Seeing Another Point of View to Create a Successful Group Dynamic

Research and Working Individually

Children expressed a desire for positive emotional connections. The teachers wanted the children to collaborate respectfully while sharing opinions or disagreeing in order to improve the learning environment. In addition, teachers considered the Life Science Standards to be studied this year. The teachers came up with 4 goals for the study:

To create quality murals depicting the knowledge we have learned about different habitats

To have each child connected to the work, the learning and the process

To allow for negotiation with peers in a team environment, thus enhancing skills necessary to be a successful member of a learning group.

To use their understanding of color and shading to demonstrate a point of view or emotion within their art piece.

With this in mind they asked the children to select an animal habitat to research and concurrently, consider the classroom as a learning habitat. The children selected a habitat to research and created an individual drawing from that research.

> Teachers asked children to select one habitat they were interested in to research.

> > Children selected from 6 habitats and began to



Teachers noticed the children worked individually and were disinterested in other's work, demonstrated through closed-off body language, lack of eye contact, etc. Despite common interests, children's ability to work collaboratively on a shared interest, was not innate. This surprised the teachers. To support collaboration, children were challenged to come up with a single, quality, group plan.

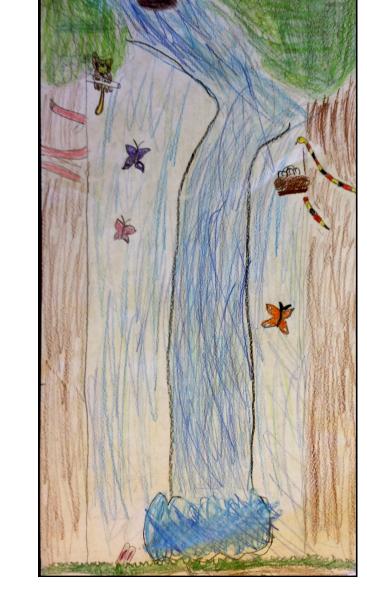
Teachers next asked the children to share their individua plans to compare research and collaborate.

Children shared their plans and began to work together using components from individual plans to create a group plan.



The children shared their plans within their habitat group and selected quality components of each individual's plan to create a group plan.







Group plans bounced between the Studio and the classroom to develop skills such as: composition, focal points, determining colors, brush strokes, texture and other details.

Teachers asked children to practice painting skill such as texture, layering, and color mixing.

Children experimented with brush types and created many different techniques in their paintin



Defining an Audience and Beginning Collaboration

The children displayed a range in interest and effort. While some were very connected to the project of creating a habitat mural, others were somewhat detached. Children shared the idea of displaying work at Open House;

the introduction of an authentic audience created an investment in the project.

Teachers asked the children how they could improve their work for their audience.

The children asked for feedback from peers and



During the Open House the children asked visitors, families, and peers to offer feedback on their work. Feedback and responses from the Open House provoked the children to research their habitats further and refine the details of their habitats, i.e. correct animals in the chosen habitat, texture of animal's coverings, and brush strokes necessary to create that texture.



Teachers filmed the children working together as they made connections between animal habitats and their learning habitats, as well as animal needs and children's needs. The children watched the video of their groups working together and discussed group strengths as well as individual strengths that they saw or experienced.

Excerpts from a Conversation with the Polar Group about strengths of the group and individuals Logan, Whitney, Chaniah, Zarveon and Maddy

What do you do well when you work together?

Well, we used to argue a lot and never get to the point. Now we have found out a way to work together; we take turns talking. We take turns and argue but we know that's how we work. – Logan

What does Logan do well in your group?

He helps us plan it out. He helps us keep focused. If half of us are messing around he gets us back to working. – Maddy What does Whitney do well in your group?

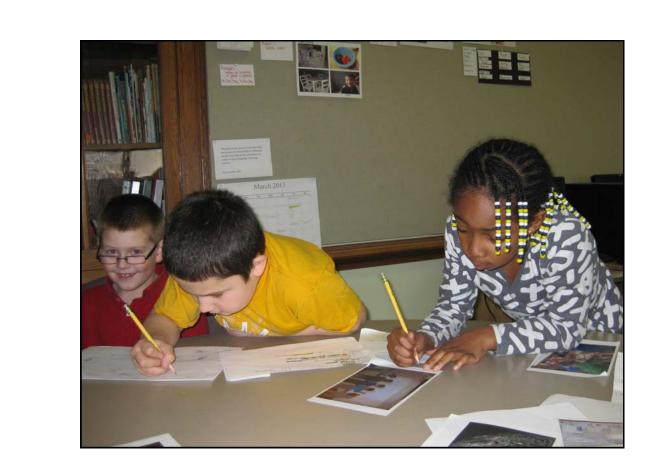
She gives feedback in a nice way, she is honest but polite. She takes it very seriously. – Maddy

What does Maddy do well in your group?

I think she helps by always being focused. She never turns her brain on something else. She never talks about pigs or something. – Whitney







Teachers then revisited the children's conversations on group strengths and noticed recurring strategies of how the groups worked together. They asked the children to state the strategies that their group used.

Working Collaboratively to Share our Learning

Together children and teachers co-constructed 12 strategies to work successfully as a group.

Feedback Being Flexible Communication Seeing the Big Picture **Emotions Affecting the Group**



Teachers asked the children to review these strategies as a group, and select the strategies that they used most in their group.

> Children also described how successful their group was while using the strategy. They analyzed which strategies would best support their group to be successful.

The children whose groups had success and worked well together were able to select specific strategies that they used. The groups that struggled with working cohesively were not able to select strategies that worked for them. But, when the work on the final murals began, all of the children showed trust in one another when adhering to the plan. This was a social change for all groups from their first plan, where all had to draw at once, to taking turns and trusting.









Teachers asked the children to revisit group strategies and focus on two strategies that they would like to teach to the other groups, explaining how those strategies worked for them,

and how those strategies could be applied in real life situations.

The children made real life connections to themselves and adults in regard to working with other people. What they found was that adults, as well as children, struggle with these same issues. But, by utilizing agreed upon strategies a group can successfully complete work with a common goal as the outcome.

Group Strategies book



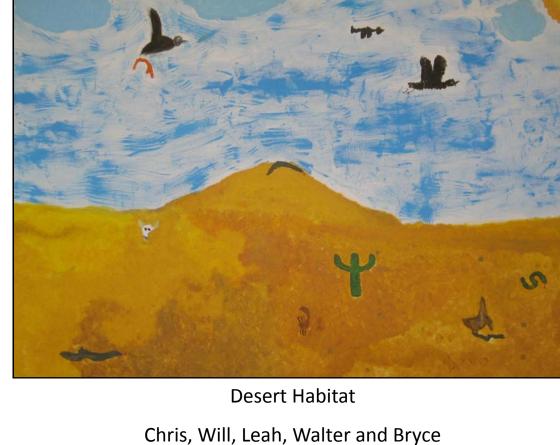


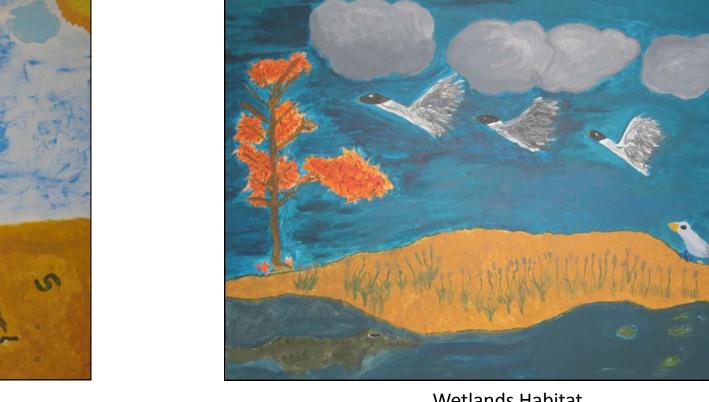




Teacher Reflections

This year our project naturally evolved when the children were researching habitats based on our science curriculum. The teachers had grouped children by their common interests. The idea of the children working toward the same objective seemed like the perfect scenario for them to collaborate and produce quality work. However, as the work progressed the group dynamics did not flow the way the teachers had hypothesized. This gave the teachers the idea of studying group dynamics and what is needed for a group to be successful. Soon the teachers documented the children experimenting with differing strategies to help keep the group dynamic on an even keel. Through conversations and documentation the teachers and children co-constructed 12 strategies that worked for all group tasks. Teachers now know that placing children into learning groups necessitates the need to consider academics, common interests, maturity, gender, age, learning styles, project goals, and that groups should be planned with intention.





Wetlands Habitat Yesenia, Owen, Jason, Zion, Zenobia and Mickey









Grassland Habitat Saelah, Eli, Jay'lise, Nolee and Lily



Marine Habitat Nate, Maya, Jason, Freya, Joe and Naomi