

Garbage Truck Project Reflection

4/17/2013

Since the beginning of the school year all of the children at Stepping Stones have been fascinated by the garbage truck. They would get so excited every time the garbage truck arrived, yelling and jumping up and down, and screeching when the dumpster would be tipped into the truck.

Over several months, the children began chanting different phrases ("Garbage Truck!") when the truck would arrive. Holly and I gravitated towards their enthusiasm and started encouraging their interest in the weekly pick up. We decided to find out the garbage man's name, which is Jim, and our project has taken off from there.

Once we found out Jim's name the kids' chants started to change. We've heard "Thank you Jim!", "We love Jim!", and "Go, Jim, Go!". And, over time, Jim started to respond to the children. Every morning he would ask, "How's it going?" or say, "Have a great day kids, stay warm!", and the children loved it!

One Friday after Jim had left, a couple of the kids decided we should make Jim a gift for Christmas. Everyone got super excited and worked together on painting and putting together our own garbage truck. It was made out of boxes and recycled material from school. The children also made a card and asked Jim questions in it such as "What's your last name?", "What's your favorite part about being a garbage man?", and "What's your favorite color?". We left the presents on top of the dumpster the Friday before our holiday break and waited anxiously for Jim to arrive. When he got there, he grabbed his garbage truck gift and card, smiled, and thanked the children for his presents. He put them in the front seat of the truck and all the kids started yelling with glee.

The children also decided they wanted to give Jim a Valentine's Day present. So, Holly and I worked with them to make heart banners and signs, and Holly and the kids decorated the dumpster with the Valentine's Day decorations. The children also made another card for Jim that said, "Happy Valentine's Day!" When Jim arrived that day he was thrilled to see what the school had done and thanked the children over and over again for making the dumpster beautiful for him.

Throughout this time, Holly created a Garbage Truck Journal. Inside, the kids have been drawing pictures of their experiences and asking us to write their words. Holly and I have also been using it to document what happens each week when Jim comes to our school.

About a month ago, Holly and I were having a dialog and decided we wanted to do something more to help the kids show their appreciation for Jim and all the hard work he does. We also wanted to figure out a way to teach the children about what happens after the garbage is picked up. We decided to create a Garbage Truck Appreciation Week. We contacted William Herring at Casella Waste Management and told him what we wanted to do. We were planning to present Jim with gifts of appreciation, and we were wondering if we could set up a field trip to the main plant so the children could see the next steps in processing our trash. William wrote back and was thrilled to be a part of our plan! He told us he will send extra men out the day we give Jim his presents so they can take pictures. He also said he would love to have us go to the plant for a tour, and would have safety vests the kids could wear. The gifts will be given May 17th, and the field trip will be May 18th. Holly and I made invitations for all the families and so far everyone has been very excited to be a part of this community event.

I love the work we have been doing with the children on this project. It has really heightened their awareness about the importance of all the jobs that take place in a community. By putting a name and face with the task, they are learning that there is always a important and special person involved in taking care of the community as a whole. I also love the variations that can be made with this project. I'm excited to take it to the next level - the postman and office, the local fire department, construction crews, police officers, so many different community members can be explored! I feel very strongly that the more our students learn about the work people in their community do, the more conscientious they will become, and they will grow into community supporters and advocates as adults.

This reflection is only the beginning of my introspection on this project. I can't wait to see where else it takes us and what I learn as a teacher and community member myself from it!

~Dawn