

What is a thematic unit?

Thematic teaching units involve a group of correlated activities that are designed around topics or themes and cross several areas of the curriculum. They provide an environment that fosters and encourages process learning and active involvement of ALL students (Fisher, 1991). They build on students' interests and prior knowledge by focusing on topics relevant to their lives. They help children relate to real-life experiences and build on what they know. Thematic units provide one of the best vehicles for integrating content areas in a way that makes sense to children and helps them make connections to transfer knowledge they learn and apply it in a meaningful way. Thematic units also address the diverse learning styles of the students we serve.

Other benefits of utilizing themes in the early childhood classroom include:

- Learning in-depth factual information

- Becoming physically involved with learning

- Learning process skills

- Learning "how to learn"

- Integrating learning in a holistic way

- Promoting group cohesiveness

- Addressing individual needs

- Motivating children and teachers (Kostelnik, M.J., Soderman, A. K., & Whiren, A. P., 2004)

What is the rationale?

The 500-700 word rationale is your overall justification for the unit. In essence, you are making an argument about how your approach to teaching this material is pedagogically sound. The audience for this rationale is for the family of the student, administrator, or mentor teacher. In this rationale, you will...explain the goals for the unit and how it fits into your overall course goals. Because your writing assignment and the readings are the unit's backbone, place them at the center of your discussion. Then highlight some of the activities and other work that students will do to support the goals of fulfilling this assignment and understanding these readings. Support your argument about the pedagogical soundness of your curriculum,

What is an essential question?

1. Essential questions are concept in the form of questions. Questions suggest inquiry.

2. Essential questions are organizers and set the focus for the lesson or unit.
3. Essential questions are initiators of creative and critical thinking.
4. Essential questions are conceptual commitments focusing on key concepts implicit in the curriculum.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS REGARDING LESSON PLANS

In order to design an effective learning experience for all students, teacher should address the following questions:

1. What do I want students to know and be able to do at the end of this lesson?
2. What part of the core content/program of studies will students be addressing through this lesson?
3. What connection to real life will this learning have?
4. What will I do to cause this learning to occur?
5. What will the student do to facilitate own learning?
6. How will I assess to find out if this learning occurred?
7. What will I do for those who show through assessment that the learning did not take place?

Are the essential questions written so that:

1. Every person in the class can understand them?
2. There is no "right" answer?
3. They require synthesis, analysis, and evaluation judgment?
4. They emphasize concepts, while requiring students to use knowledge in developing answers?
5. They cause the students' learning to uncover and recover important ideas?
6. They are sequential?

What are the terms, practices and principles?

Terms are the vocabulary children will need to know to engage in the unit.

Principles of effective theme teaching to consider:

- Are the activities related to real-life experiences?
- Are they appropriate and culturally sensitive?
- Represent a concept for children to investigate?
- Integrate content learning with process learning?
- Involve children's families in some way?

Practices are the instructional choices you include in your unit based on the principles listed above. This is reflected in the lesson plans.

What is the research on the theme?

Research the accurate historical information about the culture underpinning the theme of your unit. Be sure to use information that avoid reinforces stereotypes in terms of race, class language or gender. Often the most accurate source of information comes from the cultural group itself. Look for sources that are produced by members of that cultural group. This makes the research and information authentic and accurate.

What is the opening/brainstorm activity?

These group activities are rooted in the practicalities of real life. They can be used to help students see how original and creative thinking can be applied to their daily lives. Brainstorming is an excellent teaching strategy to generate ideas on a given topic. Brainstorming helps promote thinking skills. When students are asked to think of all things related to a concept, they are really being asked to stretch their thinking skills. However, with the technique of brainstorming, the child says what comes to mind as it relates to the topic. Brainstorming promotes success for students with special needs as there is no one right answer.

What are the 5-10 topics?

During the early years, theme topics generally pertain to children's life experiences and interests. By selecting topics of high interest to children, the opportunities for active involvement in the process of learning are increased. Organizing curriculum around a theme allows for curriculum content and learning processes to be addressed within a meaningful context. The topics are derived from the lesson objectives.