

Making Transparencies with Plant-Dyed Fleece
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One spring, while casting about for ideas for Mother's Day gifts, I thought of window transparencies. This is an activity in the realm of light and color, which I do like the children to experience; it also provides a "small-muscle" challenge which is beneficial, especially for the older children. In the past I have tried, in addition to transparencies made with flat tissue paper bits, those made with sculptured tissue paper, and the result can be quite lovely. For many children, however, the process -- and this, after all, is the essential aspect for the children -- was not very satisfactory. Most of them tended to crumple the tissue paper tightly, necessitating quite a bit of teacher intervention if the end product was to be kept in mind at all. Based on this experience, I wonder whether this type of transparency is better suited to older children.

In any case, the idea occurred to me of making transparencies using plant-dyed fleece (fairy wool), and this turned out to be one of the most satisfying special projects we have tried. The children of all ages (young 4's to 6+'s) enjoyed the whole process, particularly the handling of the fleece, fluffing it and looking through it at the light. It was interesting to me that some children (in all age groups) made specific designs or pictures (a rainbow fragment, a pet cat in the grass, flowers, a house), while others simply arranged the colors in a seemingly random way. Yet every single child seemed to feel at peace with what he or she was doing and with the end result as well. The transparencies were quite lovely, but the process was from my point of view equally pleasing!

These transparencies could certainly be done at any time of year, and might be particularly appropriate for Christmas.

Materials needed

Light-weight white poster board, cut into "window frames" (I prepared these in advance, doing some of the cutting during class time. In doing such projects, I like to do as much of the preparation as possible in the children's presence so that the work becomes part of the life of the kindergarten. When the children ask, "What is that?" I always reply, "You'll see!")

Tracing paper cut to a size to cover the open part of the window (also prepared during class time).

Elmer's glue; Q-tips

Glue sticks (I usually avoid these, preferring a more direct experience of glue or paste -- but for this project glue sticks are best.)

Plant-dyed fleece (I offered the rainbow colors in pastels: pink, yellow, light green, light blue, violet. A little goes a long way!)

Crochet cotton and needle, for making hanging loops.

Procedure

A week or so in advance, I made an experimental transparency at home and then, without comment to the children, hung it in the classroom window. (On the day we began making the transparencies, one little

boy exclaimed, "I wondered what that was!" But interestingly, no child attempted to copy what I had done before.)

On the first day, we glued the tracing paper to the back of the window frames. Each child had a square of stiff paper with a little "puddle" of Elmer's glue on it, and a Q-tip for applying the glue around the frame. I helped each child to lay the tracing paper on straight and smooth it. For this step, the frames were not labeled with the child's name; we were preparing the frames for the class. By so doing, I wanted to avoid entering the "this is mine" mentality right away. In fact, some of the youngest children, who were not showing an interest in this activity, were allowed to continue playing, and some of the older children were allowed to help by preparing more than one window frame.

On the next day, the children, working a few at a time, made their transparencies. Using the glue sticks, they covered the front side of the tracing paper with glue. Then they pulled off smaller or larger pieces of fleece, fluffing and pulling it until light could shine through, and then arranged it on the sticky tracing paper. If a child worked especially slowly, the glue might dry up, in which case a bit more glue could be applied. The finished transparencies were set aside "to dry."

Over the next day or two I sewed hanging loops onto the tops of the frames and hung the transparencies in the classroom windows where they remained a few days until it was time to wrap them and take them home for Mother's Day. Many of the children enjoyed looking at them in the windows during the days they hung in the classroom.