Using Teacher Dialogue to Bring Nature Based Learning to Kindergarten: The Hippo Inquiry.

Abstract:
During a three month period, partner and student teachers were involved in a hippo inquiry project with two classes of kindergarten children. Their collaborative investigation centered upon pursuing this essential question: How are people living respectfully with hippos? They did so by learning about the Calgary Zoo’s support of the Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary (WCHS), a unique community-based project, protecting and preserving the wildlife and environment of a 40km stretch of the Black Volta River in Ghana’s upper west area. Nurturing a classroom climate that invites young children to explore and make discoveries inherent in an emergent curriculum was integral to this work. Together the teachers explored teaching strategies which helped them work effectively with children of diverse backgrounds, interests and skills. Valuing connections with the world outside the classroom motivated this teacher team to invite a zoology professor, a zoo education director, and a naturalist to deepen this nature based inquiry.

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