Dog Project 2010-2011

Constructing knowledge collaboratively is an essential component in a successful project. Our main understanding is that dogs are dependent on us for food, shelter, and love. Owning a dog can be a very rewarding responsibility!

Out of a growing love for “Kaya stories” (those of a teacher’s furry golden retriever friend), the children became curious about and very interested in dogs. On our daily walks to the park, they noticed dogs of all kinds out enjoying our neighborhood! Using the resources of our city, the teachers took the children to the dog park where we all could meet real dogs and talk with their owners. Back in the classroom, we documented our current understandings about dogs and we gathered our many questions as well. Armed with information and many wonderings, the children led us into our rich study of dogs. Enjoy this account of our project work!
Phase One—Questions

This phase of project work encouraged children to:
- ask questions
- listen to one another
- share prior knowledge

Careful listening proved that the children indeed had a genuine interest in dogs and were curious to learn more. Thus a project on dogs was born!

To facilitate our investigations, we first generated a topic web of our collective knowledge of and experience with dogs. Phase one of our dog project lasted for a total of two weeks.

A sample of observations we collected:
- dogs have a lot of hair
- dogs know how to swim
- dogs have really wet noses
- dogs have very small eyes
- dogs get treats for being good
- dogs can have short tails
- dogs sometimes can have long tails
- dogs have long ears
- dogs know how to sit
Our daily trip to the playground afforded us an opportunity to regale preschoolers with stories of all kinds. The topic of "Kaya the dog" was a favorite. Handmade costumes were delivered to Kaya for her to don!
A list of wonderings we had about dogs followed. Sample questions included:

Why do some dogs have so much hair?

How do dogs take a bath?

Why do dogs have wet noses?

What do dogs eat?

What do dogs eat out of?

Do dogs scratch?

Why do dogs do heavy breathing?

Are all dogs good at playing fetch?

What is a dog park for?

What kinds of dogs are there?
Phase Two—Investigation, Fieldwork, and Experts

This phase of project work encouraged children to:
- learn about many different breeds of dogs
- learn about animals in need and how we can help
- practice caring for a dog
- learn that words and numbers have meaning
- understand how to interview someone
- research answers
- organize and represent information

We asked the children to help us think about what resources we could use to investigate and learn more about the answers to our questions.

A sample of source suggestions included:

Primary sources
- outside experts (dog owners in our school and neighborhood communities, pet store and rescue center owner, grooming salon owner)
- dog park
- neighborhood walks (dog searching!)

Secondary sources
- books about dogs (research books, children’s literature, dog breed encyclopedias)
- iPad applications
- dog grooming video clip

Phase two of our dog project lasted for eleven weeks.
As part of dramatic play, a group of children created a dog park. The props help us expand on our growing schema of dogs and the parks they visit to exercise and play in!
We used model-size dogs for our morning sign-in sheet where children practiced name recognition skills and familiarity with dog breeds. Investigating our questions about dogs and dog breeds provided a meaningful way to apply early literacy skills such as writing, drawing, and reading. We also collected books about dogs and used them as secondary source material.
After careful observation of dog anatomy—the children worked with our art specialist to create our very own classroom dog with paper mache, paint, and recycled and found materials.
We welcomed a new member into our classroom community and the children decided the dog needed a name. We took a class vote and “Taco Brownie Hannah” became our class mascot!
What do dogs eat? How do they eat?

In order to give the children an understanding of what and how much dogs eat, I shared Kaya’s feeding routine with the children. Using a real sample of her dry food, the children familiarized themselves with dog feeding bowls. Measuring cups were used to demonstrate our understanding of how dog food is measured for portion control in a dog’s daily diet. The children researched what kibble looked like and how much kibble could fit into different sized feeding bowls.
We built on concepts of weight, one-to-one correspondence, and structural design using a variety of dogs.
A game we called “What Dog is Missing?” challenged children’s memory, spatial, and probability skills. Our daily trips to the local dog park had us curious about how many dogs were in the park on any given day. We decided to record the daily number of dogs at the park and graph our findings using the children’s own dog illustrations.
Why does the dog park have a fence?
After several observations of our neighborhood dog park, a group of children created their own dog park in our sensory table. We learned the importance of using fences in the park to keep dogs safe.
While researching more about dogs, we used books as secondary sources in our project work. We also created many stories and pictures about dogs to share our learning journey with one another.
Dog experts visited our class to share stories and answer questions. We heard tales of breeds, shelter dogs, and more!
Dog related games expanded our understanding of turn-taking, one-to-one correspondence, and number and spacial recognition. Using technology, we downloaded two project-relevant applications on our school iPads—a dog memory game and breed quiz.
Our dog project afforded us the opportunity to use our artistic skills as another lens into our observations about and understandings of dogs.
We met an owner and her dog at our local city dog park who talked with the children about rescuing her dog. She answered impromptu questions we had about greyhounds and dog training. Little did this owner know that she was instrumental in mapping a new course in our dog project—rescue work and shelters!
Lindsay Condefer, owner of Chic Petique and S.T.A.R. (an animal rescue organization), talked with us about her rescue work. Gordon (pictured above), a dog Lindsay worked closely with, had full leg mobility after a surgery, extensive physical therapy, and lots of love! We handmade toys for the animals at the shelter.
As a thank you to our many guest experts, we baked dog-bone treats for their furry, four-legged friends and "pupcakes" for ourselves. We carefully measured ingredients and bagged treats complete with thank you notes!
Through the progression of our project, we gained an awareness about animals in shelters. Realizing they have many needs, our class decided to take part in a service learning project. We organized a collection of warm blankets, towels, treats, food, and toys for our friends in the shelter and brought it all over to our friends at the PSPCA.
Chez Bow Wow owner, Gwendolyn Carry, came and talked with us after a group of children became interested in how dogs take a bath and get a haircut. Gwendolyn brought real shaved hair from a customer and talked about the importance of dog grooming for overall health and well-being. She brought with her a groomer’s toolbox!
Phase Three—Culmination and Conclusion

This phase of project work encouraged children to:
- make meaning from what we learned
- plan and organize how to best represent their understanding
- work collaboratively
- problem solve
- self monitor
- communicate
- celebrate and share their learning experiences

Leaving posters with drawings of various dog breeds and important grooming tools, Gwendolyn inspired us to make our very own grooming shop in the dramatic play area of our classroom. Taco was our first customer! Phase three lasted about four weeks.
A storefront sign, inspired by the name of Gwendolyn’s shop, was created by a group of students. We also created a “must do” checklist for a thorough grooming.
Customer ribbons were prepared for post-grooming beauty and we practiced our techniques on dog stuffed animals.
We researched the logistics of operating a business and the children assigned roles in our very own “Chez Bow Wow.” Inviting another preschool class to our grooming shop, we had great success in providing quality care and customer satisfaction!
To celebrate our opening day success, we planned and organized a doggy dance party in the classroom complete with a disco ball and dance floor!!
The celebration led us into our next project—dance!
Dog Project

Dedicated to Kaya