

Mentor Minute

Project-Based Learning

The April Mentor Minute continues the conversation about Project-Based Learning - looking specifically at strategies on how a project might develop (Phase 2) and ideas on how to celebrate children's learning at the conclusion of the project (Phase 3). A reminder for mentors and evaluators is to be mindful of where a teacher is currently and where they fit in the following scenarios: teachers may not yet be ready to consider new information; for some teachers it is just introducing the concept; yet others supporting them in understanding of project based learning, the process and connecting them to resources.

Benefits of Project-Based Learning:

- Strategies that enable teachers to guide children through in-depth studies of real-world topics
- Intentional but adaptable framework where teaching and learning are seen as interactive process
- Children feel highly motivated and actively involved in their own learning
- Often results in high-quality child-produced work
- Opportunities for children to grow as individuals and collaborators
- 21st Century Learning is embedded throughout Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning - Phase 2: Developing the Project (Investigating)

Teachers as they develop the project; plan and provide many opportunities for children to explore and investigate a topic. Books, materials, Internet searches, learning experiences, field trips and/or visitors can be planned to help children build their knowledge of the topic. Teachers observe children, listen to their conversations and questions and provide ways for children to explore further. Teachers by being familiar with curriculum standards and learning goals can authentically connect learning goals to the study (Foundations LDC-9: Children comprehend and use information presented in books and other print media) supports children in seeking information about their topic; (Foundations CD-15: Children explore the world by observing.....asking questions....represent what they learn through... drawing, modeling, building...) supports children in creating observational drawings/creative representations and (Foundations LDC-13: Children use writing and other symbols to record information....) supports children in labeling and writing in their representations. Phase 2 provides many opportunities for children to learn new information and to also correct children's misinformation.

Questions to encourage teachers in Phase 2: Developing the Project (Investigating)

- How can you develop an on-going visual of what children are learning? (Topic web, KWL) How might you document and continue to add new information that is being learned?
- How can you introduce families to your study? (inviting their expertise, collecting no-cost supplies/resources, classroom/ volunteers and planning for parent/child projects)
- What site visits or classroom visitors might you plan for that would provide opportunities for children to find answers to their questions and investigate further? (experts can be anyone that has knowledge of the topic)
- How might you plan opportunities for children to create observational drawings to document what they are learning? Children's drawings capture so naturally the progression of their knowledge/skills learned.
- What are some ways that you could plan for children to work in teams to investigate and create representations/drawings?
- What skills can be embedded into your study? How can you align children's learning objectives?
- How might you include children in creating the props/signs/artifacts that will be needed in the study?

References:

- Helm, J.H. & Katz, L.G. (2016) *Young Investigators*. (3rd, ed.). New York: Teachers College Press
- Helm, J. H. (2015). *Becoming young thinkers: Deep project work in the classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press

Additional Project-Based Learning Resource Links:

- [The School Bus Project](#)- Article by Ruth Harkema in Early Childhood Research and Practice journal
- [The Philadelphia School Preschool Dog Project](#)-Slideshow

Mentor Minute (cont.)

Project-Based Learning-Phase 2: Developing the Project (Investigating)



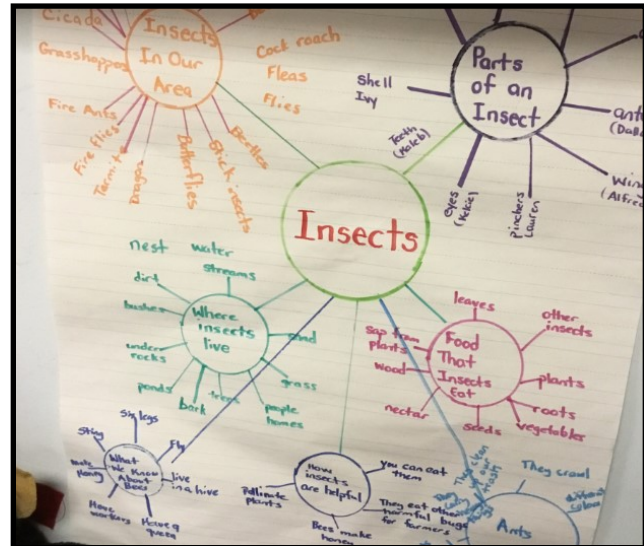
A butterfly habitat was added for children to investigate first hand the life cycle of a butterfly.



The teacher provided science journals for children to make observational drawings to document changes in the butterfly habitat.



The teacher provided various materials and planned experiences to encourage children to explore and investigate insects. Children's observational drawings were added to their Insect Project Class Book.



A topic web documents progress of Insect Study over time.



Children worked in a small group to create a model of a caterpillar. The teacher placed a non-fiction book nearby for the children to refer to as needed.



Project-based learning promotes many opportunities for children to work together. These two children created a representation of an ant hill.

Project-Based Learning-Phase 3: Celebrating Learning

After children have had ample time and opportunities to explore and investigate various aspects of a project, it is important to celebrate their learning (Phase 3). This can be done in various ways.

Questions that encourage teachers in Phase 3: Celebrating Learning

- What are some ways that the children could share with each other what they have learned?
- What are some ways that the children could share with their families what they have learned?
- What are some ways you could share what was learned with families whom are unable to attend a project concluding event?
- Did any community members share their expertise with the class about a project topic? If yes, how could you include them in your culminating project activity?



During circle time, children shared with each other what they have learned about an animal study (left) and a bridge study (right).



A documentation panel showcases what children learned and created during a study of recyclable materials (left).



A video was taken of a tree project culminating activity. Families who were unable to attend were sent the video link (right).

[Click here for video link](#)



Children shared with families what they had learned through finished representations of an Insect study (left).

Creative representations are displayed. The teacher-dictated notes reflect each child's growing knowledge of butterflies (right).

