

This book belongs to

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Cover art by Gary Mohrman. Cover photo © RubberBall Productions

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ISBN No. 978-1-4291-1162-1

Printing No. 987654321

Teaching & Learning Company
Dayton, OH 45401-0802
www.LorenzEducationalPress.com

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Developing a Theme with Learning Centers

There are many advantages to developing themes through tasks in the learning centers already established in your classroom. Tasks are added to the learning centers to reflect what you are studying.

Use these guidelines to develop the tasks to reflect your theme:

That Are Motivating to the Children

Tasks

Choose tasks that are interesting to the children, ones that allow work for a meaningful amount of time. Tasks in learning centers may be done many times. The best test for meaningful tasks is if the children want to go back to them again.

That Provide Real Experiences

Tasks

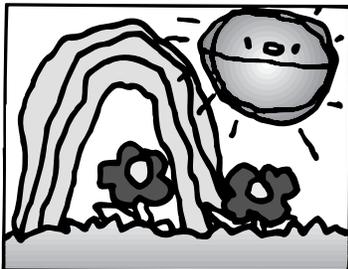
Develop tasks that will provide real experiences about the theme. Children need to feel as if every task that they work on has a purpose. Meaningful tasks are ones where the child can stay with the work for a sustained amount of time. These tasks will keep children engaged and develop deeper understanding about the theme.



That Allow Children to Construct Knowledge

Tasks

Tasks should be developed that allow the children to begin with what they think they know about a theme and build on that knowledge to develop deeper understandings. One way children construct new knowledge is from conversations with other children about their work. Consider tasks that encourage children to discuss what they are doing.



Tasks

That Have a Process and a Product

The product is an important way for the child to show what he or she has figured out in the process. Whether it is an art piece, writing or some other creation, the product serves as the indication that the child has figured out something which can be shown to others.

Designing Meaningful Starting Points for Themes

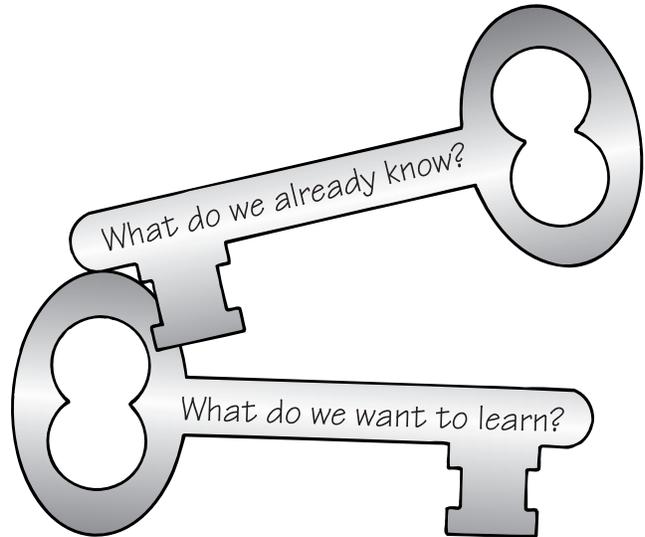
Starting Point

Think broadly about a starting point. Traditionally books have been used to introduce a theme. But what could be designed that would give you feedback about what information the children bring to the theme? Create a scenario that has mystery, something memorable that you will be able to refer to throughout the theme. The starting point should be unexpected with an element of surprise.

The starting point should lead to a discussion that results in gathering information around the key areas:

What do we already know?

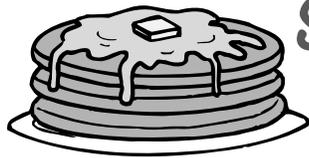
What do we want to learn?



Print the information on large charts with the heading listed at the top. As each child contributes information for the charts, transcribe his or her words and the child's name.

Post the charts in a place that is at the eye level of the children. Plan to leave the charts posted throughout the theme and refer to them often. When the children discuss information they have learned from a task they have completed, relate it to the chart to help them connect what they're learning.

Add a third chart with the heading *Other Things We Want to Learn*. Add information that is acquired throughout the theme.



Starting Point for the Farm Theme



Ask four to five parents to volunteer to help. Ask them to wear an apron over their clothes. Set up the room with four cooking stations. Assign one parent to each of the following stations:

Station 1: Pancakes

Provide a large box of pancake mix, measuring cup, milk, eggs, wooden spoons, large bowl, ladle, hot plate, cast iron skillet, pancake turner, paper towels and oven mitt. Print the recipe for pancakes from the mix box onto chart paper. Display the recipe beside Station 1. Children will follow the recipe to make pancakes.

Station 2: Butter

Provide several small baby food jars with a lid and a clean marble, whipping cream, colander and salt. Fill the jar half full with whipping cream. Place the lid on securely. Allow each child to shake a jar until butter is formed. Pour off excess liquid by washing the butter in cold water and draining. Repeat the process several times. Add salt if desired.

Station 3: Syrup

Provide 1 cup light corn syrup, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, 1 teaspoon maple flavoring, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vanilla, 1 tablespoon butter, pan, hot plate, wooden spoons, measuring cups, oven mitt, paper towels and a pitcher for serving. Print the recipe for making syrup onto chart paper. Display the recipe beside Station 2. Cook and stir syrup, sugar and water until the sugar dissolves. Stir in flavorings and butter. Serve warm.

Station 4: Fruit and Vegetable Cups

Provide a variety of fresh, washed fruits and vegetables including apples, oranges, baby carrots and strawberries; several small bowls; table knives; wooden spoons and small bowls for serving. Wash and peel fruits and vegetables. Cut into bite-sized pieces. Mix and serve in individual bowls.

Divide the children into four equal-sized groups and assign each group to a station. Ask the parents to allow the children to participate in the food preparation at each station. Visit the stations as the children are working and engage them in conversations about their tasks. When the food is prepared, ask children to rotate to each station to pick up their portions of food. While the children and parents are eating their food, lead a discussion about where the ingredients for the foods came from. Direct the discussion to farms. Use the sources of foods to help the children discuss what they know about farms and the work of farmers.

On the top of a sheet of chart paper, print *Things We Know About the Farm*. Ask the children to contribute to the list. Print each response on the chart paper. Make a second chart that has the heading *Things We Want to Know About the Farm*. Follow the same procedure by contributing questions the children have about farms. Mount both charts in the classroom where they can be used as a reference throughout.