

Barbara Dowling: By observing the children, listening to them, and asking yourself, "What are they curious about?" The home, the classroom, the park, the sidewalk, the grocery store, ants on the playground, new objects in the environment, or a comment a child makes that a flower looks like a hot air balloon -- these all can be starting points for an investigation.

Ordinary moments may become extraordinary investigations if you observe carefully and engage in conversations with the children. One phenomenon that often intrigues young children is shadows. They notice them and wonder what they are and where they come from. They formulate theories in shadows -- about shadows and engage in activities and experiences to test those theories.

Children ask questions. Lot's of questions, like, "How can we make our shadows bigger or smaller? What makes a shadow disappear? What makes shadows at night?" And, "Do shadows talk? Where are my shadow's eyes?" They'll say, "Our shadows were in front of us when we left, but they are behind us now. What happened? And how can we get our shadows in front of us again? Where do shadows go when the sun goes behind a cloud?"

These questions also reflect the theories children have about shadows and these theories will determine what experiences and activities to offer the children. It is extremely important that the content and experiences presented to the children match their cognitive abilities. How children view shadows or any other subject is determined by their experiences and their perspectives.

Their responses are not always correct and there may be some misconceptions, but it is the process of the investigation that is important and that will expand the children's thinking. By investigating, children are developing a scientific approach to studying phenomena in their environment.

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