonfiction books about trucks, and the children named the different trucks and their purposes. I recorded the children's questions. The children were interested in how to drive a truck, the windshield wiper fluid, oil, and gasoline.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

One day while we were writing in our journals, Misael drew a truck and told me it was the kind that "puts salt on the road." This comment prompted a big discussion among the children about why the salt goes on roads and how the truck puts it there. We had a hard time finding photographs of salt trucks in the literature and discovered that the salt truck is the same thing as a snowplow. I contacted our city service garage and arranged a visit from our city snowplow driver for the following week.

City workers brought over a backhoe loader, sometimes used to move snow in parking lots. The city workers were very helpful and first came into our classroom to answer the children's questions. Their questions had narrowed from trucks, in general, to how the salt gets on the road and how the snow gets moved. The city workers demonstrated how snow is moved, both with the snowplow and the backhoe loader. They also showed where the gas tank, oil stick, and windshield wiper fluid reservoir are on the equipment. After watching the demonstrations, the children sketched the snowplow and backhoe loader. They also represented their learning through painting. Later, they created a play structure of the snowplow.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

After completion of the snowplow, documentation of the children's learning was shared. The children made a list of whom they wanted to invite to see their project. The students created their own invitations, and we ended up having a snowplow "open house" to share their learning with parents, other children in the school, and the community.

Comments

Among the many things that I learned from this project was how meaningful and life changing projects can be for children. Many new experiences like finger painting or taking off his shoes frighten Misael, and he cries. When our associate teacher's husband brought his semi truck to school, Misael was terrified and cried. I carried him out to see the truck, and he buried his head. But when Mr. Buysse started talking about his semi, Misael lifted his head and was fascinated! By the time our class got halfway around the semi, Misael was down on the ground listening intently with the other children. Back in our classroom, in the block center, Misael re-created his experience, even showing where the grain fell out of the bottom of the truck. Since that day, Misael has been investigating trucks and is opening up to new experiences and sharing with other children. He was instrumental in the children's interest in "salt trucks!" Misael has become a leader in our classroom, sharing ideas with other children about how to create the snowplow. The project has transformed Misael's role in our class and helped him to communicate verbally with his peers.

