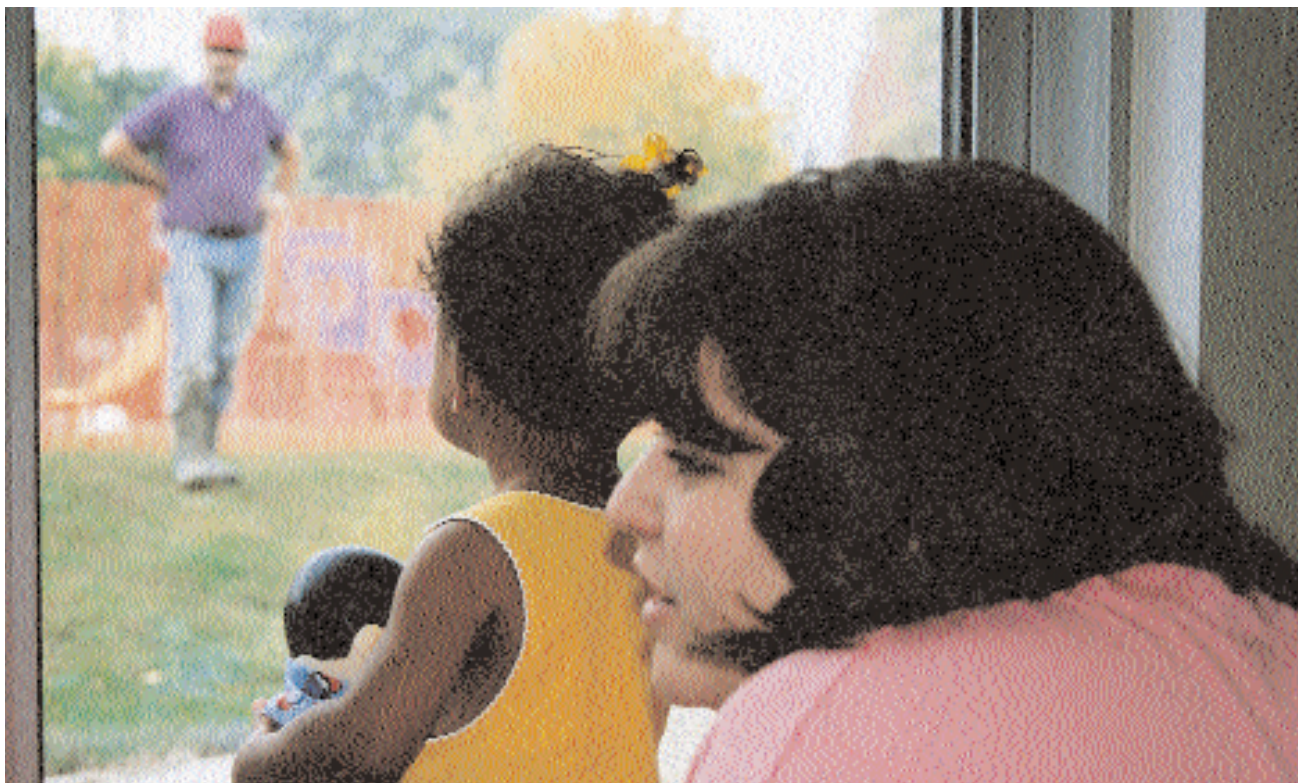
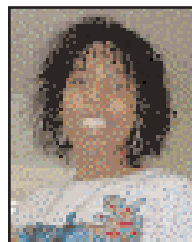


The Story of a Field Trip: Trash and Its Place Within Children's Learning and Community

by Olga Winbush



Every Thursday morning, shortly after the children finish their morning snack, one, two or several children will come to me and ask, "Is it time to see the trash truck, Olga?" I glance at the clock and usually respond with "Yes, it's time, let's head for the blacktop." Immediately, paint brushes drop, blockbuilding ceases, and the counting and sorting of plastic teddy bears is interrupted, as my 18 kindergarteners leave their various morning activities to rush out to the school's blacktop. We are rushing to see the huge trash truck make its weekly round to our school. The children watch in excitement and complete awe as the trash truck's two-pronged lift raises the school dumpster off the blacktop, and pour the



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week's load of trash into its rear. With a wave, the two trash workers step back into the truck and roar down the street as my students wave and shout, "good bye" and "thank you" at the top of their five year old lungs.

This weekly ritual of watching for the trash truck began as a result of our school job. At Children's Community School in Van Nuys, California, each class had, and still has, a school job, which they do as a means of not only taking care of the school community, but as a way building a strong sense of caring and community among the students and teachers. It was the kindergarteners' job each day to empty the small trash cans located in the school office, director's office, auditorium, blockbuilding room, and art room into the four larger trash cans, which were placed outside the school office.

As a result of this daily community job, the children began to ask me where the trash went once they had put it in the large trash cans. In order to answer their question, I chose three children to watch the large trash cans near the end of the school day, to see exactly what happened. They faithfully watched, and the next day reported back to the class that four children from the fifth/sixth grade class took the large trash cans to the blacktop (where all of the children play outside games), and poured the trash into a really, really big garbage can. I informed the children that this really big garbage can was called a dumpster. Well from there, the class wanted to know what happened to the trash once it was in the dumpster. Thus began our weekly ritual of watching for the trash truck.

The children thoroughly enjoyed watching the school dumpster being emptied into the huge trash truck every Thursday. After about three or four weeks of intense weekly observation of the school's trash exiting the blacktop in the big green trash truck, several children began to question where the trash men were taking the truck with our trash in it. I posed this question to the entire group during one of our circle times. The children began to brainstorm ideas about where they thought the trash men took our trash and what became of our trash. These were some of the children's ideas:

- They take the trash to a big building where they keep all the trash;
- The trash men take the trash away from the school, so they can burn it like my father burns the leaves that fall off our trees;
- The truck takes the trash to a big place full of dirt and they bury it.

I wrote each of the children's ideas on a huge piece of lined chart paper, making a language experience chart entitled, "Where We Think the Trash Men Take Our Trash." This language experience chart provided the first of many literacy activities which emerged from this expanding study of our trash. As a result of the children's questions and ideas, I organized a trip to the local landfill, which the school's waste service used, so the children could actually see where the trash trucks took the trash. I asked them to brainstorm some questions, which they might have had for the landfill. These questions, which each child dictated to me were also written on a large language experience chart. Some of the questions the children asked were:

- What is a landfill?
- What do you do at a landfill?
- What happens to the trash at the landfill?
- Why do the trucks use the landfill?

Armed with our questions, we headed for the landfill the next day. When our big yellow school bus drove up the hill to what appeared to be the top of the landfill, the children looked out of the windows with great excitement. As we stepped off the bus, the children were greeted with all types of sights, sounds, and smells. Big green trash trucks, like the one that visited our school every week, rolled up the hill dumping out trash, and then proceeded back down the hill to collect more. Huge bulldozers and dirt movers moved back and forth, covering the trash with dirt, making the hill we were standing on grow a bit smaller, as another hill was being formed behind us from the mountain of trash and dirt.

We stood and watched all of this wonderful movement for about 25 to 30 minutes, while our guide, one of the landfill employees, explained to the class what we were seeing, and answered the many questions being fired at him by the children. The children continually commented on the smell of the landfill and the hundreds of seagulls flying overhead seeking food in the mountains of trash. The children also spoke to the trash truck drivers, asking them if they liked their jobs and how much trash they picked up in one day.

Our guide then took us back to the landfill office, where the children watched the two secretaries answering the telephones and typing on the computers. The guide escorted us into a meeting room and gave us lemonade

and cookies to eat, while we watched a ten minute video explaining the work of the landfill.

The guide also explained how the landfill was expanding into recycling. They were building a recycling unit, where paper, glass, tin, and bottles to be sorted from the trash and then recycled. The children decided then and there to share the importance of recycling with the entire school at our next weekly all-school meeting. The guide answered the children's final questions, and amidst the fond exchange of goodbyes and thank yous between the landfill employees and our class, we once again boarded our bus for the return trip to school.

The next few weeks were filled with activities; the children represented their field trip experience within a variety of mediums. This integration of the field trip throughout the class curriculum enabled the children to build further understanding of the relationship of trash and trash workers to their community, and it enabled them to assimilate new experiences and learning into their already existing knowledge.

One of the first activities that the children participated in was a language experience chart activity. In this literacy activity, each child dictated what they had seen and what they had learned. This language experience chart formed

the basis for several ongoing literacy activities. Another literacy activity involved a matching game which I developed. In this game, the children matched cards with words written on them, that I had taken from the chart, to the same words on the actual chart.

Some examples of the words that I pulled from the language experience chart to make this game were: trash, bulldozer, landfill, dirt, office, recycle, scale, seagulls. These words, and many more like them, became new key sight words for the children to touch, experience, and use throughout their play. I also developed five different word matching games with words from this particular experience chart, where two children could sit together and play one of these trash vocabulary matching games.

Art became another medium through which the children integrated their landfill trip experience. Upon returning to school, each child first painted a picture showing what they had seen and learned at the landfill. After each child completed their picture, they dictated to me what the picture was about, and I wrote their dictation on a sentence strip and attached it to their painting. Each child also made a shoe box diorama depicting a part of their landfill trip. The diorama consisted of the children painting the inside of their box to show whatever scene

Train Teachers by Kay Albrecht

Create a Starting Place: What a wonderful example of helping children construct their own knowledge! But note, that the impetus for the whole project began with a shared commitment to community service by the faculty of Winbush's school. Consider this idea of sharing the caring for the community in an open discussion about the range and type of responsibilities that might be appropriate for each group of children. Explore teachers' ideas about incorporating such an approach in your school or center.

Reflection as a Springboard: Reflect with teachers the potential field trips that might spring from current emergent curriculum topics. (Directors who are in classrooms often as observers might well be able to suggest emergent topics from recent observations.) Or, ask teachers to bring children's portfolios to a *discovery* meeting where teachers review children's work samples, anecdotal notes and observations, assessments, current play themes indicated in art work, etc., to *discover* topics and the field trips that are suggested by the topics.

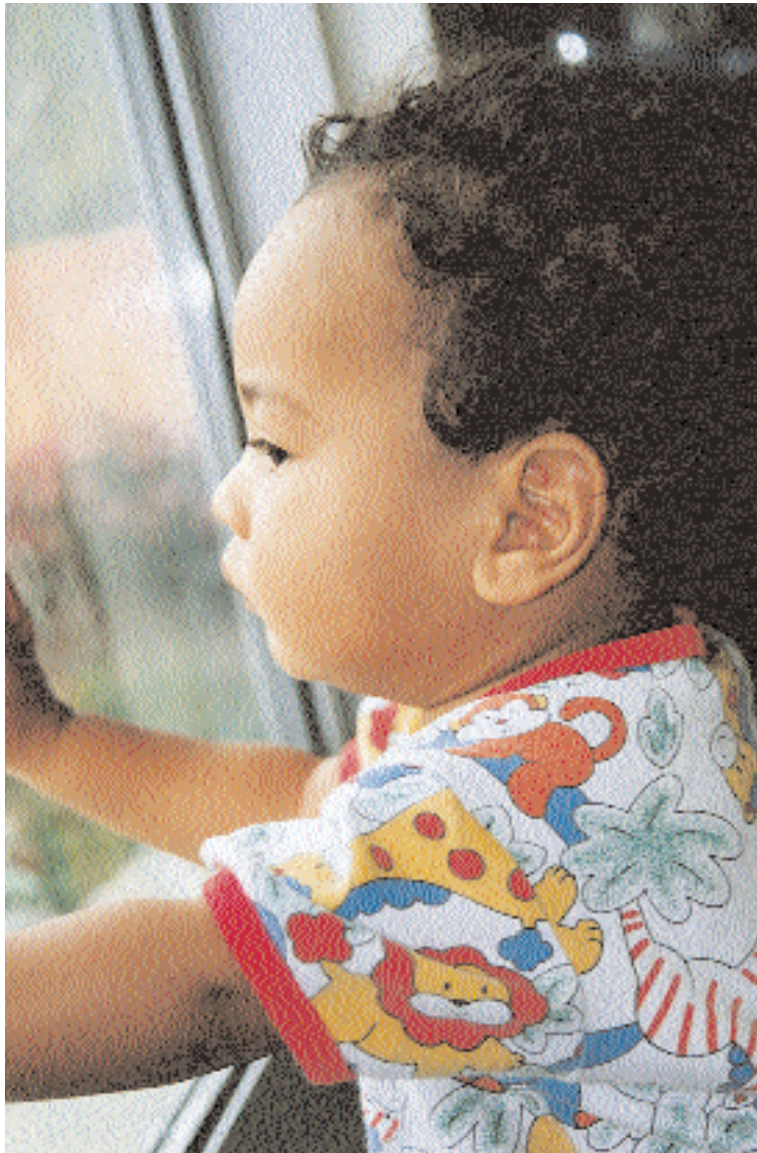
Thank You! Saying thank you for wonderful opportunities and experiences is an important social skill for children to learn. Winbush's children came up with a wonderful way to say thank you to the staff at the landfill. The children's mural was not only appreciated by the landfill employees but also became a part of their environment when it was framed and hung. Encourage teachers to involve the children in deciding on an appropriate thank you. Get children's ideas before the trip and explore them again after the trip. Then, make sure that good ideas (maybe more than one) get implemented and exchanged.

How to Use Beginnings Workshop to

from the landfill they wanted to represent, and then making clay trucks, machinery, trash, and people to place in their scene. These dioramas were accompanied by dictations from the children describing their landfill scene. Each child shared their paintings, dioramas, and dictations with the rest of the class. The dioramas were also shared with the first grade class.

As a thank you, the children collaboratively painted a huge mural depicting the landfill. This mural, along with a dictated letter from the children, thanking the landfill workers for allowing us to visit and learn, was sent to the landfill office. The landfill workers in turn, sent us a wonderful thank you and a picture showing our mural, which they had framed and hung on the wall of the meeting room where we had had our cookies and lemonade. Needless to say, the children were delighted.

A final integration of the landfill trip took place in our blockbuilding activities. Each week with the unit-blocks, the class would build their community, which consisted of houses, the school, castles, space stations, other fantasy buildings, and many of the trips we had taken. Some of the trips, which we had taken already were walking trips to the fire station, the local barber shop, and the gas station. The landfill became an integral part of this blockbuilding community. The children made trash cans and dumpsters for each building out of cardboard and plasticene. Trash workers, in their small trash trucks which the children had constructed in



Photographs by Subjects & Predicates

woodworking, moved trash through their community to the landfill effectively and efficiently.

The study of trash and the field trip to the landfill turned out to be a valuable learning experience for these kindergartners. This study of where our school's trash went and the ensuing trip to the landfill served to link the children to the wider community. The children saw how this service impacts their lives; thus, it became important to them. They also learned to value the trash workers and the landfill workers in a meaningful way, because they had seen, touched, and communicated with the workers.

This study brought diversity into the classroom. A part of the community was brought into the children's lives, where they could experience it in a very realistic and tangible way, and the children were brought into the larger community of adults. As a result, the community could see that their adult lives and their adult work is an integral and vital part of young children's learning. The landfill treated us like royalty and our mural still hangs there today.

Field trips help the larger community to see that schooling for children exists not only within the walls of school, but that young children's learning takes place everywhere. Through the integration of field trips into the classroom curriculum, children are able to acquire literacy, numeracy, further their creativity, and build community with one another in concrete ways that make sense to their young lives.