A FRAMEWORK FOR INQUIRY-BASED PROJECT WORK

The process is never linear, but there are stages that are vital, questions to consider, and experiences that may be necessary to support project work. This framework was developed collaboratively by Opal School staff over a period of several years. It continues to be a work-in-progress as we dig deeper into our own inquiry.

1. What is the intention of the project?
Why are you thinking about this topic? Why should you and the students be engaged in the topic or the content? Why bother? Think beyond curriculum requirements and standards to what relationships, connections, and experiences that might have meaning. Why should the students care about it? What energy have you seen that you want to support? What have you observed that suggested this topic? What interests are visible? What content may be developmentally appropriate?

Examples:
Expand upon an interest that has surfaced....
Dig deep into an historical event
Bring the wonder of the natural world to the attention of children....
Access children's wisdom about the importance of community by....
Support children who struggle with.....
Encourage collaboration

2. List two or more of your pedagogical questions.
What are your research questions regarding the learning and development of children? What do you wonder about?

3. What might be the children's questions?
(Perhaps, you are making assumptions at this stage.) What do you think your students wonder about based on your knowledge of them, who they are, their interests, their struggles?

4. What are the possibilities for rich, complex experiences?
What interests may this project support? What ideas may surface? What directions do you think it may go? What connections and meaning might children make? What relationships might become visible? This is a time of projecting and webbing all the possible subtopics and connections that may surface during the project.

5. What about content and skills?
What content do you intend to introduce, and/or what do you think will surface? What are the big ideas? What concepts, vocabulary, skills, do you think are important?

6. What planning is required?

What provocations might you introduce? Is the topic a sensitive one to children or families? If so, how will you involve/prepare families? Will you form groups of children? What criteria will you use to group them? What resources and materials will you need? What help will you need in gathering them? Are there budget issues? Whose approval do you need? Are others going to be involved? Should parents be notified? Will parents participate? If so in what roles? What will be the specific roles of each teacher participating in the project?

7. Which languages of the arts will support the project?

What languages might take the children deeper into their thinking? Is the language new to the children? If yes, how will you introduce it? How will students have time to explore the affordances prior to using it as a language? What languages might become an important means of expressing ideas that are central to the project?

8. How will you get started?

What experience will you use to get started? (i.e. science talk, dialogue, story, an experience, nature walk, exploration of a new material). What are your expectations of the students? What kinds of preparation is required?

9. What inquiry questions do you think will be helpful?

What questions will you ask children to support authentic inquiry. What's the difference between inquiry questions and quizzing children? Do your questions limit children's responses to recall or what they think they know? Do you questions take them to certainty or uncertainty? Do your questions tickle their imaginations?

10. How will you move forward after the first experience?

What happened? What energy surfaced? What direction do you think it's going? Who can collaborate with you to help the possibilities surface?

11. How will you document the project as it progresses?

How might you use documentation as a way of reflecting the children's work back to them as the project progresses? What processes will be helpful? What materials do you need? Who can help?