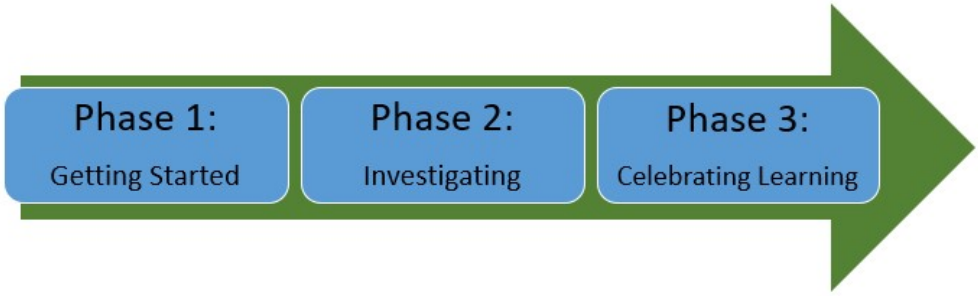
Mentor Minute

Project-Based Learning (PBL)

According to Dr. Sylvia Chard, Professor Emeritus of Early Childhood Education at the University of Alberta, Canada and author of several Project-Based Learning resources, "Project Based Learning refers to a set of teaching strategies that enable teachers to guide students through in-depth investigations of real-world topics that are worthy of a student's attention and effort. Projects develop within a framework where teaching and learning are seen as an interactive collaborative process between teacher and student." Several components encompass Project-Based Learning such as determining the topic, engaging in real-life experiences, and sharing what was learned with others. However, when guiding a teacher through the implementation of Project-Based Learning, it can difficult to know where to start. As always, it is important for mentors and evaluators to be mindful of where a teacher is currently and then start from there. In this 2-part Mentor Minute, three phases of coaching a teacher through the implementation of the Project-Based Learning Continuum will be discussed. Phase 1: Getting Started will be focused on in March while the other two phases will be explored further in April.

Project-Based Learning Continuum



For teachers who are interested in Project-Based Learning but unsure of where to start, they might be encouraged to take pieces of the PBL and plan a mini-project with a small group of children in the classroom to explore a particular interest. A teacher would still process through the same steps, selecting a topic, providing different ways for children to investigate and learn for themselves and then lastly to share with others what they have learned. Encouraging teachers to focus on a mini-project at first will help them to begin to get comfortable with each step and be able to ask for guidance along the way before planning a larger project.

Steps of Phase 1: Getting Started

FIRST-Guide teachers to:

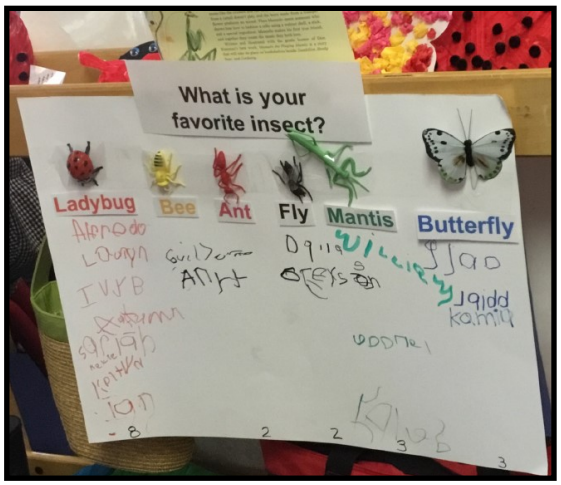
- Select a possible topic
- Determine children's interests, common experiences, and prior knowledge (What do the children talk about during the day, what things are they drawing or building during center-time?)
- Plan a possible direction and resources (What resources/materials will be needed?)
- Brainstorm and create an Anticipatory web for planning to determine if there is enough interests/resources to make a viable study
- If a study is viable, align learning objectives with your planning web (What skill building opportunities can teachers embed into the study?)

THEN-Guide teachers to:

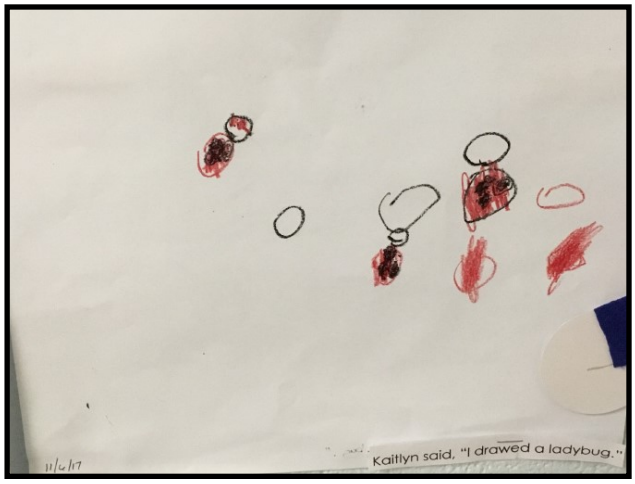
- Start a topic web with children to determine what children know and what questions do they have
- Provide time for children to explore and build their knowledge and new vocabulary (What experiences can be planned that encourage children to explore and find out for themselves? What questions might emerge after exploration has begun?)
- Determine ways that children's beginning knowledge with later knowledge will be documented
- Provide various materials to encourage children to document what they are learning in a variety of ways (i.e. through drawings, clay representations, etc.)
- Think about ways to involve families in the study. (What talents or resources can they provide?)

Mentor Minute (cont.)

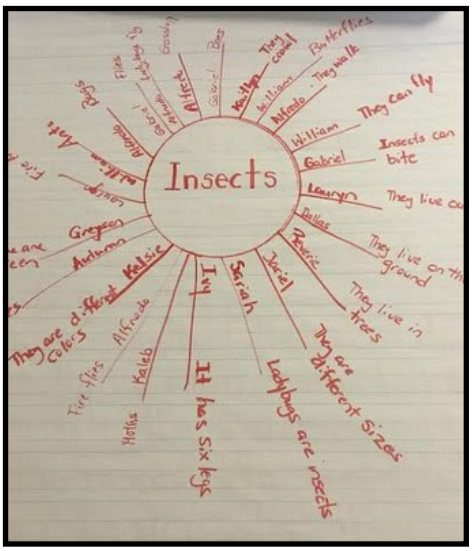
Exploration of Project-Based Learning through photos of an Insect study



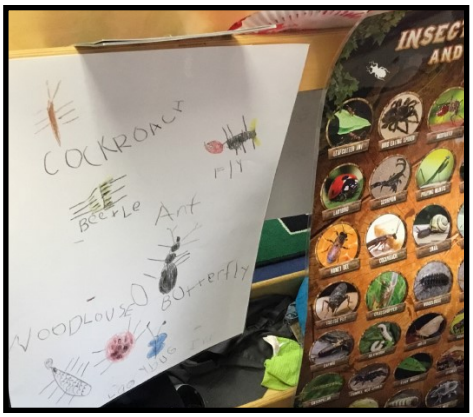
The teacher began a study of insects by asking children to chart their favorite insect. She later used the information to form learning teams for children to investigate their favorite insect.



Children were encouraged to create a "Memory Drawing" as they begin a Project Study. This drawing captures a child's beginning knowledge of a topic.



The teacher created a beginning web to capture children's beginning knowledge of insects

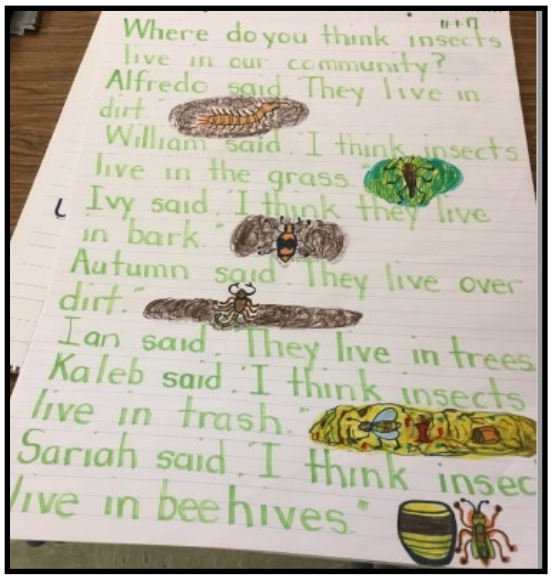


Children were provided opportunities to investigate and build their knowledge of the topic in a study. Centers were intentionally set up to promote children's investigation into insects.

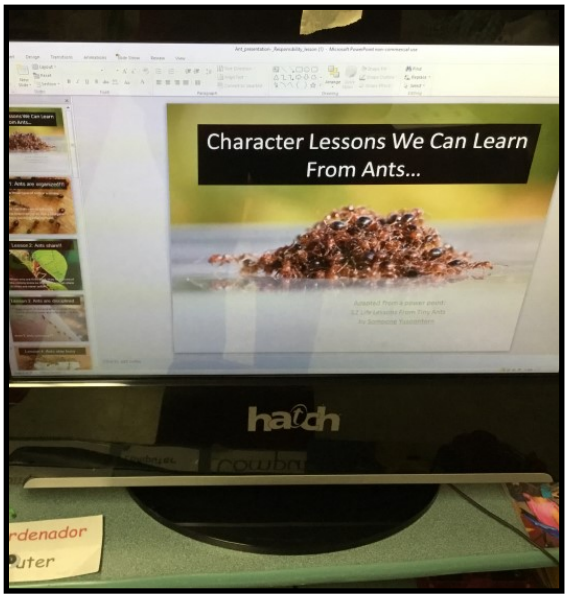
The teacher then encouraged the child to draw what they were learning.

Mentor Minute (cont.)

Project-Based Learning



Shared writing charts were used by the teacher to capture children's beginning knowledge of insects.



The teacher utilized technology for children to explore and learn new information about ants.

Children are provided materials to create representations of insects. Note children's increasing knowledge of insects in their dictated thoughts captured by the teacher.

Project-Based Learning resource links:

- The Project Approach -Website
- Picturing the Project Approach -Webinar by Early Childhood Investigators Webinars
- Changing Classroom Practice to Include the Project Approach-Article by Ann-Marie Clark in Early Childhood Research and Practice journal
- Project Approach Tip Sheets-from Illinois Early Learning Project
- The Project Approach and STEM- Article by Sylvia Chard in Community Playthings
- From Themes to Projects -Article by Sylvia Chard
- Implementing the Project Approach in an Inclusive Classroom: A Teacher's First Attempt with Project-Based Learning (Voices)- Article in NAEYC's Young Children
- Looking at Trees Around Us-Article by Karen Bellous in Early Childhood Research and Practice journal

Please click on each item listed above for more information