

Project Planning Journal

Name of Teacher _____

Project Title _____

Project Dates _____ to _____

School/Center _____

Age Level _____

from

Young Investigators
The Project Approach in the Early Years
(2nd edition)

By Judy Harris Helm and Lilian Katz

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Introduction to the Project Planning Journal



THE PROJECT PLANNING JOURNAL serves two purposes. The first purpose is to support and encourage teachers while they are learning how to do a first project. Along with the chapters in this book, *Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years*, the Journal provides step-by-step guidance through the decisions that a teacher has to make in doing a first project with young children. It helps teachers prepare, plan, and implement a project with young investigators in their own classroom.

A second, unplanned, purpose for the Journal was discovered as teachers who already knew how to guide projects with young children began to use it as a convenient way to organize their thinking and record information. It enabled them to keep track of their planning tasks, the events of a project, and their documentation. For busy teachers, it provided reassurance that they were preserving the key information about each project. More important, the Journal appeared to provide a place and a purpose for reflections. These reflections were often then shared with colleagues.

The Project Planning Journal is designed to be reproduced by teachers for use in various ways. (It may be photocopied from the book or printed from a PDF version that is available for free download from www.tcpres.com.) Some teachers put copies into three-ring binders and add pages for additional notes, scrapbook pages, or pocket folders for photographs. The main task in each phase of the project is presented, questions to consider are listed, and Teacher Journal boxes (highlighted with **TJ** icons) are provided for teacher reflection. Areas and activities that offer good opportunities for parental involvement are identified with **P** icons. Some principals and directors of programs prepare such notebooks for their staff to encourage project work. As Project Planning Journals accumulate with second and subsequent projects, teachers, as well as centers or schools, can build a data bank of their project experiences. This encourages teachers to look back on their own development as teachers guiding projects and provides ideas and support for teachers new to project work.

On page 3 of this Journal appears the handout “How We Are Learning: An Introduction to the Project Approach.” This handout can be given to parents at the beginning of the year to explain project work. It can also be sent or hand-delivered by teachers to field-site staff and given to experts before visits. The handout can also be included as a take-away when project work is displayed.

The project flowchart described in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.5) is reproduced on page 4 of this Journal to assist in planning and to remind teachers of the structure of the project approach. Teachers report that revisiting the flowchart and then finding the corresponding pages in the Project Planning Journal provides a sense of direction and focus to their daily planning. Sections of the flowchart are reproduced throughout the Journal to serve as landmarks to show where specific activities fit into the larger picture. If you are working with toddlers, you will want to study the flowchart for toddlers that appears on page 5 of this Journal (reproduced from Figure 7.13) and review Chapter 7 regarding planning activities to match the knowledge and skills of toddlers. Comparing the flowcharts side by side will provide additional insight into how project work can be adapted to serve the younger set.

The Project Planning Journal is a guide, a road map for a journey. Projects, like journeys, do not always take the direct route. There may be side roads followed, detours taken that enrich and delight. This book, this Journal, and the flowcharts show the lay of the land, where roads lead and where one might go. These guides are not like a blueprint for a building that must be carefully and precisely followed. Where the journey goes and where the children and teacher end up are decided by them together.

How We Are Learning: An Introduction to the Project Approach

What is the project approach?

The project approach is a method of teaching in which an in-depth study of a particular topic is conducted by a child or a group of children.

How is it different from others ways of learning?

Our children study one topic for a long time period. The topic is selected partly because they were interested in it and it is meaningful to them and their lives. The children will go into great depth and often at a level higher than many adults would expect for this. The teacher integrates content knowledge like math, reading, and science into the project.

How is a project planned?

The children make many of their own plans with the teacher's help. Plans usually include an on-site visit and/or interviews with experts. An expert is anyone who knows a great deal about the topic of study.

How will children learn?

Children use a variety of resources to find answers to their questions. These include traditional resources like books. They also conduct in-depth investigations on site visits. The children plan questions for interviews and have assigned tasks for trips or for interviewing experts. They make field notes and draw or write on site. They make plans for building structures and play environments that will help them sort out what they are learning about the topic.

Children do their own problem solving with the teacher structuring problems and assisting in finding solutions and resources. Children will redraw and rewrite as their knowledge grows. Some of the ways that they will record their learning are project books, posters, murals, artwork, graphs, charts, constructions, and journals.

How does the teacher know if children are learning?

The teacher collects children's work, observes what they do, and analyzes their work. This is called documentation. The curriculum goals of the school or center are reviewed and documentation is planned to be sure that children are learning concepts and skills specified in the goals. Often a display will be prepared that shows what students are learning.

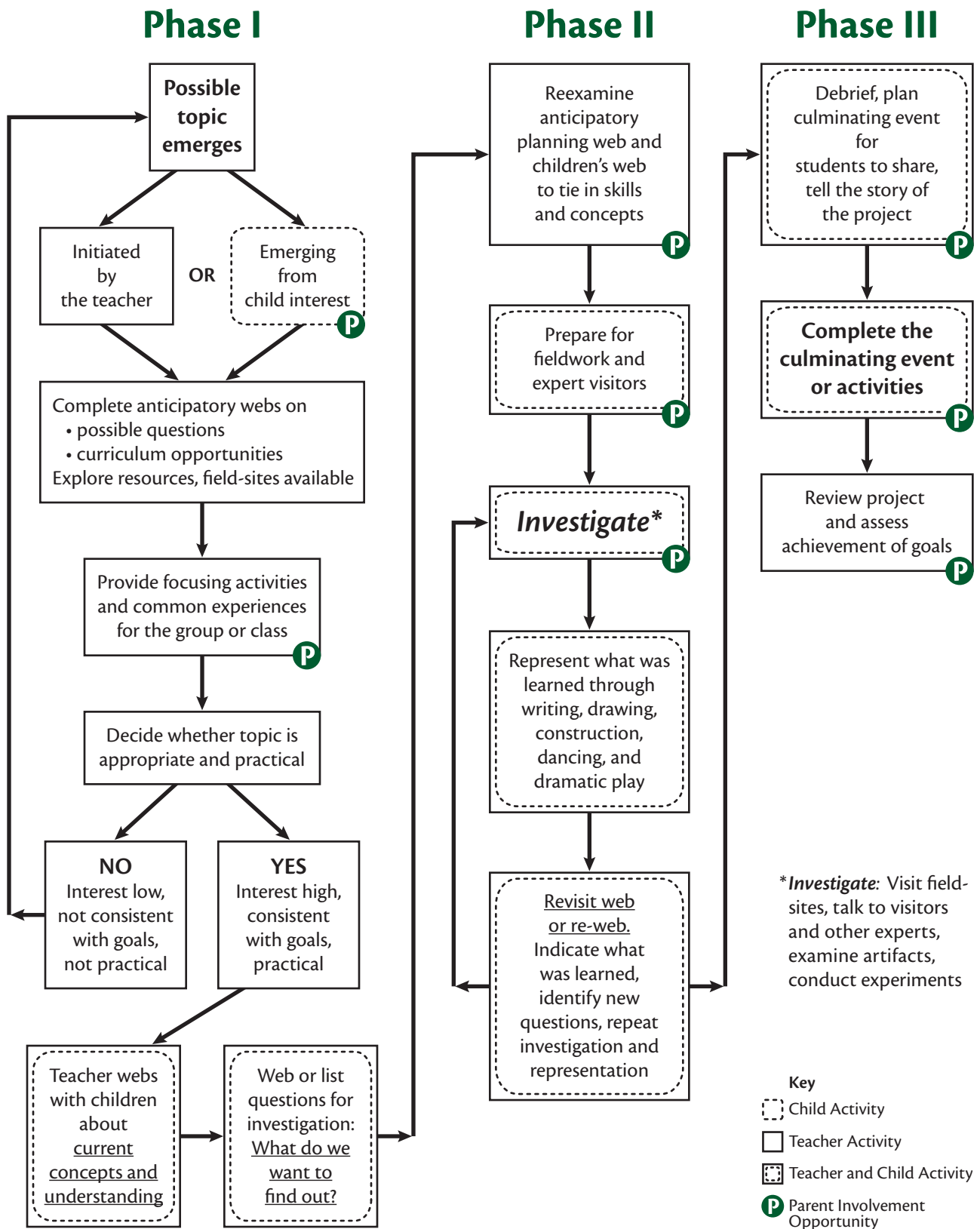
Is this the only way these children are learning?

The project approach is one way among a variety of ways that children learn. The project integrates much of the same knowledge and skills presented in more formal ways in the classroom. Projects have the added advantage of providing an opportunity for children to apply and use what they are learning as they solve problems and share what they know. It provides opportunities for developing group skills such as working with others and challenges children to think, which supports brain development.

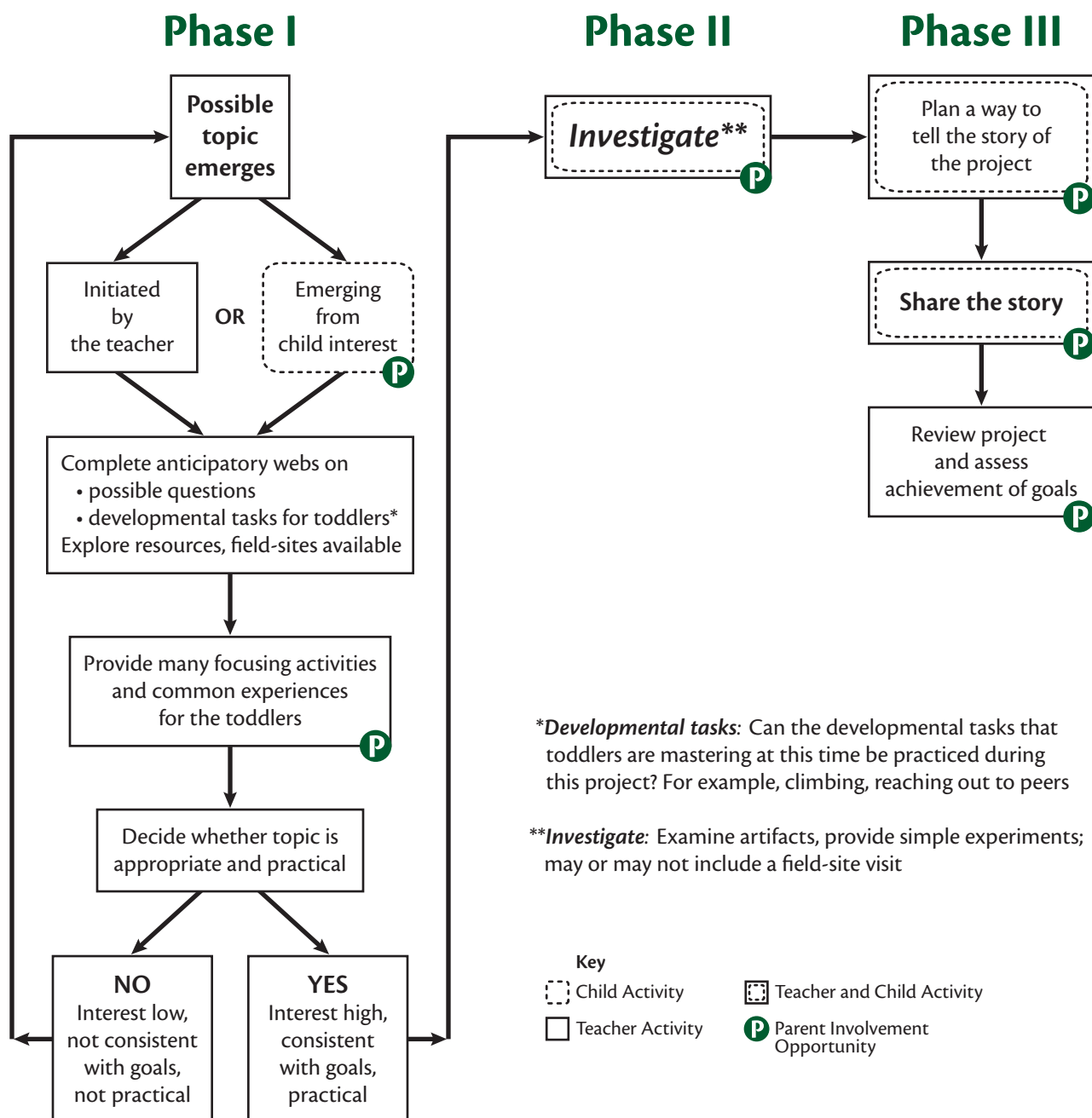
How can others help with projects?

Realize that children have their own questions and are learning to use you and many resources to find answers. Take their questions seriously, and listen to what they have to say. Provide space and opportunities for them to draw or photograph what they are studying. Children learn best when many senses are involved, so anything that they can touch, see up close, or hear is helpful. Things that can be borrowed for study in the classroom are valued and appreciated, especially parts of machines, tools, samples of products, and so forth. We hope you will follow up, view our documentation, and find out how children have processed what they have learned.

Phases of a Project

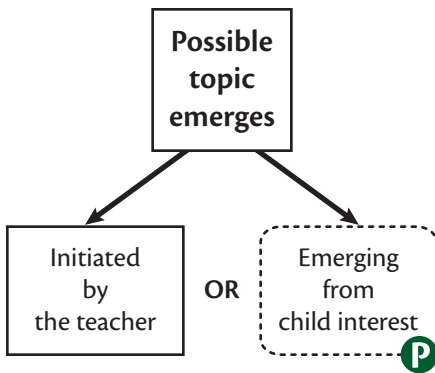


Phases of a Project with Toddlers



PHASE I • Beginning the Project

Determining Children's Interest and Selecting a Topic



What general topics appear to interest the children in your classroom?

How did you learn about their interest?

- Conversations Drawings Observations Questions Parent report

If a student-initiated topic does not emerge, the curriculum can be examined for broad topic areas. Is there an event or learning experience coming that could be used as a starting point? A walk around the school and neighborhood will often result in identifying something in the vicinity that might interest your children.

What are your curriculum goals for the children this year? Attach a list of curriculum goals to your journal. Are there some topics that are both of interest to your children and a part of your curriculum goals?

Select a few topics of interest and apply the criteria for selection of a topic for a project (see Chapter 2). If this topic were to develop into a project, would the experience have value for children?

Will it

- Help young investigators understand their own experience and environment more fully and accurately?
- Strengthen the disposition to look closely at phenomena in their environments worthy of appreciation?
- Provide ample opportunity for children to employ a wide variety of interactive skills and dispositions while conducting the investigation?
- Provide opportunity for children to develop insight into the functions and limitations of a variety of different media and develop skillfulness in applying the various media to their work?

What topics that your children find of interest meet the criteria for topic selection?

Complete anticipatory webs on

- possible questions
- curriculum opportunities

Explore resources, field-sites available

Make an Anticipatory Planning Web

Make a web to see if the project can be integrated with your curriculum. If you do not have a required curriculum experiment with some of the anticipatory webs described in Chapter 2. If you do have a required curriculum, follow the webbing process described in Chapter 6.



Teacher Journal: Planning Web

Copy your anticipatory planning web here.



Teacher Journal:
Topic Selection

Take time to reflect on your selection of this possible topic.
Record your thoughts.

What are your reasons for selecting this topic?

What possible directions could it take?

What content or skills would be strengthened?

What do you know about this topic? What would you like to know about this topic?

Trying Out a Topic and Getting Started

Provide focusing activities and common experiences for the group or class



The project can begin in several ways: Children express an interest, teacher introduces a topic, or a topic is agreed upon by children and teacher (Katz & Chard, 1989). For young children, it is helpful to spend some time introducing the topic.

Topic: _____ Date Phase I Began: _____

Establish Common Ground

The main idea is to establish a common ground among the children by pooling the information, ideas, and experiences they already have about a topic. Build a shared perspective. During preliminary discussions, the teacher encourages talking about the topic, playing, and depicting current understanding in many ways. (Katz & Chard, 1989, p. 82)

The younger the children and the more diverse the group, the more time the teacher may need to spend creating a common understanding. Teachers may provide several experiences for children relating to the topic. Children will need enough knowledge about the topic to develop questions for investigation.

What event can be used to focus the children's attention on this topic?

- Book Video Related objects Discussion Dramatic play

Notes/Results:

P Is there an opportunity to involve parents in focusing events?

What do the children already know about this topic? How can their knowledge be recorded?
For ideas on how to access children's prior knowledge, see Chapter 2.

- Web List of questions Drawings/constructions Recording discussions

Notes/Results:

Extend Children's Interest and Build a Common Vocabulary

What resources can be used to stimulate interest and clarify questions?

- Books Construction materials Visitors Artifacts **P**arent contributions

Notes/Results:

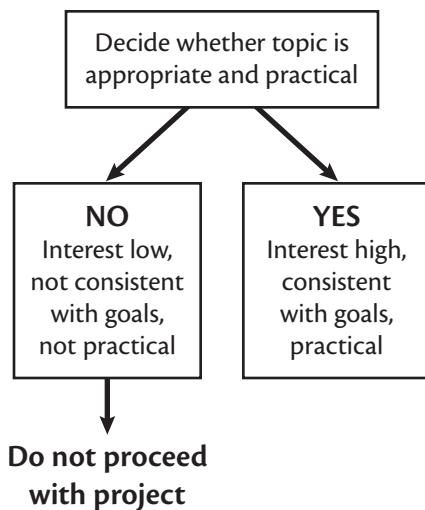
How are the children showing what they already know about the topic? How are they beginning to explore the topic?

- Drawings/sketches Paintings Constructions Play Language products

What can be done to encourage representation?

Notes/Results:

Deciding Whether the Topic Is Appropriate for a Project



If this topic were to develop into a project, how practical would it be for a project for young children?

Is this a topic that

- Is more concrete than abstract?
- Involves an abundance of first-hand, direct experiences and real objects that young investigators can manipulate?
- Is easily related to their prior experiences?
- Has related sites nearby that can be conveniently visited and even revisited?
- Young children can research with minimal assistance from adults? Can it be researched without relying only on secondary sources like books, Internet, or video?
- Children can represent what they know and learn by using skills and techniques appropriate for their age?
- Is culturally relevant to the children and their families?

Is this topic still a topic of interest?

- No, because children's interest in this topic has waned.
- Yes.

Does this topic have merit for curriculum integration?

- No, it does not fit curriculum goals.
- Yes.

If the answer to either of the above questions is no, you can continue to explore the topic as a teacher-directed unit or move on to other topics. Wait for a better topic for a project.

If both answers are yes—the children are interested and this has promise of being a valuable learning experience—then proceed with the project.

Plan for Documentation

Take time now to think about documentation.

Review the following list of ways to document. For more information on documentation see Chapter 6 and consult *Windows on Learning: Documenting Young Children's Work* (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1998a, 1998b).

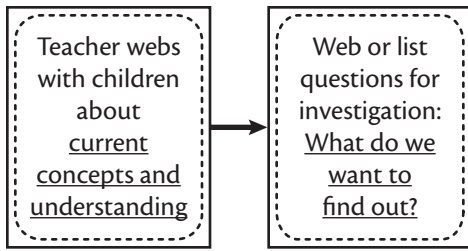
What types of documentation can be used for this project? Come back to this page often during the project. Write down what has been collected for each type.

- Project narratives: Telling the story
- Observations of child development: Watching the child
- Checklists of knowledge and skills in curriculum
- Anecdotal notes
- Individual portfolios
- Individual and group products:
 - Written language products: Signs, letters, books
 - Verbal language products
 - Webs and lists
 - Pictures
 - Representational pictures: Time 1 and Time 2 pictures, symbolic pictures
 - Music and movement
 - Constructions: Play environments, sculpture, blocks, or building toys
- Self-reflections of students

Are there characteristics of this topic that make one type of documentation more effective than another?

Are there school or center personnel who can be asked to help with documentation?

P Are there parents who can help with documentation (i.e., photographing, taking dictation, videotaping)?



Determining What Children Know and What They Want to Find Out

In a large or small group, talk with children about what they know about the topic. What concepts and understanding do they already have about the topic? How will you record it?

Webs Lists

Notes/Results:

With the children, record what they want to know about the topic. What initial questions have been generated for possible research?

Webs Lists

Notes/Results:

PHASE II • Developing the Project

Reexamine anticipatory planning web and children's web to tie in skills and concepts

P

Project Topic: _____

Focus of the Topic: _____

Date Phase II Began: _____

Reexamining the Instructional Planning Web

Now that a topic has been selected, reexamine the planning web. What curriculum goals will integrate into the project? Are there experiences that should be provided at times other than project work times? If the topic has changed significantly from the anticipatory web and there is a required curriculum, consult Chapter 6.

TJ

***Teacher Journal:
Looking Ahead***

What can the children gain from this experience? What content and skill development do I hope to see? What dispositions do I hope will be strengthened?

Preparing for Investigation

Prepare for
fieldwork and
expert visitors



The emphasis during this phase is on introducing new information and finding answers to questions. This phase can include visiting field-sites, talking with visitors who bring real objects to the classroom, and examining books, photographs, or artifacts. Children are encouraged to follow their interests and find answers to their questions.

How can the investigation become focused?

- Discussion New web List of questions Assigned tasks

Notes/Results:

What additional resources should be brought into the classroom to enable and support in-depth study?

- Books Artifacts Visitors
 Websites Construction materials Parent contributions

Notes/Results:

What skills might the children need help with? These skills are described in Chapter 3 with suggestions for practicing and integrating these skills. These skills are also learned during the project.

- How to pose a question to an adult
 How to tally data
 Observing and talking about what they observed
 Observational drawing and field sketching
 Using construction tools and materials such as tape, glue, staplers
 Using clay
 How to use camera or video

How can the children best be prepared for field-site experience?

- Discussion Practicing skills Reminders Rehearsal

Notes/Results:

Planning for Field-Site Visits

Arrange Transportation

Do I need to arrange for transportation to a site? Do I need permission slips from parents?

Communicate with Field-Site Personnel

How will I prepare the field-site personnel to maximize investigation opportunities for my children?

- Phone call Pre-trip visit by teacher Reminder letter "How We Are Learning" handout

Checklist for discussion with site personnel (see Chapter 3 on preparing site personnel)

- Safety issues involved in this site visit
- Importance of child investigation and direct first-hand experiences
- Importance of real objects, especially those with which children can interact by using their senses
- Overview of what the children currently know and understand
- Overview of what the children are interested in learning (share some of the questions they might ask)
- Explanation of how children will record what they see, what they think, and what they find out (tape recording, video, clipboards, writing, photographing)
- Opportunities for demonstration of a task or activity
- Possible items or scenes that children may sketch or record
- Artifacts (tools, equipment, products, etc.) that can be borrowed and kept in the classroom for further investigation
- Importance of having a guide or host with experience in communicating with young children

Notes from discussion:

Plan and Prepare for Adult Helpers/Chaperones **P**

How many children will go on the visit? _____ How many adults are needed? _____

What preparations should adult helpers have?

- Phone call Request letter Meeting Reminder note "How We Are Learning" handout

Checklist to cover with adult helpers:

- Safety issues involved in this site visit
- Information about particular children who might require special assistance
- Importance of child investigation and direct first-hand experiences
- Importance of children interacting with real objects and using their senses
- Overview of what the children currently know and understand
- Overview of what the children are interested in learning (share some of the questions they might ask)
- Explanation of the importance of seeing adults model drawing, writing, or recording
- Explanation of how they can help children record what they see, what they think, and what they find out (tape recording, video, clipboards, writing, photographing)
- Possible demonstrations of tasks or activities, and items or scenes that children may sketch or record
- Artifacts (tools, equipment, products, etc.) that may be borrowed and brought back for further investigation
- Time schedule

Gather Materials and Supplies for the Field-Site Visit

Materials and supplies needed:

- Clipboards
- Recording equipment: Camera Camcorder Tape recorder
- Paper, pencils, art materials
- Bags, boxes, or other containers for materials collected
- Other

Organize the Children **P**

How will children be organized for the experience?

- Children assigned to specific adult Groups with a specific task One large group

How will responsibility for children be assigned to adult helpers?

List adults who are helping and list children by groups.



TJ

Teacher Journal: **Field-Site Visit**

Write a narrative about what happened during the field trip. Where did the children go? What did the children see and do? With whom did they interact? What were the highlights of the experience?

Arranging for Visiting Experts

Will the visitor come into the classroom? Do I need to schedule a room or space?

Communicate with the Visiting Expert

How will I prepare the expert visitor to maximize the opportunities for investigation for my children?
(See also Chapter 3)

- Phone call Reminder letter “How We Are Learning” handout

Checklist for discussion with visiting experts.

- Safety issues involved in this visit. Will items brought into the classroom be safe for children to explore?
- Importance of child investigation and direct first-hand experiences
- Importance of real objects, especially those with which children can interact by using their senses
- Overview of what the children currently know and understand
- Overview of what the children are interested in learning (share some of the questions they might ask)
- Explanation of how children will record what they see, what they think, and what they find out (tape recording, video, clipboards, writing, photographing)
- Opportunities for demonstration of a task or activity
- Possible items for the expert to bring that children may sketch or record
- Artifacts (tools, equipment, products, etc.) that can be borrowed and kept in the classroom for further investigation
- Importance of using language that young children can understand

Notes from discussion:

Plan and Prepare for Adult Helpers **P**

Would it be helpful to have additional adults in the classroom when the visit occurs?

How many adults are needed? _____

What preparations should adult helpers have?

- Phone call Request letter Meeting Reminder note “How We Are Learning” handout

Checklist to cover with adult helpers:

- Safety issues involved in this visit
- Information about particular children who might require special assistance
- Importance of child investigation and direct first-hand experiences
- Importance of children interacting with real objects and using their senses
- Overview of what the children currently know and understand
- Overview of what the children are interested in learning (share some of the questions they might ask)
- Explanation of the importance of seeing adults model drawing, writing, or recording
- Explanation of how they can help children record what they see, what they think, and what they find out (tape recording, video, clipboards, writing, photographing)
- Possible demonstrations of tasks or activities, and items or scenes that children may sketch or record
- Artifacts (tools, equipment, products, etc.) that may be borrowed and kept for further investigation
- Time schedule

Gather Materials and Supplies Needed When the Visiting Expert Comes

- Clipboards
- Recording equipment: Camera Camcorder Tape recorder
- Paper, pencils, art materials

Plan Interactions with the Visiting Expert P

How will children be organized for the experience?

- Children assigned to specific adult
- Children individually approach or observe the visitor
- Groups with a specific task
- One large group

How will responsibilities be assigned to adult helpers? If adult helpers will be assisting with groups of children, list the groups here.

TJ

Teacher Journal: Expert Visitor

Write a narrative about what happened during the expert's visit. What did the children see and do? What were the highlights of the experience?

Represent what was learned through writing, drawing, construction, dancing, and dramatic play

Representing What Was Learned

How will children review their experiences and fieldwork?

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss sketches | <input type="checkbox"/> Review photos | <input type="checkbox"/> Time 1/Time 2 drawings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dictate experience | <input type="checkbox"/> Revise webs | <input type="checkbox"/> Answer questions on list |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scrapbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Display | |

Other:

How can children be encouraged to use secondary sources?

- Introduce books Add to choices in room Encourage play, creation of play environment

How can the children represent what they have learned about the topic?

- Drawings/sketches Paintings Constructions Play Language products

What do I need to do to encourage representation?

How can the following experiences be provided through this project?

- Problem solving: What can children figure out on their own?

- Application of construction skills such as taping, gluing, organizing materials.

Working together as a group.

Using a variety of ways to represent what they are learning and to communicate, such as drawing, building, dramatic play, writing, constructing, musical expression, and so forth.

TJ

***Teacher Journal:
Children's Dispositions***

Write a narrative about the children's dispositions and the development of their investigation skills. What dispositions are you seeing expressed during their project work? Are the children actively engaged in the project?

Revisit web
or re-web.
Indicate what
was learned,
identify new
questions, repeat
investigation and
representation

Revisiting the Children's Web and List of Questions

What have children learned? Did they find the answers to their questions?

Are there new questions for investigation? How might they be answered?

What would be helpful for the children to have?

- More resources such as books
- Additional experts to visit
- Additional field-site visits
 - Same site revisited
 - Different site
- Revisiting of documentation of field site
- More representation opportunities

What additional experiences can be provided?

Determine When to Culminate the Project

- Are the children satisfied with their new knowledge?
- Would further investigation require skills the children do not have (such as advanced reading and writing)?
- Are children just losing interest in the topic?

If the answers are *yes*, then the project is probably ready for culmination.

PHASE III • Concluding the Project

Debrief, plan
culminating event
for
students to share,
tell the story of
the project



In the third phase children bring work to completion and summarize what has been learned. It is important that children are able to “elaborate what they have learned so that its meaning is enhanced and made personal” (Katz & Chard, 1989, p. 84).

Sharing with Others What We Have Learned


What evidence of children’s learning can be gathered and discussed with them?

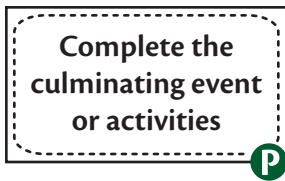
- Drawings/sketches Paintings Constructions Language products
 Final webs Lists Play

Discuss the project with the children. What do the children think they have learned?

With whom would they like to share their project?

How might the children share what they have learned?

- Exhibit
 Role-play in play environment
 Make histories of the project
 Write reports
 Plays, dramas, music
 Make individual scrapbooks or files
 School presentation
 Open house for parents 
 Presentation for parents
 Take home books
 Community displays



Reviewing the Documentation

What types of documentation have I used to document this project? Review the following list of varieties of ways to document (see Chapter 5; also Helm et al., 1998a, 1998b).

- Project narratives
- Observations of child development
- Checklists of knowledge and skills in curriculum
- Anecdotal notes
- Individual portfolios
- Individual and group products:
 - Written language products: Signs, letters, books
 - Verbal language products
 - Webs and lists
 - Pictures
 - Representational pictures: Time 1/Time 2 pictures, symbolic pictures
 - Music and movement
 - Constructions: Play environments, sculpture, blocks, or building toys
- Self-reflections of children

Consider the Next Project

Is there another topic that has emerged for further investigation?

Would this topic be a topic to investigate now or at a later time?

Review project
and assess
achievement of goals



Evaluating the Project: Learning How to Do It Better

TJ

Teacher Journal: Project Evaluation

Review the project. What have you learned about topic selection? Was this a good topic? Why did it work or not work for children's investigation?

Review page 15 (Phase II). Did children gain the content knowledge and skills that you hoped they would?

What did you learn about Phase I?

What did you learn about Phase II?

What did you learn about Phase III?

What would you do differently in the next project?

What suggestions do you have for other teachers working with the same age group or topic?

Evaluate Engagement in Learning

Apply the concepts of engaged learning to your project (see Chapter 5).

1. Did the children take responsibility for their own work or activity?

- Did they show that they have a voice in what they study?
- Did they take charge of the learning experience and explain or show the teacher what they wanted to do?

2. Were children absorbed and engrossed in their work?

- Did they find satisfaction and pleasure in their work?
- Were they developing a taste for solving problems and understanding ideas or concepts?

3. Were children strategic learners?

- Were they developing problem-solving strategies and skills?
- Did they apply what they learned in one experience to a similar experience?

4. Were the children becoming increasingly collaborative?

- Did they work with other children?
- Could they talk about their ideas to others?
- Were they fair-minded in dealing with those who disagreed with them?
- Did they offer each other support, suggestions, and encouragement?
- Did they recognize their strengths and the strengths of others?

5. Were tasks in the projects challenging and integrative?

- Were they complex, requiring sustained amounts of time over days or even weeks?
- Did tasks require children to stretch their thinking and social skills in order to be successful?
- Were children learning how literacy, math, science, and communication skills are helpful?
- Were all children encouraged to ask hard questions, to define problems, and to take part in conversations?

6. Is children's work from the project being used to assess their learning?

- Is there documentation of how children constructed knowledge and created artifacts to represent their learning?
- Is there documentation of achievement of the goals of the curriculum?
- Does the documentation include individual and group efforts?
- Does the documentation make visible children's dispositions in the project such as to solve problems, to ask questions, and so forth?
- Does the documentation include drafts as well as final products?
- Were children involved in the documentation process and encouraged to reflect on the documentation?
- Were children encouraged to generate criteria, such as what makes a good observational drawing or a good question?

7. *Did you, as a teacher, facilitate and guide the children's work?*

- Did you provide a rich environment, rich experiences, and activities?
- Did you encourage sharing of knowledge and responsibility?
- Did you adjust the level of information and support based on children's needs?
- Did you help children link new information to prior knowledge?
- Did you help children develop strategies to find out what they want to know?
- Did you model and coach?
- Did you feel like a co-learner and co-investigator with the children?

TJ

***Teacher Journal:
Final Narrative***

Write a final narrative on this project. Was this project an engaged learning experience for you and your children? What might you have done differently to increase engagement? Closing thoughts: