

THE PROJECT APPROACH: Making Curriculum Come Alive

By Sylvia C. Chard, PhD

Reviewed by Joyce Mesrobian, M.Ed

Young children are inquisitive. They ask questions, wonder about things, and like to investigate interesting phenomena in their world. The Project Approach feeds into this whirling pool of constant wonder by involving children in an extended, in-depth exploration of a topic that is meaningful to them and lends itself to careful, developmentally-appropriate inquiry.

In this clearly-written, practical guide, Dr. Chard discusses the main features of the Project Approach with its three distinct phases: Phase 1 – Getting Started; Phase 2 – Gathering Information about the Chosen Topic; and Phase 3 – Concluding the Project.

Phase 1- It is important to note that the children choose what to investigate. The teacher role is that of guide and facilitator. Through engaging in discussions and questions concerning a topic such as the “school bus,” “building a house,” or “planting a garden,” the children develop a baseline of what they know and what they want to know. A topic web is created by the teacher and children, and needed materials are discussed. The entire project may take a few weeks or several months and involve several children or all the children in the classroom.

Phase 2 - The children, with the help of their teacher, plan field trips to gather topical information. They also read or listen to books read aloud on the subject, or explore the internet. The children then represent their gathered information in artwork, journals, graphs, labels, books, or 3-D objects, and share their findings with their classmates and teacher.

Phase 3 – Children compare their new evidence with what they knew before the start of the Project. They document their findings on bulletin boards and share their findings with parents and other guests.

Throughout her teacher-friendly guide, Dr. Chard provides a host of useful tips for implementing each phase, such as how to make a topic web, what questions to ask the children, how to plan a field trip, and how to assess the interest level and learning.

THE PROJECT APPROACH is a highly accessible resource for all teachers, from preschool through elementary grades, who wish to introduce the Project Approach into their curriculum to offer engaging learning opportunities to young children.

Reviewer’s Note: For more information on the Project Approach, I recommend the website <http://illinoispip.org>, designed under the guidance of Dr. Lilian Katz and Sallee Beneke at the University of Illinois, that contains a wealth of information including examples of a number of Projects completed by young children.

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