

The Project Approach in Action

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Introduction

Projects, like good stories, have a beginning, a middle, and an end. This temporal structure helps the teacher to organize the progression of activities according to the development of the children's interests and personal involvement with the topic of study.

During the preliminary planning stage, the teacher selects the topic of study (based on the children's interests, the curriculum, the availability of local resources, etc.). The teacher also brainstorms her own experience, knowledge, and ideas and represents them in a topic web. This web will be added to throughout the project and used for recording the progress of the project.

Phase 1: Beginning the Project

The teacher holds discussions with the children to find out what experiences they have had with the topic and what they already know about it. The children represent their experiences and show their understanding of the concepts involved in explaining them. The teacher helps the children develop questions that their investigation will answer. A letter about the study is sent home to parents. The teacher encourages the parents to talk with their children about the topic and to share any relevant special expertise.

Phase 2: Developing the Project

Opportunities for the children to do fieldwork and speak to experts are arranged. The teacher provides resources to help the children with their investigations; real objects, books, and other research materials are gathered. The teacher suggests ways for children to carry out a variety of investigations. Each child is involved in

representing what he or she is learning, and each child can work at his or her own level in terms of basic skills, constructions, drawing, music, and dramatic play. The teacher enables the children to be aware of all the different work being done through class or group discussion and display. The topic web designed earlier provides a shorthand means of documenting the progress of the project.

Phase 3: Concluding the Project

The teacher arranges a culminating event through which the children share with others what they have learned. The children can be helped to tell the story of their project by featuring its highlights for other classes, the principal, and the parents. The teacher helps the children to select material to share and, in so doing, involves them purposefully in reviewing and evaluating the whole project. The teacher also offers the children imaginative ways of personalizing their new knowledge through art, stories, and drama. Finally, the teacher uses children's ideas and interests to make a meaningful transition between the project being concluded and the topic of study in the next project.

This summary explains some of the common features of projects, but each project is also unique. The teacher, the children, the topic, and the location of the school all contribute to the distinctiveness of each project.