Project Approach Phases
From the work of Dr. Sylvia Chard
Modeled by The Duke School, Durham, NC

Pre-planning - Teachers choose topics based on student interests that connect the curriculum with real world issues. The topics are chosen based on developmental readiness, curriculum needs, and availability of appropriate sources. Teachers develop the essential questions and enduring understandings for students to explore.

Phase 1 - Beginning. Exploring Current Knowledge on the Topic: Students and teachers take time to gather all that they currently know about the topic. Chalk talks, lists, “writing what you know,” sharing memories, drawing, photography, and oral sharing create shared community knowledge. This knowledge provides the basis for the questions that frame Phase 2.

Phase 2 - Exploring and Inquiry. Developing the Project. Students do field work to expand knowledge - field trips, interview experts, gather and compare notes with each other, research, collect and apply data. Visual representations of their thinking are displayed as the work develops. Regular conversations reveal how new knowledge is growing. Teachers assess students’ ongoing efforts, process, academic skills, and ability to work with others. Students also self assess.

Phase 3 - Culminating. Presenting the Work to an Audience Beyond the Classroom. Students take on the role of expert, presenting findings to an authentic audience. The shape of this presentation can vary from student to student. It could be a poster talk given by individuals or small groups, or could include dramatic representations, public websites, gardens, public art, gallery talks, etc. The choice of presentation type may line up with student interests and preferred communication styles. The presentation should link the project to the contemporary world.

Phase 4 - Reflection. Teachers and students gather for frank discussion of what worked and what did not. Ideas and suggestions for future projects are collected and used to plan projects in future years.

Bibliography

