



ARTISTS in the classroom

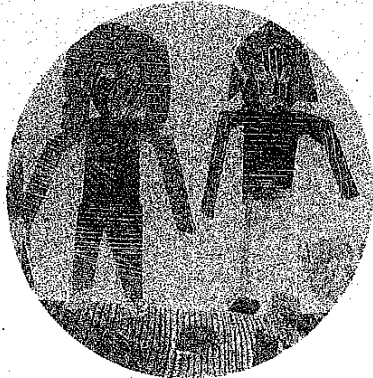
TEN COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

LITERACY THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY • THE CENTER FOR DOCUMENTARY STUDIES

PROJECT: **Club Kid: Creating a Class Magazine**

LOCATION: **Club Boulevard Elementary School** • TEACHER: **Lisa Lord**

ARTISTS: **Alex Harris & Robert Shreefter** • GRADES: **Fourth and fifth**



The twenty-nine students in Lisa Lord's fourth-and-fifth-grade combination class at Club Boulevard Elementary School worked for a semester to produce a class magazine, *Club Kid*, during the fall of 1997. Photographer Alex Harris directed sessions on editing photographs, and Robert Shreefter, an artist, held workshops on making collages.

Alex Harris: I put aside my own photographic work for five years to help launch and edit *DoubleTake* magazine. The premise of the magazine—and for that matter of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke that published *DoubleTake*—is that there can be real value in documentary work: for the person making the photograph or writing the story, for the subject of the piece, and ultimately for the audience of the work. *DoubleTake* looks for authentic voices, whether well known or unknown, and has published numerous pieces by and about children around the world.

For this reason it made a lot of sense for me to work with collage artist and teacher Robert Shreefter to help put out a documentary magazine by young people. Like *DoubleTake*, we wanted to publish the kids' magazine in as beautiful a way as we could so that the magazine would resemble the children's original artwork as much as possible. We also wanted a magazine that would be seen as a celebration of the lives it documents, a publication the children and their families would want to keep.

From my first meeting with Lisa Lord's students, I was impressed by work the students had already been doing that could be expanded to become part of the magazine project. They were visiting Durham's Methodist Retirement Home on an ongoing basis, going to area businesses to see how they worked, and taking class trips to other sites like Camp New Hope. They were writing poetry and stories as part of a daily writing workshop and making photographs as part of the Literacy through Photography program.

During my first visit to the classroom, Robert and I both talked to the students about our work and discussed what this magazine might be like. I showed them photographs I had made in North Carolina, New Mexico, and Alaska. Students pointed out things that interested them

DETAIL FROM A CLUB KID COLLAGE

in the pictures—lighting, motion, content—which we subsequently discussed in detail.

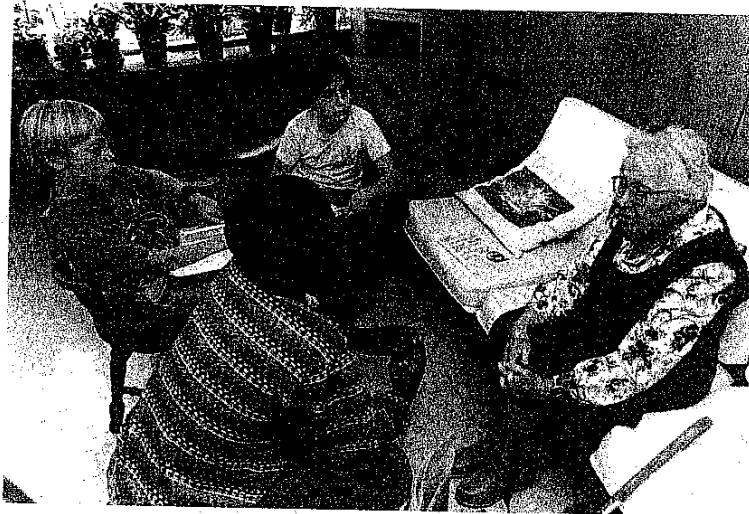
On following visits, we edited the students' photographs and discussed why some photographs worked better than others. This was the most important and challenging exercise; the students had a difficult time going beyond choosing photographs in which they or their friends appeared.

The students and Lisa Lord decided on five subjects for the magazine: recess, the Methodist Retirement Home, lunch at school and dinner at home, Halloween, and the visit to Camp New Hope. In each of these categories, students from different sections of the class worked in different mediums: collage, poetry, photography, nonfiction and historical reports.

The key to the success of the project was the classroom teacher, Lisa Lord. The magazine became the culmination of several projects she had already begun.

Robert Schreefter:

My teaching is guided by the philosophical idea and pedagogical practice that education and schooling must be student-centered. School experiences need to enable students to discover their own talents (rather than constantly telling students what they can't do or aren't good at). The best learning takes place when students value their experiences, feelings, and insights, and are aware of a positive relationship between what's being taught and their own skills, language, and knowledge.



ABOVE: STUDENTS TALK WITH A RESIDENT OF THE METHODIST RETIREMENT HOME
BELOW: CLUB KID MAGAZINE PAGE ON A RESIDENT OF THE METHODIST RETIREMENT HOME

Elizabeth Grissom

She loves hummingbirds,
She was born in Dunn.
We have to speak loud so she can hear us,
And she is a lot of fun.
She likes Halloween.
Her costume's a skeleton.
She likes to sew
And she has one son.
She has sewn two dolls with her own hands,
She likes to watch birds,
And she likes to listen to Christian bands.

by Andrew Lance



Andrew Lance and Christine Werner are standing with Mrs. Grissom outside her very decorated door.

Photograph by Rebekah Fuerst

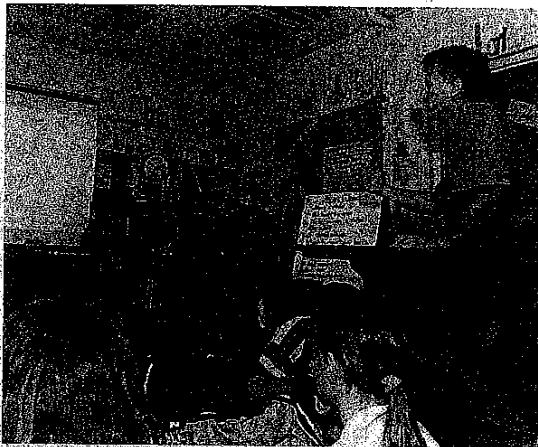
In the *Club Kid* project, students participated in the long and complicated process of creating their own magazine. They generated themes and topics for articles, and were asked to find their own way of focusing these pieces by considering their own lives and experiences, likes and dislikes. Students used photography and collage to document their lives and interests, as well as learning or enhancing artistic and technical skills.

Connecting many disciplines, students brainstormed, wrote (and rewrote), edited, held peer-review sessions, and made editorial decisions about which pieces needed more work. They conducted interviews and made friends with senior citizens. They made paste paper collages, took photographs, worked in the dark room. During these processes, students learned important lessons about translating ideas and written pieces into a visual language. They also learned a language to critically evaluate others' work and make suggestions.

The *Club Kid* project drew students into a process that made sense of every aspect of the process—from conceptualizing the content to creating the "look" of the magazine to binding the magazines by hand.

Often students were successful, but sometimes they were bogged down by self-perceptions of being "bad writers," "bad artists"; were scared of trying new things or failing at old ones. This process allowed students to learn new skills in a context that was purposeful and positive.

Participants were encouraged to be cooperative and think of



TOP: ALEX HARRIS SHARES HIS PHOTOGRAPHS WITH THE STUDENTS
MIDDLE: ROBERT SHREEFTER AND LISA LORD DISCUSS LOGISTICS
BOTTOM: ROBERT SHREEFTER AND STUDENTS MAKING PASTE PAPER

learning and creating as a community enterprise. Students planned a project together, set goals, made decisions by consensus, and assessed community needs.

Lisa Lord: I spend most of my time in the world of children, and I wasn't sure what to expect of this make-a-magazine idea. What would it mean? What would we learn? In my world of children, we write for real purposes, expecting that someone will read what we write and appreciate our messages. We publish writing in hand-sewn books, cards, class newspapers, pieces entered in contests, and on posters. We also take photographs and share our artwork every week.

Throughout the fall there were many indications to the students that writing for the magazine *Club Kid* was especially "real"—what adults do. There was much mention of *DoubleTake* magazine. We looked at back issues, met with Alex Harris, visited the Center for Documentary Studies, and also met Camilo José Vergara (a visiting artist at the Center)—this was adult stuff. Then there was the discussion of the expense of reproducing the magazine, giving parents an opportunity to pay for extra copies, entering into the negotiations of who would print the magazine for how much money, and who would pay. Big bills, adult stuff.

Students applied for the opportunity to work on collages and writing with Robert Shreefter. They brainstormed with Alex Harris, editor of *DoubleTake* magazine; Julia, our volunteer photography teacher; and me to determine subject matter for the magazine.

CLUB KID



A MAGAZINE BY LISA LORD'S FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADERS AT CLUB BOULEVARD HUMANITIES MAGNET SCHOOL

VOLUME 1

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From the selected subjects we then made assignments for photographers and writers. Cameras went home. Students met with Alex to select photos. They proofread papers, added captions, and critiqued the layouts Alex, Robert, and I assembled. They were treated seriously by the editor of *DoubleTake*.

When I looked back on the production of *Club Kid*, I realized there were several aspects of the project that the children did not experience: setting the schedule, laying out the pages on Christmas Eve, dealing with

computer glitches, making decisions about page numbers, collating and folding pages, and stitching seventy copies with a needle and thread. I felt apologetic that everything wasn't child-done. I wondered if I had cheated them out of something. Might they have learned more? So what if the stitches were sloppy, the holes ragged, the paper-cutting uneven, the title silly?

Then I thought about the new dimension this project had added to my adult life: I got to spend time in the world of

The Nature Hike

On the nature hike we went around Camp New Hope Lake. While we were going around the lake we stopped to look at some things like a plant that grows on trees and tree stumps. It is a green, small, and fluffy plant. The reason we stopped was to count the rings on the trees. One of the trees had 110 rings inside it.

When we got half way around the lake we saw frogs. Some of the frogs were hiding in the mud. We ran after them. Everyone caught one.

When we got to the dock we picked up long sticks and dropped them in the water. Then I picked up a stick and dumped it in the water. I picked up the stick again. When I picked up the stick it started to drop. When it dropped into the water it made little circles, then they turned into big circles.

As we left the dock we saw a little tree. It was a little tree with red berries. Those berries are called dogwood berries. I picked six or seven. I found out that the inside looks like cheddar cheese, and if you put those berries in a plastic bag with water, it will sprout by itself. Then we got back where we started and that was the end of the nature hike.

how to make a classroom magazine

The students will work in three mediums: writing, photography, and collage. Have your students choose four to five subjects to explore for their magazine. Spend approximately two weeks working on each subject matter.

Writing

If you are already involved in a writing project with your students, have them use their writing time to work on pieces for the magazine. If you do not have a set writing time for your class, create one in which the students will write poetry, essays, and reports on a specific subject matter for the magazine.

- Interviewing skills are essential when reporting. Have your students develop questions to ask the person they will interview, and have them practice asking the questions. Through practicing they will be able to gauge the amount of information they will receive and how to rework the question to make it more effective.
- Plan on editing continuously throughout the project. After students have completed their writings on a specific subject, have them break into small groups and edit each others pieces for clarity and substance.
- Have each group select one writing piece to submit for final printing after each session.

Photography

- Talk to the students about photography and the concept of "exploring" their environment through the camera.
- Have your photographers take pictures of the subject matter for the magazine.
- Plan on spending approximately three months on this if the students will be processing and printing their own photographs for all of the subjects of the magazine—if the processing and printing is being done elsewhere.
- Once a body of photographic work has been produced, hold at least two editing sessions. The first editing session should be used to talk about composition, lighting, and print quality. In discussing these aspects of the photographs, the students should edit out at least half of their photographs. The second editing session should focus on matching up the photographs with writing samples that have been selected. Discuss why certain images illustrate the selected writing pieces better than others.

Collage

- One option, in terms of time, is to collaborate with the art teacher at your school to use art time, in the art room, to make paste paint and paper for their collages.
- Collage is a technique whereby pieces of material, usually paper, are arranged in layers to make a design or image. It