

Mysteries of the multifaceted forest

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(Teacher Training Primary and Grammar School
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Project diary

Nowadays, sustainable development is the focal point of the whole world's attention. At our inner city school, it is one of our main priorities to shape our students' perspectives, as well as form and sustain their appreciation of nature. Because of this, we have been consciously focusing on environmental education since the 1990s. With the inclusion of differentiated, flexible, and cooperative learning management, we have created a complex development programme which supports science studies and enables students to acquire the skills necessary for generating, testing, and reviewing hypotheses and theories, as well as reflecting on these processes.

Activity 1: My pet

Introducing pets with the use of posters, pictures and text. Some parents volunteered to bring their child's pet turtles or rabbits to school. Students had an opportunity to learn about what it takes to be a responsible pet owner. This activity sparked students' interest and gave them a chance to share their experiences.



Activity 2: Visit to the Tudástár (scientific exhibition hall)

At Tudástár (scientific exhibition hall), we attended a lecture, through which students explored forest creatures, such as plants, animals, and fungi by utilizing the artifacts on display. The main purpose of this activity was to expand students' knowledge. The groups paid close attention to the lecture, then they gathered useful information from the experts and the artifacts' labels.



Activity 3: Visit to the zoo – observing wild animals

This activity was important because children living in the city rarely get the chance to see wild animals, and seeing them up close provides a different experience than watching them on film. Students were happy to collect feathers and antlers, and they gathered information through direct experiences. The activity provided them with an opportunity to analyse similarities and differences, as well as to enhance systematic thinking skills.

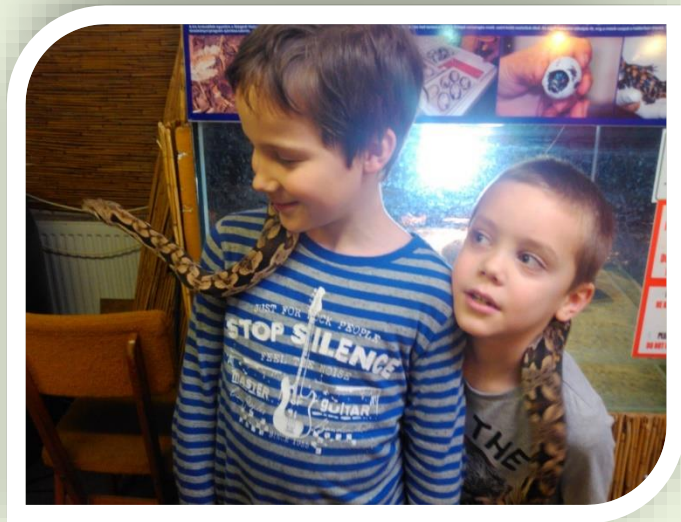


Activity 4: In the SzeReTeD laboratory

In the SzeReTeD (Szegedi Regionális Természettudományos Diáklaboratórium – Regional Student Laboratory in Szeged) laboratory, students observed unicellular organisms and types of moss that are invisible to the naked eye. Drawing on students' natural sense of curiosity, the activity presented ample opportunity to introduce children to experiments, discovery-oriented learning, and scientific knowledge.

Activity 5: "Yucky" animals

During a visit to the zoo, students met live animals, including less popular, "yucky" animals.



Activity 6: Learning and sensitization

Involving live animals in the activities is a unique and effective method for learning and sensitization. We achieved this by visiting the zoo and bringing a therapy dog to one of the activity sessions. The students quickly took a liking to the dog, however, it was occasionally difficult to make it do certain tasks. By the end of the session, students understood that they have to give clear instructions in order to make the dog cooperate with them.



Activity 7: Making posters

After the introduction, the groups chose topics related to forests, researched relevant information, then they selected the most important and most effective photos and articles, and used them to make posters. The research portion required students to be highly cooperative, so they used the internet to stay in touch. Some of the posters were informative or environment-themed, while others focused on extinct species and the possible reasons behind extinction. This activity enhanced students' creativity and critical thinking skills. By the end of the program, every student understood the notion of biodiversity, the importance of biological balance, the circle of life in nature, and environmental protection. They became aware of the importance of looking for the reasons behind the phenomena that they experience in nature, and searching for connections between them.





Reflections

Teacher' reflections

Through the programme, students were introduced to elements of research-oriented and discovery-focused learning, and they also became aware of the diversity of the world that surrounds us. They started caring about the environment and we managed to teach them how to recognize nature's peculiarities, as well as notice beneficial and harmful events regarding the environment. The selected activities improved students' cooperative skills. They learnt a lot of new information and enjoyed all of the activities. We established fruitful collaborations with several institutions and experts.

Students' reflections

Student 1: We are students from SZTE Gyakorló Gimnázium és Általános Iskola (Teacher Training Primary and Grammar School of the University of Szeged). We would like to introduce our project, which is about the wonderful world of forest creatures, namely unicellular organisms, fungi, plants, squirrels and woodpeckers. Our favourite part was the fact that a drop of water contains so many creatures – this is something that we had not known before. We observed these under the microscope. We were really happy to be there. We started preparing days before the project, and everyone was excited about it. Standing in front of the camera was the most exciting part. Everyone took part in the activity, because it was so interesting that all team members were paying attention. We recorded the first part at the SzeReTeD laboratory and the second part in our classroom. Our classroom activities included making posters, playing with a therapy dog and demonstrating the food chain. Then we visited Szeged Zoo, where we saw some "yucky" animals. At the end of the programme, we listened to presentations about everyone's projects at Arany János Általános Iskola (Arany János Primary School) and we even got to try them. Participating in this programme was a unique experience.

Student 2: Showing my bunny was great, because many of my classmates thought it was cute, and they wanted to

have one as well. After the presentation, they thought about whether or not they could take care of a bunny properly. We have to take care of pets all the time, even when they get old or when we want to play with them.

Student 3: I was really scared of the visit to the zoo, because I find all creepy crawlies and bugs disgusting. Touching the snake was not so bad; I thought it would be different.

Student 4: Making posters and playing with strings was a great activity. It was interesting to see how many connections there are in nature.

Student 5: I was very surprised when I looked into the microscope and saw creatures swimming around.

Student 6: It was great to observe so many different animals and learn about their habitat. With the group, we discussed the importance of environmental protection and preventing extinction.

Student 7: Unfortunately, we can only use computers in small groups, so I could hardly wait for my turn. I was a bit surprised to see that we had to take a test, but I was relieved to see that the tasks were fun. We only lost two points!