



Thanksgiving Point

Early Childhood Outreach Program

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Executive Summary

OVERVIEW:

Our main purpose for this project was to **evaluate early childhood outreach at Thanksgiving Point as a value-added program.** Early childhood outreach provides high quality STEM education to underserved communities in Utah. We specifically focused on the South Franklin Center and will use our findings as resources for change at every operating location. To evaluate the program, **we made observations at Thanksgiving Point and the South Franklin Center, interviewed parents and teachers, and conducted triangulation techniques** to gain as much empathy data as possible.

KEY FINDINGS:

Through our data collection techniques, we found that the class caters more to English-speaking toddlers, which is only approx. 50% of the class demographics. **Groups such as infants and Spanish-speakers do not have as engaging of an experience in the classroom.** We also found that **new teachers feel uncomfortable and less confident** managing the class and interacting with young children due to inexperience. Teachers of all experience levels highlighted a **need for more preparation before running a class.** *See page 12 for Affinity Diagram

RECOMMEDATIONS:

To address the need for **greater inclusion in the classroom and inspire greater confidence in early childhood teachers,** we recommend:

1. Tailored, experience-based trainings for teachers
2. Classroom division based on developmental stages of children
3. Promotion of language diversity amongst teachers and class participants



The Team



Kendall Jones



Grace Xiques



Milaya Bealer



Hannah DeMille

Context

Background

Thanksgiving Point is a nonprofit organization that provides interactive and child-led learning experiences across several museums and outdoor spaces. Our team has all taken a particular interest in early childhood and/or education, making this project perfect for our continues learning.

Importance

The outreach programs at Thanksgiving Point provide high quality STEM education to underserved communities in Utah. Early childhood is a critical time for learning and development, making this specific program a top priority for the company.

Need

We are focusing on analyzing Early Childhood Outreach as a value-added program for Thanksgiving Point. After gathering data, we specifically saw a need for greater inclusion and teacher preparation in the classroom. Our JTBD is to **create a safe and inclusive environment for children and their parents to learn and grow.**

Description of Process

Observations



Interviews



Triangulation

Observations

SOUTH FRANKLIN COMMUNITY CENTER

Participant / Bifocal: While interacting with the children, I saw limited attention given to babies in the room, with a focus on toddlers by all facilitators. The activities, predominantly tailored for toddlers, left most babies **unable to participate**. The main activity space posed safety concerns for babies, lacking a separate, baby-safe option for younger toddlers and infants. Despite this, older toddlers and kids displayed excitement, with teachers effectively encouraging play and curiosity throughout themed activities.

Overt / Microscope Lens: The community center offers an ideal setting for energetic and creative children. The observed class included 14 kids, with **approx. 60% toddlers and 40% infants with some speaking Spanish**. The parents/guardians, predominantly women, actively participated, with a few conversing exclusively in Spanish. Instructors **interacted primarily with toddlers**, leaving infants to play with toys brought by their parents. Despite this, infants demonstrated social engagement, and parents appeared equally motivated by both their child's participation and socializing with others.



Tales for Tots

Simple & Covert / Rose-Colored Lens: Observing Tales for Tots, I focused on overall dynamics and participant interactions. I noted **variations in engagement** among around 20 children; some active, others less so. My goal was to highlight class strengths, and found it as an **entertaining structured learning opportunity for kids**.

Nonparticipant & Behavioral / Bifocals: Noting divergent levels of children's interaction with the facilitator and distractions from external activities, I observed a keen interest in art supplies at the end of the session. Most **children seemed more drawn to unstructured play**. Parental involvement varied, with many appearing indifferent to their child's participation, even when children briefly explored other surroundings. While acknowledging the positive impact of Tales for Tots, I believe **intentional design enhancements could further elevate the learning experience and engagement for the children involved**.

Interviews

Teachers

We interviewed several teachers and specialists from the Early Childhood Outreach program. The teachers emphasized the significance of teamwork and creating a supportive environment. One specialist highlighted the importance of facilitators in engaging participants, particularly children, and stressed the **need for facilitators to be well-educated about child development**. Teachers also emphasized the importance of **preparation, intentionality, and experience** in teaching at outreach centers. Teachers' engagement and preparedness were identified as critical factors influencing the variation in class experiences.

Parents

We all interviewed parents at the South Franklin Community Center. Parents noted the teachers' ability to discern when a teacher lacked experience or confidence, with their toddlers reacting more reservedly in such situations. The parents emphasized the significance of teacher engagement with all students in the room, suggesting that **a teacher's level of experience directly influenced the comfort and engagement of the participants**. This reiterated the importance of thorough training for teachers working with young children in outreach programs, ensuring they are well-prepared, confident, and capable of creating an inclusive and positive learning atmosphere.



Triangulation

MTM: Centers/Free Play

This moment occurs at the beginning of each class, when teachers set out objects and toys for kids to play with freely.

Sticky Notes

- Mostly positive feedback
- Larger learning space
- Divide into smaller groups by age
- Free play is key to maximizing inclusion
- Parents notice when instructors are trained versus when they are not!

Love Letter/ Breakup Letter

- Loves the class and how interactive it is
- Is worried about running out of room in class
- Participants feel the class is valuable
- Growth is important to consider for the future

Social Media Observation

- Loves the child-led activities
- Not as many options because of monetary resources
- Find a way to increase resources
- Continue to encourage curiosity

Focus Group

- 28 minute conversation with 6 instructors
- How can instructors ensure they are teaching and not babysitting?
- Current training schedule is twice per year. How can training be improved for all hires?

Findings

Age Groups

While parents and children express overwhelming love for the program, our research shows a gap regarding inclusivity. The Thanksgiving Point Outreach classes are built for toddler age children which leaves infants excluded. Throughout our visits to class, there have consistently been several parents infant aged children. In fact, there are at least two semi-regular parents who attend the class with only one, infant aged child. Therefore, it is crucial that the Outreach program aims to include infants as much as toddlers, so that parents of infants receive equal value from time spent in the weekly class.

Cultural Awareness

Similarly, the South Franklin Center attracts a diverse group of individuals, spanning multiple languages and cultures.

We found that while some parents love that the class is in English (their children can learn the language), other parents struggle to connect due to limited or no English speaking ability. Additionally, a few parents expressed desire for other cultures to be celebrated and represented in the class. This is a clear opportunity for the Outreach class to increase value for participants.

Instructor Training

From our research with Thanksgiving Point instructors, we find a gap between current training processes and in-class teamwork. Instructors are very knowledgeable about how to interact with children, however, there is a lack of responsibility/role clarity. During class, instructors with more experience naturally take lead, and less-experienced instructors tend to appear unsure of how to improve the quality of class.



Recommendations

Training

We suggest that outreach class instructors received a **standardized training** from Thanksgiving Point. This recommendation is based on feedback from parents who are easily able to tell when instructors are new based on observing their teaching style. We hope to normalize the outreach class experience through regulating and homogenizing each instructor's teaching skills.

Class Division

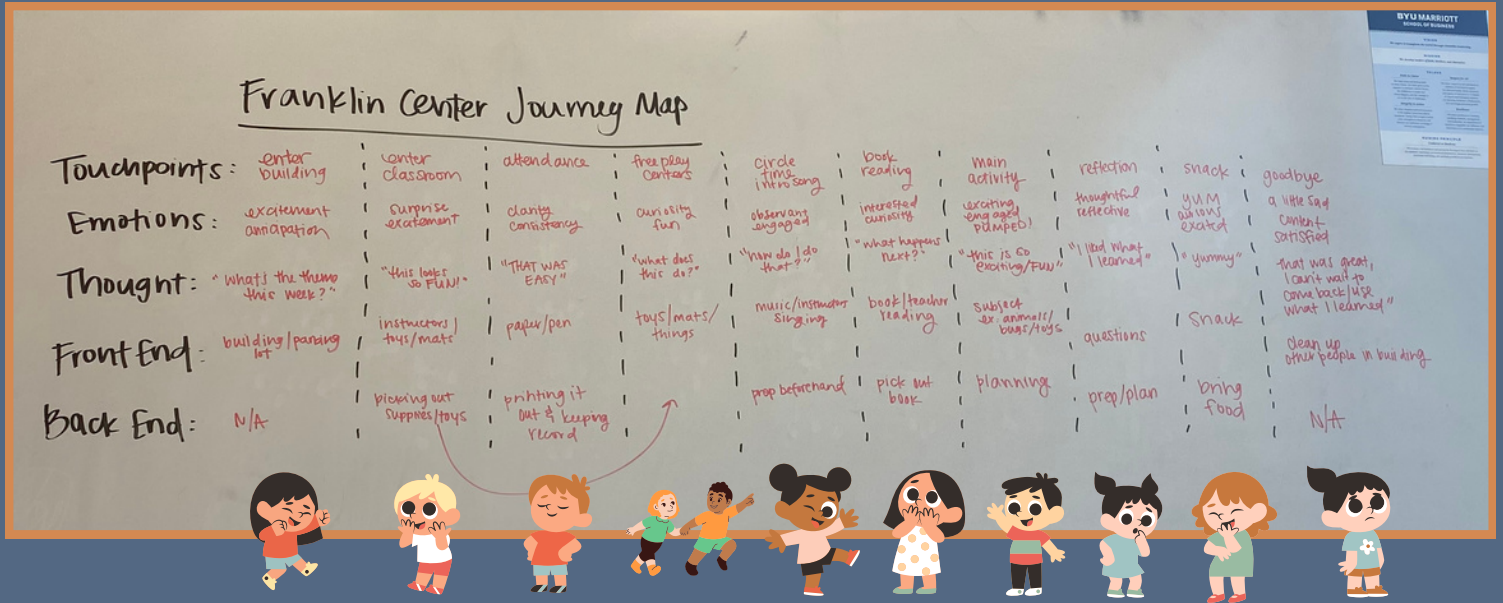
Another recommendation based on parent feedback about instructors is to utilize all of them! Our suggestion is to divide the large class into **smaller subgroups based on age**. With one instructor assigned to each group, each child's developmental needs can be better met in their learning.

Language Diversity

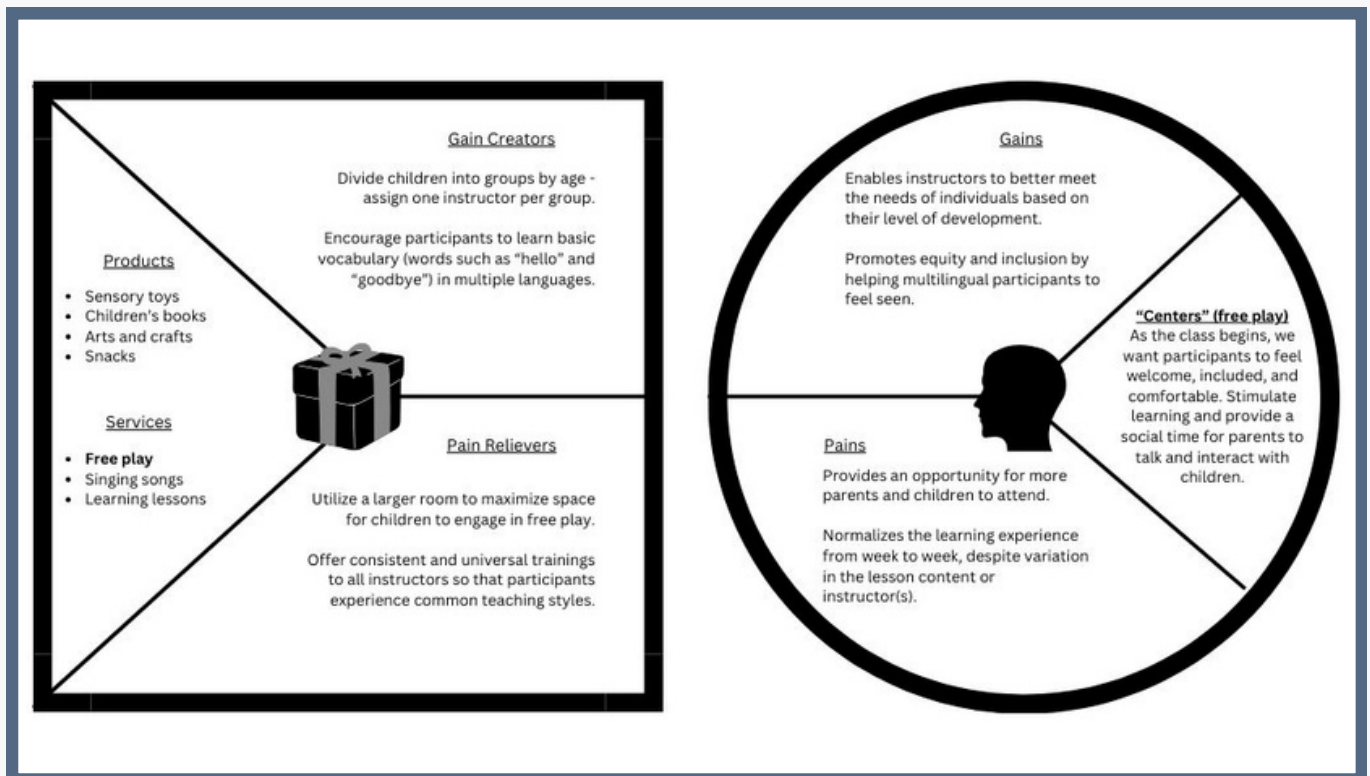
Finally, we recommend that instructors make efforts to be more intentionally inclusive of all cultures in their classes. They can do this by introducing a "**word of the day**" in each session of the class, **teaching the word in multiple languages**. For example, instructors would teach the word of the day in Spanish and Mandarin at the South Franklin Community because some of the participants who attend speak those languages. This will help all who come to feel welcomed and included equally.

Experience Map & Value Proposition

EXPERIENCE MAP



Value Proposition



Appendix

Research Wall

Things that Went Well

- Many individuals brought
- Parents and guardians
- High energy, lots of
- lots of children
- Parents were very
- All things that
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very

Things to be Improved

- lots of children
- Parents were very
- All things that
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very

Things to Pull From

- lots of children
- Parents were very
- All things that
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very
- Parents were very

Wednesday, October 4, 10:00am - 11:00am

Activities

- singing songs
- dancing to music
- reading books
- free play with stuffed animals
- imitating bugs
- bug hunt in the garden

Environment

- underprivileged community center
- a closet full of toys and supplies
- lots of windows and light
- located in a quiet neighborhood
- wooden floors
- sounds echo easily
- a park across the street
- minimal parking

Interactions

- free play before class
- lots of kids remained by the parents
- parents took a lot of phone calls
- telling a story to the kids
- showing the cockroach to the kids
- answering questions about the bugs

Objects

- stuffed animals of bugs
- blue mats on the floor
- music
- bug books
- garden plants and dirt
- chairs
- magnifying glass and tweezers

Users

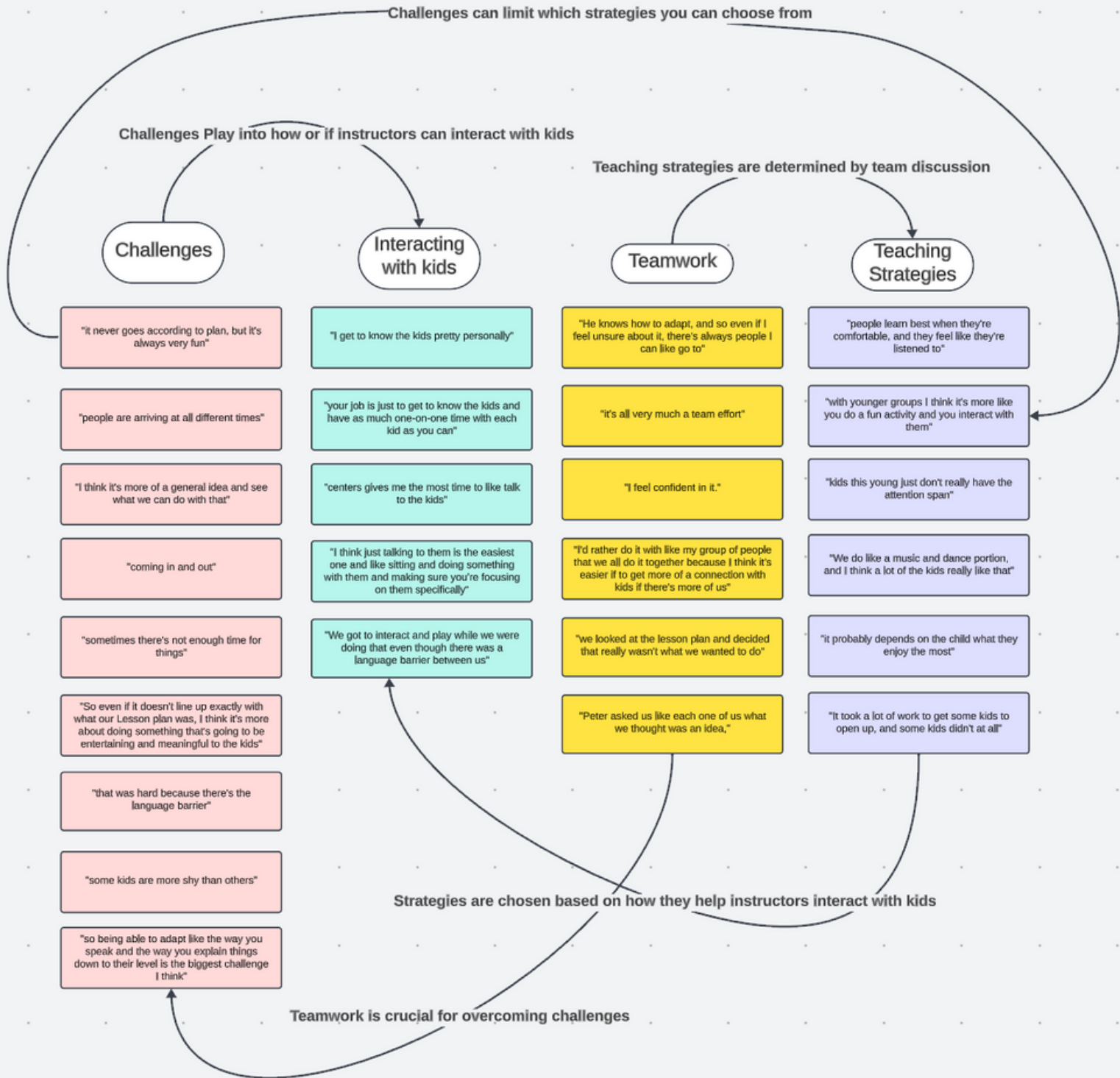
- parents/guardians
- 14 kids
- 5 instructors
- multiple languages

Reflection

Overall, I think the participants loved their time in the class. Observing the reactions and behaviors of all involved, I feel the class offers local parents/guardians the opportunity to connect and create a sense of community across cultural lines. The instructors seem passionate about what they do, and the children seemed to love every minute. However, I noticed three areas for improvement that would deliver greater value to participants if enhanced. These areas are: 1) Providing activities, toys, and specific instructors for the infant aged children and 2) Utilizing multi-lingual music and books to reach the Spanish-speaking participants. Before developing full-fledged solutions along those lines, however, I am curious to gather data from participants to see if my instincts are aligned with their expectations and desires, or if their needs are different from what I observed.

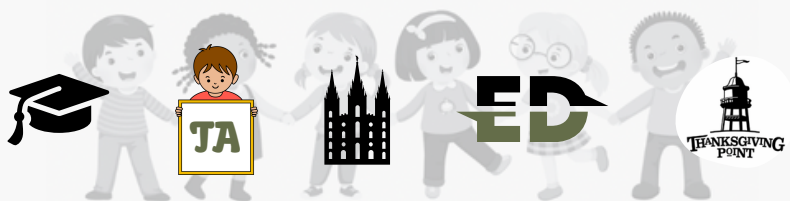
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Appendix Continued

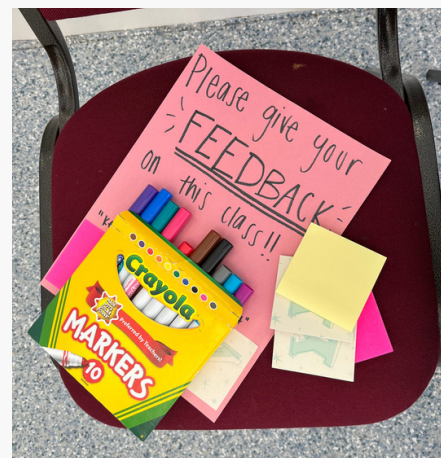


Appendix Continued

Interviewing Artifact: June's Journey



Triangulation Artifact



Metrics: NPS Formula

PROMOTERS	\$110	30%	\$4,290	50%	\$7,150
PASSIVE	\$50	45%	\$2,925	25%	\$1,625
DETRACTORS	\$20	10%	\$260	10%	\$260
			\$7,475		\$9,035

By implementing our recommendation, 20% of passive participants change into promoters. As a result, you experience an increase of \$1,300.

Appendix Continued

Takeaways from Outreach Team Meeting

Outreach Lesson Plan	
Main Theme:	Featured Words: •
Suggested Books:	Suggested Songs:
Centers: Write down 3-5 centers people can choose from that relate to the topic (if it doesn't relate perfectly that's fine)	
Intro Activity: <u>Welcome everyone and introduce yourself and the theme.</u> Choose 1-2 of the following activities:	
Main Activity: Pick 1 of the following activities:	
Reflection: Example Questions you can ask for reflection:	
Supplies and Location: •	•
At Home Extension/Take home activity:	Sample Timeline: 10:00- Put out centers. Greet Guests as they come. 10:15- Welcome and Intro Activity 10:30- Main Activity 10:50- Begin to give Clean-up warnings 10:55- Clean-up and reflect

Information for Caregivers:

- This is supposed to be a child-led exploration where caregivers engage on items that interest the child.
- All items may be used for a variety of purposes. There is no single 'right' way.
- Caretakers are encouraged to participate, as this activity promotes social and emotional development.
- Children are naturally little scientists, they love to explore, investigate, and observe things as they work to make sense of their world.

How many kids we've impacted so far since we started: 677!

How many centers we're running: 3

Future centers in the works: 4

"Biggest wildest possibility": 22+