

DOG PROJECT

Abstract

The following is an account of a dog study undertaken by four and five year old children at The Philadelphia School. The Philadelphia School is an urban progressive, independent school educating students in preschool through eighth grade. Using photographs and text, the following project book features a detailed account of each phase of the project. Both integral parts of the school's curriculum, the use of city resources and technology were incorporated in the children's investigations, fieldwork, and research about dogs.

Background Information

The dog project (developed by preschool teachers Mary Beth McNeish Fedirko and Lisa Hoke at The Philadelphia School) used the resources of the city to maximize a hands-on, experiential study of dogs. At The Philadelphia School, we want our students to become engaged citizens who are critical thinkers, creative problem solvers, and lifelong learners. Through our commitment to learning in the city, country, and classroom, the rich resources of our city and the natural environment of a nearby nature center, serve as primary sources for our learners. Our students can learn about the complexity of modern urban life by studying their own neighborhood, which is abundant with stores, restaurants, museums, and neighborhood parks for people and dogs.

This project emerged in one of our two four-year-old classrooms in the preschool where two head teachers worked with 21 preschool children. Out of a growing love for "Kaya stories" (those of a teacher's furry golden retriever friend), the children became curious about and interested in dogs. On our daily walks to our local city park, they noticed dogs of all kinds out enjoying the neighborhood. Using the resources of our city, the children frequented the dog park where they met real dogs and talked with their owners. Back in the classroom, we documented our understandings of and questions about dogs. We used these as a guide in our investigations. We invited outside experts to help deepen our understandings. With each question answered, new ones surfaced. Our learning pursuits led us into a myriad of findings. Listening carefully to the children, these findings led us to investigate new topics regarding dogs such as dog grooming and adopting rescue dogs. This project lasted for seventeen weeks.



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Author

Mary Beth McNeish Fedirko is a preschool teacher in an urban independent school, The Philadelphia School, in the heart of Center City, Philadelphia. She has a Bachelor of Science degree from Northeastern University and a Master of Science degree in Education from the University of Pennsylvania. She has been a preschool teacher at The Philadelphia School for eleven years. Her interests include the Project Approach, the Reggio Emilia approach, running, biking, photography, and spending time with her husband, Rob and their dog, Kaya.

Contact Information

Mary Beth McNeish Fedirko
2501 Lombard Street
Philadelphia, PA 19146
marybethfedirko@me.com