School Garden Project – Learning strategies

Hungary – Balassi Bálint Primary School, Eger

One of our project's aims was to create a school garden at each school to enhance learning experiences for our students while studying life cycles, plants and nutrition.
Unfortunately the yard at our school is not suitable to start a garden, so we agreed that each class would grow plants in their classroom. Some classes started with seeds, others with seedlings. They could select the plants: several students chose flower seedlings, like petunia or geranium; the others preferred vegetables, such as tomato, green pepper, or herbals like thyme. We also wanted to decorate the school yard itself, so the eight-class students planted flowers in plastic bottles, and hung them on the windows.








The ten-year-old pupils in Class 4. c took part in the garden project considering learning strategies, which they called ‘Green City”.

The idea the pupils wanted to present with their project was that people leave big cities. They move to the country far away from high-rise blocks. Modern housing estates become abandoned. Since people’s polluting activities come to an end, plants find their new homes in the blocks, at the top of the houses. Green Cities are formed. People may return to these cities, but then they take care of their environment more carefully.

Activities

1. Before starting the project we asked the pupils to use a survey to identify their learning style. They defined what a learning style is. In groups they shared how they do their homework and discussed the environment in which they work best. Finally they completed the survey. Using the worksheet information they gained a better understanding of themselves as a learner. We hope that by evaluating the way they prefer to learn, they will be able to develop strategies that will enhance their learning potential.

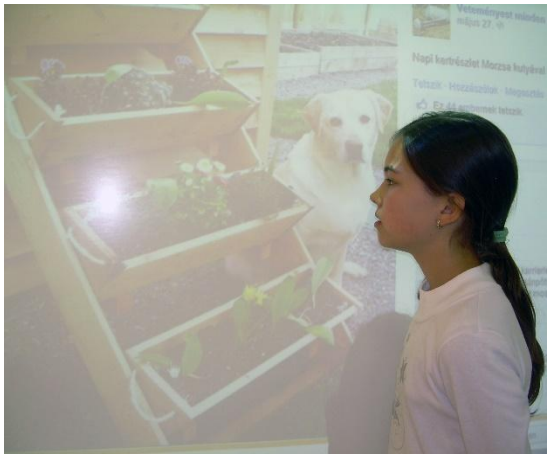
2. The project started with observing our surroundings. The pupils went outdoors. They took a walk on the housing estate where our school is situated. They realised that there is not much greenery around the high-rise blocks. Plenty of open space and more plants, especially trees would be necessary so that people would not feel alienated, lonely and depressed.


3. After the walk they discussed in groups why it is so important for us to be surrounded by green vegetation. They came up with the ideas that greenery produces oxygen, keeps away dust and noise, and provides shadow.

4. It also turned out that the pupils do not have the knowledge how to take care of plants. Therefore they went on a field trip to the training farm of the local agricultural secondary school. The kids were shown how plants are grown in a greenhouse; they were told what plants need to stay alive. Though they did not farm there, they were taken for a drive in a tractor.




5. The next task in the project included collecting information about how to grow plants. The children agreed to grow plants that are native to our area. They researched the topic in the school library and on the Internet. They decided as a class what types of plants to grow. As it takes the seeds quite long to germinate, they fixed on using seedlings brought from the training farm.



6. The pupils were involved in reading comprehension tasks. The texts on the paper containers of the seeds were used. The children had to complete a questionnaire according to the information written on the paper bags.

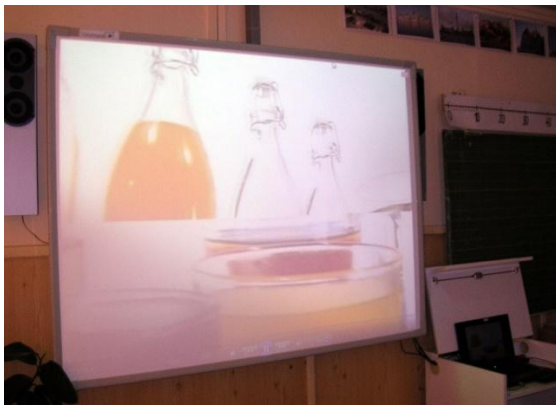
7. The children created pictures from corn and seeds using natural materials.

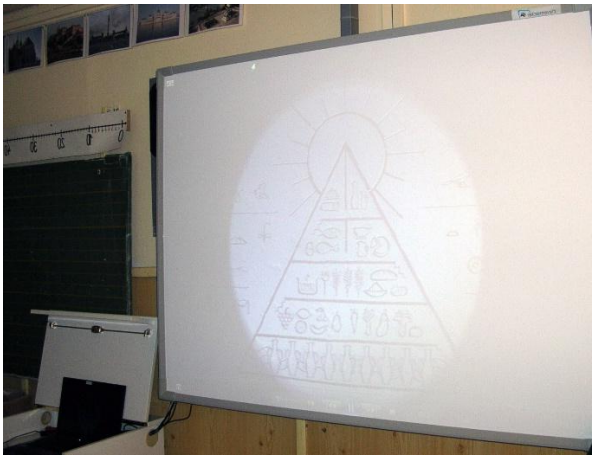
8. The pupils learned about the different types of garbage and the importance of selective waste collection. They collected materials that can be recycled, and were determined to use plastic bottles and milk cartons to create their 'living corner' called 'Green City'.

9. They created the blocks of flats of the 'Green City'.

10. The seedlings were planted in their new ‘homes’. The ‘Green City’ was put in a place where it was highly visible to the public. Afterwards the ‘inhabitants’ of this city were looked after by the pupils.

11. We invited a counsellor to the classroom to talk about food systems and healthy nutrition.



12. The pupils discussed why it is worth growing vegetables and fruits without chemicals. They took a walk to the market where they talked to the gardeners who sell organic vegetables and fruits. Finally the kids were encouraged to persuade their parents and grandparents to have eco gardens at home.

Theoretical background

Our goal was to provide students with foundational experiences that would foster knowledge, interest and lifelong subsistence skills. We designed both individual and collaborative classroom and out-of classroom experiences by which the students engaged in teamwork, reflective thinking and the process of inquiry with a lot of enjoyment.

The methods we used in this project were:

- school trips
- individual reading
- making experiments
- observing
- researches
- practical, manual work
- interpreting informative texts, materials
- using encyclopaedias

Types of activities that were applied:

- group work
- individual work
- cooperative work
- frontal observing
- surfing the Internet
- listening to lectures
- interpretation of different guides

Skills and competences we wanted to develop:

Key competences:

- communication in the mother tongue
- mathematical competence and basic competences in science
- digital competence
- learning to learn
- social competence
- sense of initiative
- cultural awareness and expression

Other competences:

- protecting health
- way of thinking
- problem solving
- the competence of scientific reasoning
- aesthetic and artistic competence
- fostering teamwork

The aims we wanted to achieve were:

- to observe the interaction between living and dead nature;
- to protect the environment: the importance of the effects of changing weather – global warming;
- to develop habits, behaviour that protect the environment;
- to respect nature, to take responsibility for taking care of plants;
- to learn about the characteristic features of plants;
- to create a delicate environment at school;
- to develop a healthy lifestyle.

The educational aims we wanted to reach were:

- to find the right way among the amounts of information
- to enjoy manual labour – the „fruit of our work”
- to experience positive feelings
- to develop manual abilities
- to apply the acquired knowledge
- to develop mathematical competences: quantities, estimation, measuring
- to be able to interpret illustrations and signs
- to use equipment and instruments without accidents
- to avoid lavish lifestyle
- to be able to draw conclusions
- to work in a time-saving way

Summary

The project activities engaged the pupils in active learning and offered opportunities for investigation, experimentation, and inquiry. The children worked together toward a common goal. Through the tasks, the kids were taught the value of effort, discipline and teamwork. The opportunities to take responsibility and work with others built their self-esteem. They learned how a collective effort can create big results.