

The Project Approach: Phase 1—Getting Started



*Teachers can use the Project Approach to meet most of the Illinois Early Learning and Development benchmarks. Projects are like good stories. They have three parts: a beginning, middle, and end. Phase 1 usually lasts about two weeks, including selection of a topic. Here are some tips to help with getting the project started. (See also *The Project Approach: Phase 1—Choosing a Topic to Investigate.*)*



Find out what the children already know about the topic.

- Be sure the children are clear about what they will be investigating.
- Bring some items related to the project topic (such as objects, photos, or books), and invite the children to bring similar items from home. Let children handle the items, and invite them to talk about their own experiences related to the objects.
- Invite children to draw or paint pictures that depict their memories or ideas related to what they are studying.
- Read some nonfiction books that contain information about the topic.
- Use class meetings to involve the children in discussions of their own experiences and ideas related to the topic. During these discussions, create a topic web on chart paper to record and organize the children's ideas.



Make a list of questions the children would like to answer during their research.

- Ask the children what they want to find out about the topic. Instead of saying, “Do you have any questions?” ask them questions such as “When the nurse visits our class, what do you want her to show you?” Or “What do you want her to talk about (or explain)?”
- Rephrase children's statements. A child might say, “I want her to show how she fixes bones when they break.” Then you can say, “So your question is ‘How do you fix broken bones?’”
- Write the children's questions on chart paper. Or you might ask them to use drawings to depict their questions. You can add your own questions to the list, too.
- Ask children to predict the answers to their questions. List children's predictions and their reasons for them alongside the questions. The class will revisit this list during Phase 3 of the project.



Talk with the children about how to begin their research.

- Help them think about where they can go to do fieldwork.
- Talk with them about whom to invite to class to help them get information.

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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