If you are a teacher who is still reluctant to embrace the project approach as an essential educational technique, this book will invite, satisfy, and propel you into a new classroom adventure. Rich with color photos of real children doing real explorations, the book’s aim is to help early childhood teachers guide children in authentic investigations of the environment.

The authors review the basics of the project approach, carefully explaining that it is not a curriculum and is compatible with other instructional methods. Unlike thematic approaches that demand teacher pre-planning, projects are responsive to children’s ideas, questions, and interests to support the goals the whole learning community has set.

Most simply, projects have three phases: first, teachers learn what children already know and what they want to know about a topic; second, the teacher organizes hands-on, authentic experiences that give children the ability to answer their questions; and third, the project group decides how to finish the project and share the learning with others.

Chapters cover project approach details including:
- identifying a project topic;
- beginning a project with a topic web that helps the teacher know what the children already know; organizes the topic in relation to curriculum, learning standards, and potential experiences; and helps the children formulate their questions for investigation;
- developing the project with opportunities for children to do field work, to talk to experts, and to represent (with photos, drawings, art, constructions, and sculpture) their developing understanding of the topic;
- concluding the project in which teachers and children revisit, summarize, assess, and share acquired knowledge with the larger community (other children, families, or other guests).

A closing chapter offers stories of projects that took place in a school in Mexico City. The first is a fish tank project with 2- and 3-year-olds. Photos and text tell the story from a pet fish web to drawing fish and their habitats, setting up an aquarium, and culminating in an event that allowed children and visitors to imagine being inside a fish tank. Older preschoolers investigated cars in their project while school-agers explored reducing, reusing, and recycling—all following the basic approach framework.

Predicated on the assumption that children are curious and eager learners, the project approach offers teachers a developmentally appropriate structure for children’s investigation, discovery, and understanding of topics that are meaningful—and therefore worth the time and effort of a teacher’s planning and presentation.
Early Sprouts Cookbook

A collaboration between the health sciences and early childhood education programs at Keene State College in New Hampshire, the Early Sprouts program helps teachers and parents foster enthusiasm for healthy foods and active play in young children. The program offers online training in gardening, classroom cooking, sensory exploration, and physical activity at www.earlysprouts.org.

The program has also produced a cookbook that is one of the best for early childhood classrooms. The book makes food science and wholesome nutrition exciting, accessible, and factual. The authors actively resist the notion that children must be bribed (“You can have more peaches only after you taste the broccoli”) or deceived (“If we puree the spinach the children won’t know it’s in the meatloaf”).

Instead, Kalich, Arnold, and Russell review recommended nutrition guidelines for young children, tips for creating appropriate cooking environments and experiences, and ideas for building partnerships with families to promote good nutrition that is inexpensive and culturally respectful.

The Early Sprouts nutritional philosophy is consistent with established best practices and solid child development theory. They recognize children’s natural fear of new things (including foods), the power of environmental and social messages (“That’s yucky,” or food offered as comfort or reward), and the frustration adults feel when carefully prepared and presented food is refused.

Strong recommendations include providing multiple and repeated exposures to new foods, engaging children in meal preparation, serving family-style meals, and providing healthy choices. Significantly, the Early Sprouts philosophy is consistent with and integrates nutrition learning into early learning guidelines for cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language development.

A short chapter offers tips on cooking with preschoolers—useful for both experienced classroom cooks and teachers who haven’t yet made the leap to this satisfying and productive activity.

Further, and maybe in the best part of the book, the authors include more than 70 child-tested and approved recipes that contribute to a well-rounded diet covering ideas for breakfast, lunch, snacks, and recipes for celebrations (Who could resist gingerbread pancakes on a cold, gray winter day or quibble about tasty sweet potato and black bean quesadillas?). Each recipe is designed for 12 to 16 servings and lists ingredients and procedures clearly with estimates of preparation and cooking time as well as optional ingredient substitutions, nutritional information, and CACFP meal complements.

The Early Sprouts Cookbook is a boon for program cooks and classroom teachers eager to share the joys of tasty and nutritious foods.

Kids Garden News

KidsGardening (at www.kidsgardening.org) creates opportunities for young people from preschool through high school to engage their natural curiosity and wonder to learn and grow through gardening. The online resource is free (but appreciates financial support) and has offered resources to teachers and families and stimulating ideas and activities for children since 1982. The organization’s mission is to
improve nutritional attitudes and educational outcomes, enhance social and emotional learning, and promote environmental stewardship for all youth.

Subscribe to receive a monthly newsletter that highlights gardening activities, lesson plans, and tips on making gardening efforts a success. The December 2018 issue, for example, focused on building hydroponic gardens—perfect for programs without space for an appropriate garden plot. The plans guide you through construction of a container through a lettuce crop ready for harvest in about four weeks.

Additionally, the site offers guidance on designing a school garden, gardening activities and basics, a featured plant of the month, tips on incorporating math and literature into gardening activities, resource books, and opportunities to apply for grant funding for innovative gardening projects.

Notably, the site includes a translation tool and RSS feed to make its valuable information widely and easily accessible.