Going Green with Recycling: Raising Environmental Awareness in the Preschool Classroom

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The Project Approach

• What is The Project Approach?

• The Project Approach - a set of teaching strategies that enable teachers to guide children through in-depth studies of real world topics. Each study topic is explored for several weeks, giving the children opportunities to ask questions, actively explore hands on materials, interview experts, reflect on information gained, and share new knowledge with peers.
How did we decide to study Recycling?

• Based on our recent class discussions on how to take care ourselves, our friends, and our classroom, it was a natural progression to talk about how we recycled in the classroom.

• We recycled in the classroom on a very small scale. The classroom had a small recycling bin for daily items such as milk bottles and paper towel rolls. Children were able to freely go into the recycling bin to choose items to use for art work. There was also a small bin for recycled paper near the art table.

• Based on the children’s interest in learning how we recycled in the classroom, the teachers decided the children would benefit from a more in-depth investigation on recycling.
Phrase One: Gathering Prior Knowledge

- What does it mean to RECYCLE?
- Children were able to have an open meeting discussion on what they thought it meant to recycle.
- Most children’s prior knowledge was based on the action of throwing items into the recycling bin rather than the trash can.
Why do we Recycle?

- All the children knew WHERE to put the recyclables, but not many understood the reason WHY they do it.
- This led us on a journey to find out the importance of recycling.
What does this symbol mean?

Where can we find this symbol?

The children were “searching” for the recycling symbol everywhere.
What do you want to know about RECYCLING?

• Children asked questions about the things they wanted to know.
• Throughout the study, their questions were answered and placed on the board underneath the original questions.
• Throughout the study, new questions were also added and answered to the board.
How can we sort our recyclable materials?

• The children were able to list different items that can be recycled. Through the list, the children discovered that the items could all fall under three categories: paper, plastic, and aluminum.

• We also looked at the different materials and decided how we can sort like items together.
Phrase Two: Investigation

How can we find the answers to our questions?

• Children had the opportunity to ask their questions to our UMD recycling expert-Mr. Guididas.

• Mr. Guididas brought in large recycling bins as well as explained to the class how the recycling truck brings all the items to the county recycling center.
Investigating Beyond our Classroom

Children had recycling homework and were asked to find and categorize recycle items at their home into the three categories. They were able to share and record their findings to the class.
Children worked in small groups to ask the children in each classroom if they recycled at home.

They asked the question and recorded the answers.

Finally, they tallied and charted their findings.
Where Does the Recycling Truck take the Recyclables?

- As our first field experience the class took a field trip to the Montgomery County Recycling Center.
- Prior to the visit the children offered their predictions about the recycling center and what happens there.
Trucks dump recyclables into a large warehouse.
A front-loader pushes the recyclables into an opening in the floor.
The children watch as the recyclables are placed into a conveyor belt.
Workers sort the recyclables based on types of material.
Were our predictions about the Recycling Center correct?

After our field trip, the children compared their predictions with the actual experience.
Bringing the field experience back into the classroom

By adding a few new materials into dramatic play such as a recycling bin, a crate, hard hats, and recyclables, the children were able to role play and reenact what they experienced at the recycling center.
The Three “R’s” of Recycling

Reduce- “To make less trash.”

Reuse- “To use it over and over again until it’s too old to use.”

Recycle- “To turn it into something else.”

Reduce- The ultimate goal of our study was to reduce the amount trash we produced in our class on a daily bases.

Reuse- We began reusing everyday items on a more permanent basis.

Recycle- We found out whether common products we used in our classroom were recyclable.
What does it mean to “be green”?

The class had open discussions and read books about what it means to “be green”. We talked about how it’s not only important to recycle, but to make the world a cleaner, healthier place to live.

“The Earth would be brown.” –Age 4
How is the University of Maryland “Green”?

• The class took a field trip to one of the university’s dining halls, The Diner, to find out how the campus recycles food and waste.

• The children learned about how anything that was once alive gets composted.
All food waste was placed into barrels and sent to a compost farm.

All takeout containers on campus are 100% compostable. They are made from sugar cane.
What can we do to “be green”? 

Weekly Trash-Free Lunches
Creating T-shirt Bags

Each child brought in an old t-shirt from home to turn it into a reusable bag.
With teacher guidance, the children turned something old into something usable.
The children shredded used construction paper and ran it through a blender to create pulp.
They poured the pulp onto screens to remove excess water.
Composting
The children prepare the compost bin by shredding pieces of newspaper.
The worms need to be fed one pound of food a week.
Phrase Three- Culmination

• How can we tell the other children in the CYC all the things we learned about recycling?
• How can we create a book about Recycling at the CYC? Each child offered her/his thoughts about recycling at the CYC to help inform other classes.
Ongoing Recycling Efforts

• A school-wide effort to reduce, reuse, and recycle.
• Reusable cups, bowls, plates, and silverware were purchased for each classroom to reduce the amount of waste we created daily.
Ongoing Recycling Effort

Continued Trash-Free Lunches

Recycle Fridays
Composting for the next year