

Designing with Children

LA CASA

LA CASA (The house) is a classroom project developed in 2013 as part of the 3rd, 4th and 5th grades academic program at the Rural Champitas Education Center located in the Urabá region of Antioquia in Colombia.

Motivation

The project consisted of a series of in-class and extra-curricular activities whose main goal was to generate awareness of the places that the students live in and the basic factors that shape and transform the surrounding environment. The program engaged the broader community of Champitas in this process; children's parents and families worked together with the students at the Centro Educativo in order to develop a better understanding of their local surroundings and public and residential spaces that they use. The activities were thus designed to enable children to develop a range of skills and abilities. These are described below.

Children's involvement

The project comprised the following three stages for children's involvement:

Educational Walks: These walks aimed to stimulate children's observation skills and a sense of orientation. The first activity as part of these walks involved the identification of people, animals and plants which co-habit the local environment. The participant children were invited to respond to the question: 'What is it that I like best about my village?' Children then engaged in a process of learning and practicing mapping techniques, by means of placing focal points in a 'map of my village'. The following questions guided them in this process: 'Which roads are there in my neighborhood?'; 'Where does the sun rise?'; 'In which direction does the wind blow?'; 'Where is my house?'; 'Where is the school?'; 'Where is the store?'; etc.

What

School project: developing place awareness

Where

Champitas Village, Chigorodó, Antioquia, Colombia

Age

7-14

Group Size

30

Project Stage

Construction, In Use

Children's Roles

Builders, Placemakers

Timescale

School year 2013

Partners

Carolina Estrada (Architect, teacher)
Third, Fourth and Fifth Grades 2013, Centro Educativo Rural Champitas (Student participants)
Institución Educativa Nel Upegui (Partner)
PIA FUNDACIÓN AUTÓNOMA EDUCATIVA (Partner)
Organización ENSEÑA POR COLOMBIA (Partner)
Gobernación de Antioquia (Partner)
Parents, families and the community in the village Champitas (Participants)

Creative Challenges: These activities sought to develop in playful ways children's problem solving skills. The students were asked to engage creatively with a range of materials either alone or in teams. For example:

- *Spaghetti Tower*: a group activity, whereby children competed over building the highest tower through use of spaghetti and tape.
- *Let's build with sticks and paper*: a free activity, which encouraged the exploration of forms and assembly of parts.
- *Neighborhood with chalk walls*: drawing on two-dimensional architectural drawings of houses, the children were assigned in teams places (lots) on the ground. They then drew their houses with chalk, thus developing an understanding of two-dimensional space.
- *Model house in which I live*: students created with their family members a model of their own house, simulating the shape, materials and colors.

Central Workshop: This was the last and central activity within the project, named 'Build a house with materials of the village'. On one level it involved the collection of waste materials found in the nearby environment and, secondly, the exploration of space and affordances of the collected materials. The goal of this exercise was for the children to engage in building a full-scale house.

Outputs and outcomes

Being a classroom project, 'LA CASA' was further enriched with master classes on specific topics around design techniques and placemaking. These were then evaluated and graded taking into account factors such as the active participation of the students, initiative, and creativity. The project offered a fun and creative context for the students to apply design and building concepts in their real, everyday environments. Both on a learning and engagement level, therefore, the outcomes observed were particularly positive, as the project generated great interest and commitment on the part of the children.

LA CASA was the winner of the UIA Architecture & Children Golden Cubes 2014 competition, Schools category.

Acknowledgements

A warm thanks to Carolina Estrada who provided information about the project LA CASA and co-authored the above text.





Educational Walks. Courtesy: Carolina Estrada.



Educational Walks. Courtesy: Carolina Estrada.



Educational Walks. Courtesy: Carolina Estrada.



Creative Challenges. Courtesy: Carolina Estrada.



Creative Challenges. Courtesy: Carolina Estrada.



Creative Challenges. Courtesy: Carolina Estrada.





Central Workshop. Courtesy: Carolina Estrada.



Central Workshop. Courtesy: Carolina Estrada.



Central Workshop. Courtesy: Carolina Estrada.