



# Teaching in Themes: An Approach to Schoolwide Learning, Creating Community, and Differentiating Instruction (Practitioner Inquiry Series)

*Deborah Meier, Matthew Knoester, Katherine Clunis D'Andrea*

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How do teachers and schools create meaningful learning experiences for students with diverse skills, abilities, and cultures? How can teachers authentically assess the learning of their students and build on their strengths and interests in ways that enrich the larger community? How can schools be turned into places where everyone is learning from each other? These are the big questions that guide the work of teachers at the well-known Mission Hill School in Boston and that are addressed in this book. *Teaching in Themes* will help schools incorporate a whole-school, theme-based curriculum that engages students across grade levels K–8. The authors provide detailed descriptions of four thematic units: What’s Baking? Learning Together About Bread and Bakeries; The Impact of Nature and Play; The Struggle for Justice: U.S. History Through the Eyes of African-Americans; and Astronomical Inquiries. Readers will see how teachers and students design “emergent inquiries” within the themes and create artwork, music, presentations, and a variety of hands-on learning experiences that support differentiated instruction across the curriculum.

## **Book Features:**

- Examples of whole-school projects designed to create a deep sense of immersion in a curricular theme and to build a multi-age learning community.
- Details of how teachers developed rich curriculum tailored to their unique students.
- The insights of legendary educator Deborah Meier on how whole-school thematic units were used to encourage collaboration among teachers.
- An afterword by teachers (and film makers) about the thinking behind their work featured in the widely-viewed film series “A Year at Mission Hill.”

“The schools Deborah Meier created in New York and Boston are outstanding examples of democratic education in action. I will never forget the first time I visited one of Deborah’s schools in East Harlem and saw the joy and curiosity on the faces of children and teachers alike. I took time then to carefully describe the school’s practices, including its portfolio-based assessment system, because I believed the word needed to be spread. I still do. Happily, this new book from Deborah and her colleagues at the Mission Hill School adds to the literature on creative and collaborative teaching and on building trusting and powerful learning communities.”

—**Linda Darling-Hammond**, Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education, Stanford University

“Here is a book that shatters the prevailing definition of a ‘good’ school as one with high test scores. *Teaching in Themes* makes clear the often hidden fact that there are many kinds of ‘good’ schools for children, adults, and a democratic society, past and present. Experienced teachers tell a fascinating story about Boston’s Mission Hill School, its goals, curriculum, classroom lessons, and assessments that will knock the socks off many true believers in only one kind of a ‘good’ school.”

—**Larry Cuban**, Professor Emeritus of Education, Stanford University

“Real student engagement is not the result of entertaining instruction; it is borne from students being

passionate about their own learning—about becoming young experts. This book gives a behind-the-scenes look at Mission Hill, a remarkably successful public school where the quality of student thinking and student work takes precedence over test scores, and where thematic learning builds powerful intellectual bridges within classrooms and across the school.”

—**Ron Berger**, chief academic officer, Expeditionary Learning

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