

Project Approach Study Guide

This study guide offers educators an overview of the Project Approach and guides them through the process of developing and implementing a project in the classroom. Readings provide both practical knowledge and a theoretical framework, while assignments offer a flexible, step-by-step approach that allows teachers to learn in the process of trying out their first (or second or third) project in the classroom.

The Guide is an adaptation of the online course I used to teach from this web site. It is still a little like a course but designed for a teacher to study for him or herself.

Journal prompts with each of the seven sections offer opportunities for teachers to reflect on and refine their strategies, ideas, and practices. Establishing a regular journal writing routine is a fundamental part of project-based teaching as this is a process that evolves with reflection and experience.

The seven sections involve multiple readings and assignments. I recommend that teachers read through the entire guide before embarking on the first lesson. Many readings are housed on the Internet and accessible by link. If you print out this document, be sure to keep an electronic version so that you can read the content under each link.

Enjoy the journey, and please get in touch with questions or comments along the way!

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A Grade 2 project on Communication

Essential and useful Texts

Katz, L.G. and Chard, S.C. (2000) *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach, Second Edition*. Stamford, CT: Ablex. [link to: <http://www.projectapproach.org/store/>]

Please choose option A or B below. Option A represents an updated, Web-based series of practical guides about the Project Approach published in 2009, and option B represents two 1998 print publications. Either option will work for the study guide, and both are available for purchase in the **Project Approach Online Store** [link to: <http://www.projectapproach.org/store/>]. Please read the descriptions in the online store to decide which option better suits your needs, as one is Web-based (and includes links to supplemental resources), and the other is print.

OPTION A

Chard, S.C. (2009) *Practical Guides for Engaging Minds with the Project Approach, 1 - 6* [link to: <http://www.projectapproach.org/store/>]

Titles of the 6 Practical Guides:

1. *Projects and the Curriculum: Seeing the Possibilities*
2. *Features of the Project Approach: A Framework for Learning*
3. *Making a Start on Context: Planning in Context*
4. *Phase 1. Launching a Project: Students' Initial Understandings*
5. *Phase 2. Developing a Project: Building the Knowledge*
6. *Phase 3. Concluding a Project: Presenting the Work*

OPTION B

Chard, S.C. (1998) *The Project Approach: Making Curriculum Come Alive (Book One)*. NY: Scholastic. [link to: <http://www.projectapproach.org/store/>]

Chard, S.C. (1998) *The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects (Book Two)*. NY: Scholastic. [link to: <http://www.projectapproach.org/store/>]

Many sections of this study guide include supplemental readings (listed at the bottom) available on-line or in most university libraries.

Section 1: Project Approach Introduction

Objectives: This section introduces you to the theoretical framework and learning benefits of the Project Approach. Journal prompts guide you to reflect on your own teaching methods and to consider possible advantages of implementing the Project Approach in your classroom.

1. Begin by reading the information under the **Project Approach** section of the Web site [link to: <http://www.projectapproach.org/project-approach-m3>]. Also read the following:

Introduction and definition, L.G. Katz (1994), The Project Approach. ERIC Digest.
[Link to <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/ecearchive/digests/1994/lk-pro94.html>]

Theoretical background and rationale: Chapter 2 of *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach, Second Edition* and all information under the **Theory** [link to: <http://www.projectapproach.org/theory-s4>] section of the Web site, including the resources under each link. If using **option B**, also see chapters 1 through 4 of *The Project Approach: Making Curriculum Come Alive*.

2. Use the questions below to reflect on your own teaching and to think about what you might gain from this study guide. Jot down your responses in a journal.

What approaches do you use in your own teaching that may be most like the Project Approach?

What are some distinctions you can see between your current practice and what might be required of you if you implement the Project Approach?

What aspects of your teaching are you most happy with and least wanting to change?

How will the Project Approach complement those other parts of your program?

Are there some aspects of your teaching that you want to change?

Will the Project Approach offer opportunities for new ideas to help you make these changes?

3. In your journal, write a tentative list of goals you would like to achieve through this study guide.

4. Visit the Project Approach **blog** [link to: <http://projectapproach.org/blog/>], run by Sylvia Chard and hosted on the Project Approach Web site. Read some of the current and archived posts, and feel free to start participating at any time.

Section 1 Supplemental Reading

Pearlman, B. (2009) **New Skills for a New Century: Students Thrive on Collaboration and Problem Solving**. *Edutopia: The George Lucas Educational Foundation*. Retrieved May 22, 2009 < <http://www.edutopia.org/new-skills-new-century>>.

Burchfield, D.W. (1996) Teaching All Children: Four Developmentally Appropriate Curricular and Instructional Strategies in Primary Grade Classrooms. *Young Children*. November, 1996.

Section 2: Planning a Project

Objectives: This section builds on the theoretical foundation established in the first section by guiding teachers to take the first steps in planning a project for their own classroom. Readings and project examples provide a better sense of what might work well in your classroom, while also helping you integrate curricula goals and learning

standards into project work. Journal prompts encourage you to develop ideas and questions and to reflect on what was learned.

1. Consider the topics listed throughout *Practical Guide 3*, if using **option A**, or *The Project Approach: Making Curriculum Come Alive (Book One)*, if using **option B**—and browse through the **Project Examples [link to: <http://projectapproach.org/project-examples-m4>]** on the Web site. Come up with a topic of your own to use in your classroom.
2. Design a topic web by means of the procedure outlined in *Practical Guide 3 (option A)* or on pages 28-32 of *The Project Approach: Making Curriculum Come Alive (Book One) (option B)*.
3. Produce a second web that links your topic with the curriculum. List any knowledge, skills, or other curricular areas/learning standards that might be met with this particular topic, but take caution not to let curricular objectives too heavily guide the scope of the project. For more information, see page 95 of *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach* and *Practical Guide 1 (option A)* or page 44 of *The Project Approach: Making Curriculum Come Alive (Book One) (option B)*.
4. In your journal, discuss why you selected this particular topic. Make reference to your curriculum requirements, local resources, personal interests, and student interests and needs. Also reflect on the process of creating a topic web. What did you learn from this process, and what does it contribute to your project planning?
6. Plan some of the key events for the project. These can be planned loosely and provisionally (except for the field site visits, which need to be confirmed in advance), so that students can also be involved in the planning. **Option A:** Read the sections on fieldwork in *Practical Guide 2* (and all other sections in this guide, if you haven't yet done so) and review the section "Other Pre-Planning Steps: Resources and Key Events" in *Practical Guide 3*. **Option B:** Read pages 34-39 of *The Project Approach: Making Curriculum Come Alive (Book 1)*. Think about possible field sites that students might visit; also note any special expertise that might be available to you.
7. Begin to plan classroom centers for investigative and representational work likely to be undertaken as the project develops. **Option B:** See pages 13-26 of *The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects (Book Two)* to help with this planning. There will be time to elaborate these centers as the project progresses, but some thinking in advance will help you be open to more possibilities as students develop their ideas. Centers are best sparsely provisioned in the first phase of a project to encourage students to ask for what they need as they develop their ideas and plans for activities, dramatic play, or construction.
8. Carefully read at least three **Project Examples [link to: <http://projectapproach.org/project-examples-m4>]** from start to finish.

Section 2 Supplemental Reading

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of Katz and Chard's *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach* (2000).

Katz and Chard (1998), **Issues in Selecting Topics for Projects**. *Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting*. Retrieved May 22, 2009 [Link to <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/ecearchive/digests/1998/katzpr98.html>].

Section 3: Phase 1, Starting a Project with Students

Objectives: This section begins with a number of readings about the initial stages of the Project Approach. These readings help you build a toolbox of strategies for introducing the project to students by tapping into what they already know about the topic. This lesson also includes activities to try out in class to enhance students' knowledge base and discover the potential of the topic. Journal prompts allow you to brainstorm and reflect on strategies.

1. Read about the **EKWQ (Experience, Knowledge, Wondering, and Asking Questions) approach** [link to <http://www.projectapproach.org/blog/experience-knowledge-wondering-and-asking-questions-a15/>]. Note that this approach much better suits the Project Approach than KWL (*What do I know? What do I want to know? What did I learn?*).
2. **Option A:** Read *Practical Guide 4*. **Option B:** Read pages 13-26 of *The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects (Book Two)*.
3. Read chapters 6 and 7 of *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach*.
4. Introduce the topic of study in the classroom. In many cases, this is best done by telling a personal story of your own experience, which will model the sharing of experiences that you wish students to engage in. Your personal participation in the sharing of experience will raise the level of interest in the topic.
5. Encourage students to talk with each other and with their parents about their experiences with the topic.
6. Invite students to represent their experiences in a variety of ways at centers set up to facilitate their work. These centers should include opportunities for a variety of expressive outlets, such as drawing, painting, writing, collage, sculpting, constructing with blocks or recycled materials, and dramatic play; they might also include technologies, such as electronic journals or digital cameras.
7. Suggest a few investigative activities for some students, e.g. conducting a survey of the experiences of other students in class, interviewing students who have particular expertise, making comparisons of individual experiences (in pairs or groups), and

representing these in Venn diagrams (two or three circles) or charts (4 or more examples).

8. It is a good idea to plan a group time at the beginning and end of project time. This will enable you to set appropriate standards of work for your students. You can make especially productive use of modeling by using samples of students' work and having each student explain his or her work to the group.

9. Have each student prepare a folder within which to keep finished project work. This will be the source of material to add to the portfolio of each student after the project ends. It will also be a collection of work that students can take home at the end of the project. It is recommended that all completed project work remain in school until the end of the project. This is partly because it can serve as both a resource for other students during the continuing life of the project and as a collection of work for each student to share with their families at the end of the project.

10. Use the bulletin boards in the classroom to display students' work (at their level), with the expectation that they will learn from each other's experience and knowledge.

11. If the students are old enough (beginning to read), develop and post a web of ideas as these emerge from the discussion of students' experiences with the topic. When working with younger children, make notes on your own web of the ideas that children discuss in reference to their own experiences.

12. Discuss and formulate questions with students to be investigated in the second phase of the project. Post a list of these questions near the web. Add to the list throughout the first phase without answering them.

13. Send a letter home informing parents of the topic of study. Look at some examples under **Project Examples** [link to: <http://projectapproach.org/project-examples-m4>], such as the kindergarten pet project by Simone Shirvell. If using **option A**, see the sample letter in *Practical Guide 4*. Also read pages 111-112 in *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach* for ideas about involving parents in project work.

14. Establish a common baseline of understanding for the class before embarking on the next phase of the work. This can be done by making a topic web of ideas with students or by making a list of things they already know about the topic.

15. In your journal, write a post about your experiences starting a project with students. Discuss surprises.

16. Read the following examples under **Project Examples** [link to: <http://projectapproach.org/project-examples-m4>]: the project on school buses (pre-k/k) and on trees (ages 5 to 7).

Section 3 Supplemental Reading

Chapter 7 of Katz and Chard's *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach, Second Edition*

Laubenthal, G. (1998) The Pueblo Project. *Texas Child Care*. Fall Issue, pp 24-34.

Section 4: Phase 2, Developing a Project with Students

Objectives: This section walks you through the development phase of project work with students. It includes readings about how to prepare for and undertake fieldwork—and how to follow up on and make the most of fieldwork experiences in the classroom. A journaling assignment allows you to reflect on and consider the learning benefits of your field experiences.

1. Read about the value of doing fieldwork with students on pages 71-75 of *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach*. Also read second-grade teacher Dot Schuler's diary regarding her second-grade pet project under **Project Examples**. [link to: <http://projectapproach.org/project-examples-m4>] **Option A:** Review the section on fieldwork at the end of *Practical Guide 4* and at the beginning of *Practical Guide 5*. **Option B:** Read pages 26 and 28-35 of *The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects (Book Two)*.
2. Make a preliminary visit to the field site to assess its potential for fieldwork and to prepare personnel for the visit in the context of a project. Remember that fieldwork differs from more traditional field trips, and be sure to keep your visit closely aligned with your project goals.
3. If using **option B**, read about how to teach students fieldwork skills on pages 58-59 of *The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects (Book Two)*. **Both options:** Read these tips on **getting students ready for fieldwork** [link to: <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/projects-phase2-getting.htm>] from the Illinois Early Learning Project. Prepare students accordingly for the fieldwork to be done during the visit.
4. Make the field visit. Discuss the fieldwork with students afterward. Assess students' interests.
5. Discuss ideas for follow-up investigations in the classroom and representation possibilities for individual students, pairs, and groups working collaboratively.
6. Modify the centers in the classroom according to the activities soon to take place. Add to the resources in the centers according to the needs of students as they develop their representations (e.g., adding new props for dramatic play or new recycled materials to the construction area, collecting new objects for the observational drawing center, etc.).
7. In your journal, jot down your initial thoughts about your fieldwork. What surprised you about your students' experiences? What did you learn that will help you plan follow-

up activities in the classroom? What student questions were answered? What new questions were raised?

8. Read at least two more full examples from **Project Examples** [link to: <http://projectapproach.org/project-examples-m4>].

9. Chapter 8 of Katz and Chard's *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach*.

Section 5: Representation and Investigation

Objectives: This section guides you through the process of using documentation for students to showcase their steps in project work and learn from their classmates. It also helps you select/design appropriate assessments to track each student's progress, both as individuals and as members of a group. A journaling assignment enables you to take note of and reflect on their observations of students engaging in project work.

1. Read Katz and Chard's "The Contribution of Documentation to the Quality of Early Childhood Education," ERIC/EECE Digest (1996) [Link to <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eeearchive/digests/1996/lkchar96.html>].

2. **Option A:** Review the sections on representation and investigation in *Practical Guide 2* and *Practical Guide 5*. **Option B:** Read pages 30 to 44 of *The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects (Book Two)*.

3. Plan, discuss, and negotiate with students the project work to be done.

4. Develop a way to keep detailed records of the work being done by all students (individually and in groups). If you teach older children, they can keep some of their own records and be involved in more formal self-assessment. (Section 6 covers this topic, too.)

5. Invite experts on the topic to the classroom. They will introduce new information and answer questions that have arisen since the field visit.

6. Add to your topic web as the project evolves.

7. Assess the work and learning of individual students. Use some form of checklist to make formal records of achievement in curricula areas and academic skills. Browse through the following Web sites for ideas about assessments that might work well in your classroom: (1) Government Schoolhouse Network, "**Assessment of Project-Based Learning**," [Link to <http://www.gsn.org/web/pbl/plan/assess.htm>]. (2) 4 Teachers.org, "**Project-Based Learning Checklists**," [Link to <http://pblchecklist.4teachers.org/checklist.shtml>].

8. Monitor the development of each student's folder of work. It is important to develop strategies for being aware of each student's involvement with and progress throughout the project.

9. Develop displays of students' work. These can be displayed on bulletin boards within the classroom, the hallway outside, or elsewhere in the school according to your circumstances; they could also be assembled electronically on classroom Web pages.

Option A: Consult the sections on display in *Practical Guide 2* and *Practical Guide 5*.

Option B: Consult pages 43-44 of *The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects (Book Two)*.

10. Use your journal to jot down your thoughts about the progress of your project. Discuss ways to document the work in individual students and to comment on their work and learning. Discuss typical and atypical levels of achievement for the class. What are some of the most able students achieving? What are some of the achievements of students with special challenges in your classroom? What are some of the surprises in terms of student achievement?

11. Read the preschool project on Hurricane Katrina under **Project Examples** [link to: <http://projectapproach.org/project-examples-m4>]. Note the varied displays set up throughout the classroom.

Section 5 Supplemental Readings

Elliott, M-J. (1998) Great Moments of Learning in Project Work. *Young Children*, NAEYC July Issue.

Booth, C. (1997) The Fiber Project: One Teacher's Adventure toward Emergent Curriculum. *Young Children*, NAEYC July Issue.

Section 6: Work Processes and Products

Objectives: This section guides you through the heart of the project by giving tips on how to collect additional resources and enhance the learning that occurs through project work. It also guides you to help students develop an evaluative language for assessing their own work. A journal prompt encourages you to jot down questions and solutions for this particular phase of project work.

1. Read chapter 10, "Drawing in the Context of a Project," from *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach*. **Option A:** Read all of *Practical Guide 5*, if you haven't already done so. **Option B:** Read pages 40-51 of *The Project Approach: Making Curriculum Come Alive (Book One)*.

2. Keep account of the development of the project as a whole. Reflect together with students in class discussion on the progress being made by groups and individuals contributing to the project in various ways.

3. Collect books, videos, Web sites, and other secondary sources of information to support students' growing understanding of the topic of study. Books can include fact and fiction, although in Phase 2, the emphasis should be on reality rather than fantasy.

4. Document the process of students working. Collect photographs of students at work, especially when there is no finished product, such as the dramatic play or block construction of younger children. Collect copies of work samples at various stages to show the work process. This is helpful in understanding the learning process of students, in communicating with parents, and in demonstrating learning through classroom displays.

5. Continue to develop assessment strategies for project work. If you teach older children, you may be faced with decisions about grading. You may need to give grades, or you may develop viable alternatives to grading for the assessment of the project work.

6. Develop multistage work with the students. In the case of older children, help them to understand the importance of quality at each stage of the work. Develop rubrics with students to help them with self assessment. In the case of the younger children, invite their ideas frequently about helping others develop work strategies and solve problems.

7. Encourage volunteers to help in your classroom, including parents, grandparents, and others. It takes some time to communicate the ways in which volunteers can help, but it is well worth the effort if you find a few people who can listen to students, read books with them, and be on hand to help in practical ways without doing work for the students or taking a directing role.

8. Read (or review) two more examples under **Project Examples** [[link to: http://projectapproach.org/project-examples-m4](http://projectapproach.org/project-examples-m4)], paying particular attention to phase 2.

9. Share what is happening in your classroom in a journal response. Comment on what works well and any challenges or unknowns; brainstorm solutions to challenges, and note any questions that come to mind; make a list of people (other educators, administrators, community members, etc.) to whom you could turn for support and resources.

Section 7: Concluding the Project

Objectives: This section guides you through the last stage of the project, during which teachers and students work together to figure out ways to present what they've learned to an outside audience. A culminating event is planned, and both teachers and students reflect on and evaluate the entire process. Steps are then taken to start thinking about a next project. A journal prompt encourages you to reflect on your thoughts about the last stage of the project, and a writing assignment offers an opportunity to earn a certificate of completion from Sylvia Chard.

1. Bring the project to a close over the period of phase 3. Read chapter 9 of *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach*. **Option A:** Read *Practical Guide 6*. **Option B:** Read pages 45-52 of *The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects (Book Two)*.

2. Plan a culminating event together with students. This can serve many purposes, especially a celebration of the work and learning achieved by students. Ensure that it offers a real opportunity to debrief on the work and review the highlights, with the purpose of sharing the experiences with others. This review can include testing older children on the knowledge and skills acquired through the project.

3. Involve students in planning the event, which builds on your previous involvement of students in the ongoing planning and monitoring of the work. This is an extension of that involvement into the summative evaluation process. Students can recognize the value of accountability and can prove very willing to take responsibility for a review of their project work if they have been involved all along in its development.

4. Encourage students to do any work they still want to try before the end of the project. Some students will be ready to move on, while others will want to continue their studies of the topic. As a teacher, you will be aware that the learning potential offered by a study of the topic has largely been realized. You may have some students who are already becoming interested in other topics, and you may have a particular topic in mind for the next project.

5. Stimulate students' imagination with literature that is more fantastical than in phase 2. Once students (particularly younger children) have acquired new knowledge, they can apply it in their imaginative play and construction activities. The third phase offers opportunities to explore the speculative "what if?" kinds of questions in relation to the topic. Projects can end (just as they began) with questions ... but the questions will take a different form. There is no such thing as a project that delivers all of the answers. The answers to questions always provide the possibilities of asking new questions.

6. Anticipate new directions, and consider initiating a discussion of possible topics for the next project. Sometimes project topics are decided in advance (especially with older children), and sometimes they emerge from the previous project. What is likely to be the case in the project you are concluding?

7. Collect information from parents following the culminating event. Seeing their child's involvement in a project can serve as a powerful experience for parents.

8. Jot down your thoughts about the third phase of the project in your journal. What worked well, and what challenges did you face? What did you learn from the experience, and what will you carry over to the next project?

9. Use the outline below to submit an account of your project to Sylvia Chard (Sylvia.chard@ualberta.ca) and receive a certificate showing your successful

completion of this self-guided study. This outline gives you a format for documenting your entire project and preparing a summative evaluation.

10. Congratulate yourself on a huge step in a highly rewarding and meaningful approach to teaching and learning!

PROJECT OUTLINE

Please submit the account of your project according to the following outline:

I. Introduction

II. Preliminary Planning and Selection of the Topic

III. Phase 1

- Discussion
- Experience
- Knowledge
- Wondering
- Questions
- Display Letter
to parents

IV. Phase 2

- Fieldwork Discussion
- Investigations
- Visiting experts
- Representation
- Information resources
- Display

V. Phase 3

- Culminating event
- Collaborative evaluation
- Activities Discussion
- Display Parent's
comments

Lead in to the next project (if any) VI. Conclusion

Your summative evaluation