

The Project Approach: Anticipating What Children Might Learn



While the overarching goal of project work is to support young children in finding answers to their questions about the topic, it also can be helpful to ask yourself what you would like the whole group—as well as individual children—to gain from the project. Many teachers have found the following strategies useful when planning a project.

-  **Consider what you want all the children in the class to understand better.**
 - For example, a tree project will likely provide opportunities for children to observe, investigate, describe, and categorize living things. So one of your goals could be to have children name differences between trees and animals.
 - Consider opportunities to deepen children’s understanding across the curriculum. Does the topic afford opportunities for movement, cooperative work, finding information in books, role play, or comparing sizes and shapes? For example, in a project on trees, children might decide to work together to construct a tree, use books to learn about different types of trees, pretend to be creatures that live in a tree, and compare the sizes and shapes of leaves.
 - Create opportunities for children to begin to evaluate their own work for clarity and completeness.

-  **Think about what you want individual children to understand better.**
 - Keep in mind the levels of ability and knowledge within your group. For example, some 3-year-olds might remember three parts of a tree, while the 5-year-olds can identify many parts.
 - Think of ways to challenge children who quickly grasp new information. For example, children who can label parts of trees may be ready to compare tree needles and leaves.
 - Note ways to connect the project to the interests of specific children. For example, two children who know a lot about birds could lead a group looking for nests in trees.

-  **Plan ways to help children develop specific skills through project work.**
 - Create opportunities for the class to work on representation skills. For example, different groups can work on turning their field drawings into three-dimensional models of trees.
 - Look for ways to address a child’s specially designed goals through project work. For example, making field sketches of trees might help two or three children work on improving their pencil grip.

-  **Consider how the project might support children’s social competence and enhance their curiosity as learners.**
 - Plan some ways to invite a shy child into class discussions.
 - Plan group activities that give all children chances to discuss their ideas and help each other with tasks.
 - Plan opportunities for children to follow up on things they are curious about.
 - Find ways to help children think about what might interest others about the project and develop ways to inform them.
 - Build in activities that help children express appreciation for others’ work and ideas.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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