

1/27/08

To Whom It May Concern:

The educational scientist known as “Dinosaur Dan” came to our Head Start classroom two times during the fall. He worked with the children in a large group setting. He did experiments with them involving suspension, litmus paper, spiders and the making of spider webs. While they worked he imparted a great deal of information to them. He never spoke down to them, and always used the correct terminology. He offered positive reinforcement in very specific terms, telling them “You held the litmus paper very steady in the suspension liquid” or “Your spider web is very well attached to the paper”. He was never impatient, and repeated himself as often as need be without ever using baby talk or less than accurate terms. He left information for parents, detailing what their children had worked on and what the objectives were. He also included follow up projects parents could do with their children at home.

After he left I heard the children using the same terms. They tried to repeat the experiments. I had three children very seriously dip their napkins into their milk and my juice cups at lunch to see if the liquid would ascend. One boy told me “I am experimenting to test out my hypothesis.” When we found a spider on the classroom floor two full weeks later, instead of screaming and stomping it they crouched at a respectful distance, counted its legs, decided it was indeed a spider and not an insect because it had eight legs and two body parts, and wanted me to find some butterflies to feed it because they remembered that Dinosaur Dan said spiders eat butterflies.

I feel the children learned a great many things from just those two visits. They learned the proper words. They learned facts about the natural world. They learned about the process of experimenting. I still hear them discuss experiments and hypotheses when they use magnets or work at the water table. And the most important thing they learned was summed up by one little girl when her father came to pick her up after his second visit. She said “Daddy, I am very good at science!”

I too learned. I learned that I can do simple science experiments in my classroom without having a PhD in the subject. I confess I was always a little intimidated by the idea of science in the classroom, feeling it would require specialized knowledge I do not have. Since his visits I have been bolder in implementing science in the daily curriculum. I would very much like the opportunity to learn more from Dinosaur Dan and his colleagues, and I would love to see my children receive the benefits of his knowledge and his understanding.

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