

The City Project

Prekindergarten Class

Teacher: Kirsten Benko

Background Information

The prekindergarten is a half-day program with 13 children who are 3 and 4 years old. This year's class has a high percentage of students who are learning English as an additional language. The program is led by the classroom teacher, Kirsten Benko and the Education Support Professional, Joani Halvorson. This is a relatively new Prekindergarten program, it opened in 2010. Kirsten and Joani have been working together in the Prekindergarten classroom for four years now.

The City Project began in February and concluded in April.

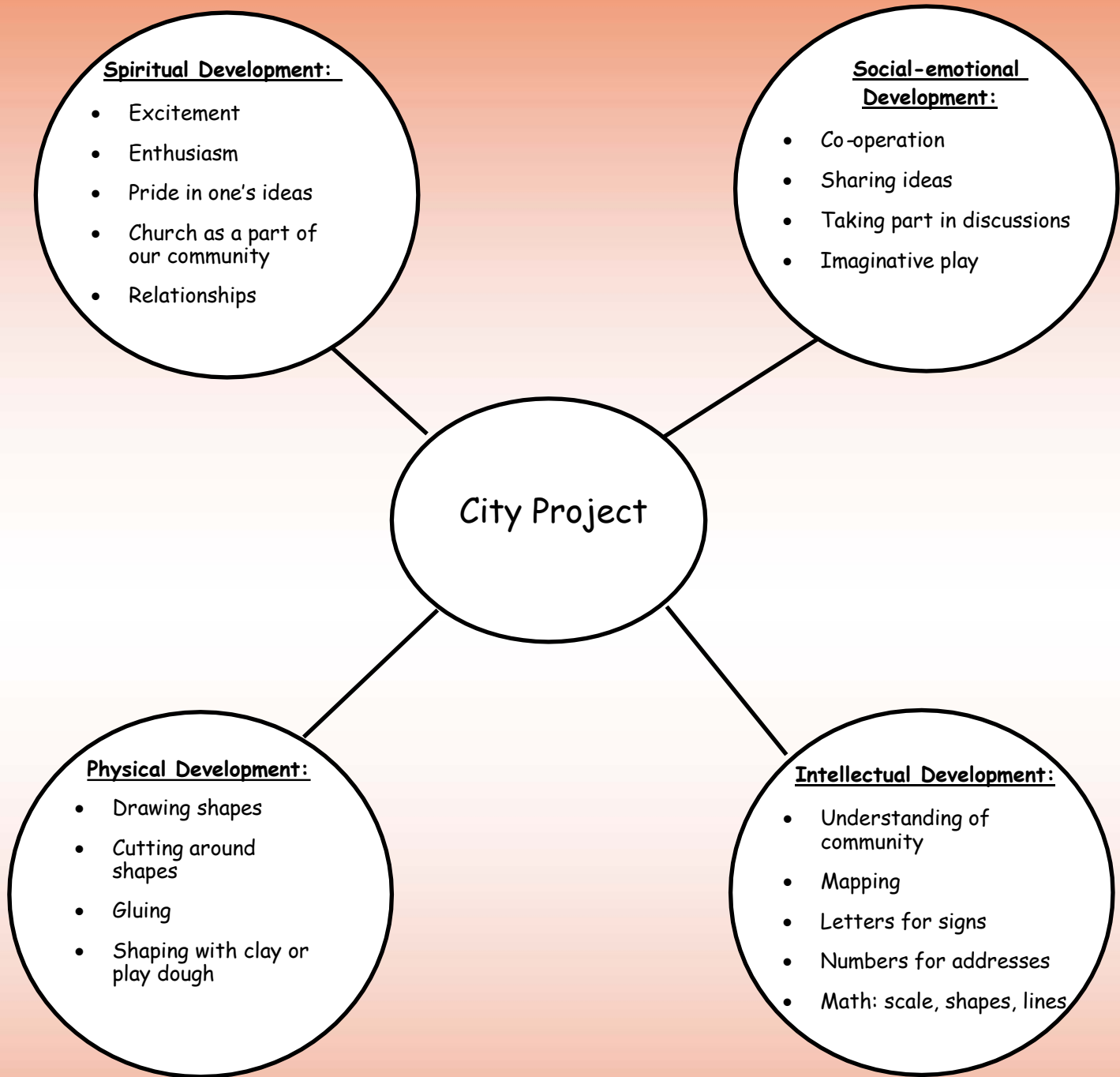
Phase 1: Beginning the Project



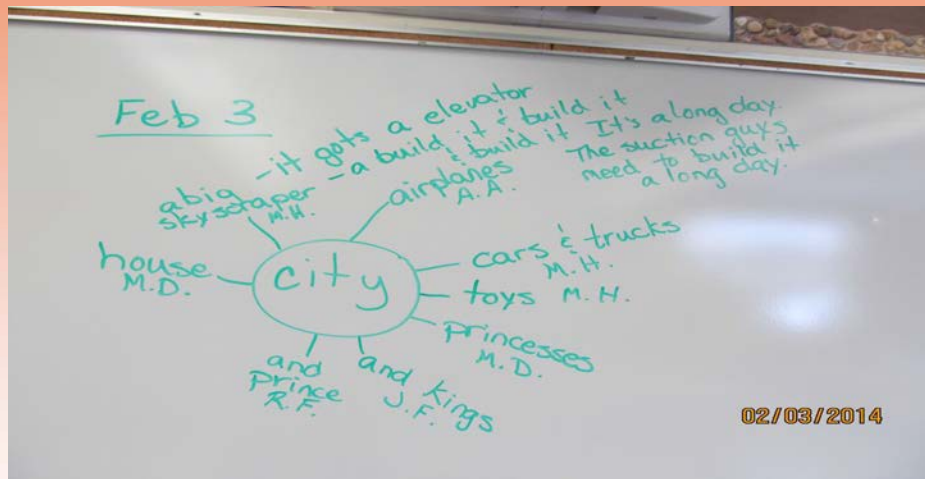
The idea for our project came from observing the trends in play in our classroom. The children gravitated towards our building center and our kitchen center regularly. They spoke often about building towers, houses, and bridges. They played restaurant and loved to serve food to their teachers. They often dressed up and pretended to be construction workers, waiters and waitresses, firefighters, etc.

This led us to discuss two different options for a project: a project focused on building with different types of materials or a project focused on creating a city in our classroom and then mini-projects spanning from that. We chose the city project because we felt it would give us greater flexibility in taking it in different directions and we also thought it would appeal to a greater number of our students.

Teacher Planning Web



Student Concept Web



Teacher: *What is in a city?*

M: *"A big skyscraper!"*

M2: *"Cars and trucks. Toys."*

M3: *"Princesses!"*

R: *"And prince."*

J: *"And kings."*

A: *"Airplanes."*

Teacher: *"M, can you tell us more about the big skyscraper?"*

M: *"It gets a elevator. A build it and build it and build it. It's a long day. The suction (construction) guys need to build it a long day!"*

Student Concept Web



We wanted to help the children to recall more information about things in a city. We decided to create a play invitation with our city toys and to document the language and type of play that happened at this center. After the play time, we met at the carpet and revisited our web.

Teacher: *"The last time we talked, we shared some ideas about what is in a city. Do you have any more ideas today? What do you see when you are driving in a car with Mom and Dad?"*

A: *"Helicopters."*

"There's even buses!"

M: *"And there's a place for a helicopter."*

R: *"Helicopters go to Nigeria."*

M: *"No, they go to Canada."*

J: *"Cement trucks."*

R: *"And even dump trucks."*

M: *"And diggers. I said that!"*

A: *"And builders."*

M: *"And there's bomber planes that drop bombs."*

R: *"And school childrens."*

J: *"And even trains."*

Student Concept Web

- M: *"We see buildings."*
- Teacher: *"What kind of buildings?"*
- M: *"Tall buildings. It's really, really tall."*
- A: *"There's even ice skates!"*
- R: *"And even gloves!"*
- A: *"And even jackets."*
- R: *"And even hats, shoes and boots."*
- Teacher: **"Where do we go to use our ice skates?"**
- R: *"We use it to the high mountain!"*
- A: *"No, we use it to go skate on ice."*
- R: *"It's slippery. The ice is slippery."*
- M: *"Icicles."*
- A: *"Even some icebergs."*
- R: *"And even peoples."*
- M: *"And bridges."*
- R: *"I see some people walking in the sidewalk."*
- M: *"There's sled down the hill."*
- J: *"And even snowballs."*
- "And even ice creams."*

Representing: Drawing a Map & Making a Building



The children were invited to think about what type of building they would add to our city and to draw it on our city map. There were castles, towers with elevators, soldier places, army bases, monster caves, houses, and families.



Next, the students each chose a recycled box and colored paper for their buildings.

Phase 2: Developing the Project: Investigation



During this phase, we brought some new resources into the classroom to encourage more critical thinking about the idea of city vehicles and buildings. We added books about different types of communities and city vehicles, we created a new invitation of a mini-construction site in our sandbox, and we brought in some new construction toys for dramatic play.

Phase 2: Investigation & Representation



We wanted to challenge the students to draw details on their buildings. We knew that drawing was a new skill for our students so we began by spending some time tracing and cutting different types of lines. Many of the students seemed to really embrace and enjoy this challenge.

Near the end of the day, we had a classroom meeting where I told the children that I was making a school for our city but I needed their help. I said I didn't know what my school was missing. I displayed 2 pictures of local schools on the data projector and asked them to identify the details that were missing from my building. The kids gave ideas such as a cross, a window, and a door and they helped to identify what types of lines I would need to draw these features. When they say how easy it was to draw using lines, they all ran to get their boxes to start drawing!

Phase 2: Investigation & Representation



Once the students had drawn doors and windows, we needed more ideas for details to add to the types of buildings they were designing.

We posted images of all of the types of buildings our students had envisioned and helped them to add the features that interested them. The students added airplanes to airports, tanks to army bases, turrets to castles, and roofs and shingles to houses.

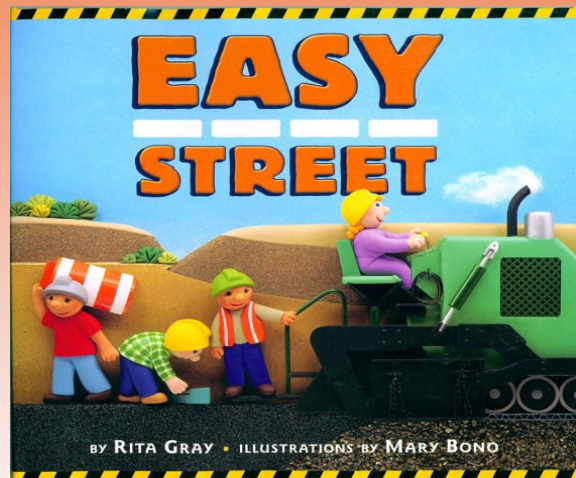
Phase 2: Investigation & Representation



When the buildings became more detailed, the students were much more interested in playing in our city. They began to play imaginatively in the city and to create intricate story lines.

Of course, we had to add people to our city next!

Phase 2: Investigation and Representation



During our City Project, we read a book called *Easy Street* by Rita Gray. The story describes the building of a road, layer by layer. The students were really taken by this story. We read the story and then read it again while doing some actions. The next day, we put mats down in the hallway and gave the children even more room to represent their learning through movement. They pretended to shovel rocks, chop gravel, dump dirt, and roll pavement.

Afterwards, the students brainstormed a list of materials we would need to make a road for our city. They chose to paint a road and they wanted some yellow lines. This was another great opportunity for some fine motor activities.

Phase 2: Investigation and Representation



The students loved our new road and they enjoyed playing with their people and cars on the road. However, one boy was disappointed that our road was missing sand and rocks. The road in the book needed sand and rocks so he thought ours should have them too.

So...we decided to make our own roads with real dirt, sand, gravel, and cement. The children loved taking their turns to make their very own road!



Phase 2: Investigation and Representation



The next day, the children were very excited to find their roads had hardened and were ready for some driving! Many of the students played with their roads the entire morning. This created a great opportunity for sharing, creative thinking, problem solving, and co-operation. By the end of the morning, the kids had created an intricate freeway with connected roads, bridges, and tunnels.

They had races, they pretended to take their cars to the garage for repairs, and there were many crashes that had to be attended by emergency vehicles. It was a lot of fun!

The roads also sparked a great deal of conversation. The students chatted to themselves and to one another throughout their play.

April 11th: Driving on our Roads

R: *"Stopping light, stopping light. I'm stuck. Help us! We stuck together!"*

A: *"Cars can go on the road."*

R: *"I'm crashing this car. That white car."*

M: *"Okay let's race them! Ready, set...go! The red motorcycle is passing...the motorcycle crashing the 1st, the white car. They need (need) to repairs."*

R: *"If he crash down, he will broke himself."*

M: *"The white car is in the cliff! It's going to crash! It's going to be boom! A guy is going to get a parachute. He's going to be okay...Then (this car) is in. He can defeat the lemon cars. He gets some lots of weapons. The lemon cars are gonna take it from him. There's lots of platforms. He calls his army to get them on the start."*

A: *"This car calls Lightning Car."*

M: *"This car is Fast Car. He can crash you off the cliff!"*

A: *"Some lights right here. And right here, and right here, and right here."*

M: *"I'm going to get a fruit smoothie."*

R: *"Me too, I'm going to get a fruit smoothie."*

A: *"I'm going to get a strawberry shake!"*

R: *"He got broken by the water (as he crashed his car off the table)."*

A: *"These cars are going to the Ice Cream Store."*

R: *"Those cars are jumping. These cars are locked."*

M: *"R gets a garage. I'm going to R's garage."*

A: *"There's some shutes on these cars. They're on top of the cars. And so the cars won't tip over. Two cars are going to be fixed from mine (at the garage). Yellow means slow down, green means go and red means stop."*

M: *"We need (need) a ramp!"*

Phase 3: Concluding the Project: A Book About Our City & a Family Day to Celebrate

As a culminating activity, we decided to write a book about our project. We based our book on the pattern of the story *This is the House That Jack Built* by Simms Taback. Our book was called *This is the City That We Built* and the story was written based on the children's comments about their buildings. The children's pictures and comments about their buildings were incorporated into the story and the children colored a picture for the cover page of their book. The book will be a nice keepsake of our classroom project for each child .



Once our book was complete we invited the parents to come for a Family Day. We began by having the children show their building to the group and tell us a bit about their building. Then we displayed our book on the data projector and read it aloud together as a group.

To complete our Family Day, each child built a planter box with his/her parent. We had initially wanted to go to Home Depot to do a building project but they did not have staff available to lead the activity so they donated the building kits. The students loved hammering and building with their parents and they were so proud of their finished products!



Teacher Reflections

Phase 1: Beginning the Project

We were excited when we chose our topic because we really felt that it would interest and engage many of our students. One of our students had always shown a keen interest in buildings, emergency vehicles, and construction so we were hopeful that this project would encourage him to take on a leadership role and further develop his language skills.

We had also noted that many of our students would benefit from fine motor activities that would enhance their fine motor strength, co-ordination, and confidence. We could foresee many opportunities to integrate fine motor activities into our project in a way that would be interesting and motivating for the kids.

During Phase 1, we planned discussions and play invitations that would help to elicit the students' prior knowledge of components of a city as well as their primary interests in regard to building a city.

Due to some language limitations in our classroom, we did not develop specific questions to research together. Instead, we tried to be careful observers in order to determine what the children were interested in learning.

In future projects, I would like to try to develop some specific questions to investigate with my students in order to further explore this aspect of the Project Approach.

Teacher Reflections

Phase 2: Developing the Project

During Phase 2, we were conscious of creating opportunities for investigation for our English as an additional language learners. We wanted our investigation to be visual in addition to being language based so all of our students would have the opportunity to explore what interested them.

For this reason, we did not focus on field trips or guest speakers during this phase. Instead, we looked for other ways to investigate. We added books with many visuals related to cities and construction into our classroom. The students were very taken with these books and often sat and looked at them together and talked about what they saw.

We also changed our sand table to reflect our project. We put away the sand toys and added small construction vehicles and wooden logs so the students could represent their learning through dramatic play. This was a very popular center during our project!

We also added some new construction vehicles to our nature center. Again, this provided an opportunity for the students to learn through dramatic play and exploration.

We used images from books and online web pages to encourage the students to be creative with their building designs and to think about the separate components of different types of buildings.

The students represented their learning through drawing, designing their buildings, designing the city, movement activities, and through dramatic play.

At the beginning of the project, the students drew a large map of the city. Towards the end of the project, we asked each student to draw an individual map of the city. The drawings were excellent and we could really see evidence of the progress they had made in their fine motor control and in their understanding of how to use lines and shapes to create pictures.



Teacher Reflections

Phase 3: Concluding the Project

Throughout our project we shared our learning and excitement with the parents. We frequently invited them to come into the classroom to see the development of the city, we included updates about our project in emails as well as in our classroom newsletters, and we had ongoing documentation including photos and language samples on a bulletin board outside of our classroom.

When it came time to conclude our project, we wanted to give the children the opportunity to show their parents what they had been doing at school because they were so proud of their city. The Family Day was a great way to do this because it was a familiar setting for everyone and it included the parents in the learning. Creating a book about our project showed the students how important their work was and it also provided the students with a way to continue to reflect on the learning and fun of our classroom project.

Throughout the project, the students had shown an interest in building with real materials. They often played with our tool kit and wooden blocks in the classroom and they frequently wore the construction worker costume as they were building. Having the opportunity to build using real hammers, nails, and wood was an exciting end to our classroom project.

If I were to do a similar project again, I would like to create more opportunities for engagement from the parents. I would like to have each family send a picture of the outside of their home so we could discuss similarities and differences in the buildings. I would also like to have the parents keep a list/take pictures of interesting places they visit in the community. This would really enhance the conversations in the classrooms and connect the parents to the learning taking place at school.

Teacher Reflections

Final Thoughts

Overall, we are very pleased with our classroom project. Most of our students were very interested in designing the city and that encouraged them to do a variety of fine motor activities which led to increased fine motor skill development. The project also created a sense of unity among the students because they were all involved in some way. Creating opportunities for students to speak and develop their oral language skills was a key component of this project. The excitement and engagement of the students led to many wonderful conversations!

We were surprised by how long the project lasted. We let the students be our guides and as long as they were interested and motivated, we continued to develop our city. When the students became so excited about building roads, we saw it as a great opportunity to explore ideas through movement as well as to follow the students' lead in the next steps of the project (building roads with real materials). It was wonderful that this idea came from reading a book because it showed the students how great things can come from reading.

At the beginning of our project, we discussed that the project may not elicit the same depth of involvement from all of our students. We knew that some of our students would really engage in all of the activities while others, especially those who had arrived later in the year, still needed time to play freely in the classroom and further develop their play skills and their social skills. We relied on the environment as our third teacher and recognized that, when students were playing in the centers designed to connect to our project or when they were reading or listening to stories about cities, they were learning and growing too.

This was a wonderful learning experience for all of us and we will definitely be using the Project Approach again next year!