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Instructional materials to support an integrated social studies theme on families for primary students in a multi-age classroom

Deborah E. Allemang
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to assemble a collection of instructional materials to be used in my primary multi-age classroom in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The organizing objectives were taken from the district's social studies theme for Families and the district's objectives for integrated language arts. The goal of the project was to coordinate a group of quality materials and suggest response activities to support using an integrated curriculum approach, specifically a literature-based social studies theme.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS TO SUPPORT AN

INTEGRATED SOCIAL STUDIES THEME ON FAMILIES

FOR PRIMARY STUDENTS IN A MULTI-AGE CLASSROOM

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A Graduate Project

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by

Deborah E. Allemang

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Rick Traw

_____

Date Approved   Adviser/Director of Graduate Project

Dale D. Johnson

Nov. 10, 1994

_____

Date Approved   Second Reader of Graduate Project

Peggy Ishler

Nov. 10, 1994

_____

Date Approved   Head, Department of Curriculum
                             and Instruction

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Introduction

Educational practices should be "a series of interrelated growth-enhancing experiences that promote learning for both children and teachers." (Cecil & Lauritzen, 1994, p. XIV.).

Purpose and Rational

The purpose of this project was to assemble a collection of instructional materials to be used in my primary multi-age classroom in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The organizing objectives were taken from the district's social studies theme for Families and the district's objectives for integrated language arts. The goal of the project was to coordinate a group of quality materials and suggest response activities to support using an integrated curriculum approach, specifically a literature-based social studies theme.

The Cedar Rapids district already has a curriculum for combination classrooms. This curriculum, however, does not match well with the more recent multi-age description of these classrooms. Although the district supports the idea of integrating across the curriculum and encourages teachers to do this, none of the material provided by the district has been coordinated with other areas for multi-age classrooms. In terms of reading instruction, this curriculum recommends separating the students by grade level or using one selection for the entire class, using Houghton Mifflin basals. These recommendations do not represent best educational

practices, which suggest less whole class instruction and less student time spent reading basal readers (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993). The instructional materials provided by the district for social studies are discrete lessons from supplementary skills guides and worksheets. Following the curriculum guide for combination classrooms results in very fragmented learning activities for students.

Instead of basals and worksheets, this project suggests a variety of materials and activities to use in an integrated program which better matches the needs of students in a multi-age classroom with the district objectives for social studies and integrated language arts.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms are relevant throughout this paper. The definitions are based on current understanding in education.

multi-age classroom - a classroom which includes students who are more than one year apart in age. The group is viewed as one cohesive entity and a sense of groupness is nurtured (Katz, Evangelou, & Hartman, 1990).

integrated curriculum - an organized framework which blends the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing with the content areas (Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstick ,1990).

reader response - an activity following the reading of a text which allows for a variety of response modes, multiple correct responses, and the sharing of ideas and information (Chase & Hynd, 1987).

Methodology

Review of the Literature

Three aspects were reviewed in preparation for the project:
integrated curriculum, multi-age classrooms, and literature-based social
studies.

Integrated Curriculum

The integrated curriculum is not a new concept in education.
Gordon F. Vars (1991) reports philosophical and psychological
antecedents dating back to writings of Herbert Spencer in the 1800s. A
variety of reform efforts over the years have supported integrative
approaches, the most important being the progressive education
movement of the 30s and 40s. More recently, proponents of the schema
theory and reader response theory, whole language advocates, early
childhood specialists, and experts in content area subjects have
supported integrating content with the language arts processes.

Schema theory supports the use of themes. Under schema theory,
reading is viewed as an active process of constructing meaning by
connecting prior knowledge with the new information found in a text
(Anderson & Pearson, 1984). This prior knowledge is represented in a
cognitive framework as a unit of knowledge, or schema. The language
that children experience in a range of contexts, which is facilitated by
integrating the curriculum, leads to modification and restructuring into a

more accurate representation of the world. Learning occurs during this knowledge restructuring. When students have a rich set of schemata to refer to when learning something, the learning is more likely to occur (Rumelhart, 1980). Conversely , when few or no connections are made, learning is difficult and easily forgotten (Holland, Hungerford, & Ernst, 1993). Using familiar themes as a basis for an integrated curriculum helps establish a format to aid learning based on this model.

Pappas et al. (1990), also advocates of the schema theory, view listening, speaking, reading, and writing as tools to support learning, not ends in and of themselves. They see the integrated language perspective as supporting the way children learn language before they enter school. They believe that using language across the curriculum is the natural way to become effective communicators.

Reader response theories, based on Louise Rosenblatt's transactional view of reading, contend that the meaning of a reader's experience derives from a transaction between the reader and the text. Readers construct their own conception of the text (Rosenblatt, 1938). This theory closely parallals schema theory which asserts that the meaning readers construct is dependent on their schema, or prior knowledge. Reader response theories support both the use of themes and the integration of language arts processes. Beach and Phinney (1992) state that "having students working in their own book clubs, selecting and discussing books based on certain topics, themes, or genres, involves them in making their own intertextual links." (p. 132). By

comparing and contrasting related books, students often gain new insights about the concepts in each book. Some reader response proponents go further than the conventional linguistic modes of responses involving writing or oral discussion (Trousdale & Harris, 1993). They suggest that "alternative ways of knowing" are legitimate and should be encouraged, indeed that they tap the multiple intelligences described by Howard Gardner (cited in Harris,1993), not just the verbal and mathematical. These can include responses using art, dance, music, and drama (Cecil & Lauritzen, 1994). Poems, for example, can often be naturally extended with music, art, and movement. Reader response theories are supported by the belief that transmediation forms the basis for literacy learning. This moving of information from one communication system to another, such as moving from reading to drama or art, is when learning occurs. Cecil and Lauritzen (1994) state that "through the blending and flowing across different communication systems, children actually generate new meanings and expand existing ones." (p. XIV).

Norma Mickelson (1992), in listing the underlying principles of whole language, includes the practice of integration within the language arts and across the curriculum. Whole language practitioner and writer Regie Routman (1991) recommends an integrated curriculum which acknowledges the interrelationships of the language processes. She supports the use of thematic units which focus on major concepts important to the curriculum and to children's needs and interests. Routman cautions other teachers not to include some other discipline

unless it extends and enriches the learning. Counting plastic bears during math time, for instance, does not enrich a theme on Bears.

Jane Hansen (1987), well known for her work with Donald Graves on the writing process, states that, "When writers write, they concentrate on their information; when they read, they respond to another writer's knowledge. Thus, writing, reading, and content learning all move along, side by side." (p. 145).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, which is concerned with the education of children aged five through eight years, is a strong supporter of an integrated curriculum. It encourages curriculum which develops knowledge and skills in meaningful contexts, not in isolation. Their position statement in 1991 specifically states that the curriculum should allow "for focus on a particular topic or content, while allowing for integration across traditional subject-matter divisions by planning around themes and/or learning experiences that provide opportunities for rich conceptual development." (p. 30).

The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland (1993) is a joint project of the Nebraska Department of Education, the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Area Education Agencies and Head Start-State Collaboration Project. It states that the curriculum should be worth learning, meaningful, engaging, and integrated wherever and whenever possible. The program recommends integrated curriculum which incorporates a variety of instructional models, strategies, and resources.

Many books from the various content areas of math, science, and social studies have been published stating just how to integrate that area with the other curricular areas. In <u>Science Through Children's Literature: An Integrated Approach</u> (Butzow &Butzow, 1989), the authors state that the processes used in reading and science are so similar that using science and the language arts together reinforces both disciplines. <u>Maths in Context: A Thematic Approach</u> (Edwards, 1990) states the advantages of using language in all its forms to extend thinking and problem solving in math activities and make them real world experiences. Regular columns in professional journals such as <u>The Reading Teacher</u> are devoted to *Integrating Curriculum.*

Recent performance-based assessments have carried the importance of integrating curriculum one step further. Developers of the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program designed the assessment to integrate activities around themes (Kapinus, Collier, & Druglanski, 1994). Believing that assessment should be in line with instruction, they are trying a different format from the traditional testing of isolated skills in standardized tests. One cluster of activities might include a short discussion about a topic designed to tap prior knowledge of that topic, followed by reading a book related to the topic, and then doing a writing activity springing from the reading. Thus, speaking, listening, reading, and writing are all focused around one theme in the assessment. Following the concept that assessment should go hand in hand with

instruction, this project will suggest assessment possibilities which could be done during the activities, both by teachers and students.

All of these groups and texts state that using integrated themes as a focus point and the communication processes as tools provide the means for true learning to occur.

Multi-Age

The multi-age or mixed-age grouping is also not a new practice. The British Primary School and many pre-school programs in this country have followed this grouping practice for years. In the past five years, many school systems, attempting to restructure their schools, have investigated multi-age primary programs. The state of Kentucky passed an act, the Kentucky Educational Reform Act, in 1990, which mandated ungraded primaries for all schools by 1992-1993 (Raymond, 1992). Many advantages for the use of this type of program are given in The Case for Mixed-Age Grouping in Early Education (Katz et al., 1990). These advantages are both for academic achievement gains and social development outcomes. In order for these advantages to be realized, however, Katz et al. (1990) state that the curriculum must be appropriate. Further, they state that most current, sequential, academic curricula do not support mixed-age grouping. They identify an appropriate curriculum as one that is broadly conceived, oriented towards projects, and multi-dimensional, offering a comparatively wide range of activities in which varying levels of skills can be applied. They say that lesson plans should

be designed to lead toward group participation and cohesion rather than social segregation. The curriculum should encourage learning activities in which individuals and small groups can do different kinds of work alongside one another. They think themes should support general intellectual growth rather than accelerate the acquisition of isolated academic skills. This philosophy fits well with an integrated approach which also encourages skills be taught in context.

In "The Whys and Hows of the Multi-Age Primary Classroom", Cushman (1990) describes the integrated curriculum as a powerful classroom technique which pulls together learning objectives. Integrating around themes allows students of different ages and developmental stages to work together in groups and to practice skills at different levels. She states that in multi-age primary classrooms language arts are such "an integral part of classroom life that it cannot be categorized." (p. 21).

In addition to supporting an integrated curriculum approach, whole language advocates support multi-age groupings. The whole language reading philosophy provides the flexibility to group children at different ability levels together, encouraging them to work with and learn from each other. The children do better when they work in small groups with flexible age boundaries (Cushman, 1990).

Principles which underlie the belief in the social nature of learning support multi-age classrooms and the use of an integrated curriculum. Social learning has been defined as a "child striving to make order of his environment by using language, both spoken and written, as a functional

tool to make connections." (Aulgar, Baker, & Copeland, 1992, p. 1).

Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development supports placing students together whose knowledge and abilities are similar, but not identical. The experts, the ones who can do some task independently, can help the novices, the students who need some assistance to do that task. Advocates of multi-age classrooms say that this grouping capitalizes on the social nature of learning by promoting many activities involving small groups consisting of students with a range of abilities. Not only do students learn from more skilled classmates, but having to collaborate and cooperate with others about an area of interest promotes the restructuring of all the students' knowledge (Vygotsky cited in Pappas et al., 1990). As the students help each other, indeed rely on each other's assistance rather than only on the teacher, they interact and come to a "natural caring about and helping for their fellow learners." (Harp, 1992, p. 12).

The formation of multi-age classrooms is supported by both the principles of the integrated nature of learning and the social nature of learning. The optimism surrounding multi-age groupings relies on the use of integrated approaches. If only the structure is changed and not the teaching strategies, the multi-age classrooms of today will fail, much as the open space classrooms did in the 60s.

Social Studies

Educators in the field of social studies encourage the use of trade

books to teach social studies concepts. Each year the National Council for the Social Studies publishes a list of notable trade books in the field of social studies. With it are suggested concepts which the books could be used to teach. The standards movement in the field of social studies sponsored by the National Council for the Social Studies "projects a vision of the social studies as an integrated field of study for kindergarten through grade 12" (Schneider, 1993, p. 34). A couple of the guiding principles which the developers of the social studies standards have cited are to integrate knowledge and experience from a variety of fields and to organize learning around powerful themes to facilitate connections and the application of knowledge. Alleman and Brophy (1994) do caution teachers to make sure they do not trivialize or promote misconceptions of social education' goals by using "cute" literature selections with no social educational value. For instance, "I Had a Little Brother " may be a catchy fantastical poem about a girl drowning her little brother in the bathtub, but it would hardly further a discussion on family relationships.

Zarnowski (1993), a professor of elementary and early childhood education, writes that "high quality children's trade books offer a means of overcoming one of the most nagging problems associated with textbook-driven programs: brief and simple explanations of complex topics." (p. 35). She offers three specific advantages of trade book use. First, trade books offer multiple perspectives. Second, they enable children to slow down and explore topics in depth. Third, they allow children to respond to writings intellectually and emotionally.

Trade books offer several perspectives and open the way for a variety of interpretations. Many picture books focusing on the same subject can be read during a theme. These can stimulate thoughtful discussions involving comparisons and contrasts. Students can examine and explore different authors' views. Using various types of literature encourages students to experience, feel, and know the content in a variety of forms (Sage, 1993).

Combining curricular areas frees up time to explore topics in depth, rather than applying the survey coverage common with short fixed time slots. This time is essential for systematic and reflective inquiry (Pappas et al., 1990). Discussions that occur for several weeks enable children to clarify their ideas, raise questions, share information and practice sustained conversation.

Quality literature can offer strong emotional appeal. Students can think, feel, and have emotions through characters in stories, thus relating more to them than they can to a paragraph in a textbook. Langer (1993) states that a literary orientation which encourages readers to live through a book allows for multiple interpretations and expands the complexity of our understandings.

Simply having these books available is not enough, however. Wooster (1993) emphasizes that teachers must plan purposefully to capitalize on the potential of children's books to teach social studies. Laughlin and Kardeleff (1991) recommend specific trade books, along with activities to teach objectives identified by the Curriculum Task Force

of the National Commission on Social Studies in the School. Pappas et al. (1990) see "social studies as the integration of the processes of learning about people as they arrange to live together in groups." (p. 228). Indeed, they see social studies as "capable of being one of the most powerful contexts within which children use all the forms of language." (p. 228).

Families is one theme the Task Force identified as important. They suggested it for grade two. This is the theme my project develops. It invites learning major concepts in a social context, doing related meaningful activities, and promoting the home/school relationship. It fulfills the requirements listed by Pappas et al. (1990) that themes should be important to the curriculum and to children's needs and interests.

The use of themes to teach the language arts processes and content material is supported by professionals advocating integrating the curriculum, by proponents of multi-age classrooms, and by leaders in the field of social studies.

Procedures

Review of Children's Literature

In planning the unit, a wide variety of literature pertaining to the family theme was investigated, both materials for students and materials for teachers to read. Different genres such as realistic fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and biography were reviewed, as were many kinds of books, including picture books, chapter books, and reference books. When

reviewing these materials the district objectives for the Family Unit were used as guides. The intent was to provide a sufficient number of books covering a range of reading levels to allow for some student choice. Because the goal of this project was to provide quality materials for students to use to meet district objectives, not just to produce an extensive list of family-related books, specific criteria were considered when selecting materials for the project.

Criteria for Literature Selection

The type of criteria used was dependent on the type of literature being reviewed.

Picture books. Books were sought in which the text and illustrations would both be of interest to children and developmentally appropriate (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993). In addition, the presence of strong literary elements such as plot, characterization, theme, point of view, imagery, and figurative language was considered. The readability range of preprimer through third grade needed to be provided.

Poems. A strong rhythmic element was a major feature desired when selecting poems. Poems which would appeal to children and were developmentally appropriate were sought.

Nonfiction. Several areas were considered when reviewing nonfiction material: accuracy, relevance, clear strong writing. and a match with the objectives.

Suggestions of Response Activities

A variety of response activities were suggested to use with the literature pieces to further achievement of the Cedar Rapids objectives in language arts and the social studies family theme. The kinds of response activities were gleaned from reading professional books such as Towards a Reading-Writing Classroom (Butler & Turbill, 1988), Invitations (Routman, 1991), The Art of Teaching Writing (Calkins, 1986), Journeying: Children Responding to Literature (Lolland, Hungerford, & Ernst, 1993), and from my own experience with students in the classroom. These response activities included music, art, and drama, as well as the more common verbal and written responses, thus building on the concept of transmediation. These suggestions were intended to be viewed as possibilities, invitations to students and teachers, not as assignments. The importance of students' choice of response modes was as important as their opportunity for choice of books. Students should share the responsibility of deciding what might be done in response. As they become more independent, they will accept more of this responsiblility for the direction of their responses. Types of suggested activities included:

Readers theater. This is a form of dramatization of prose or verse. This is staged simply with no costumes, props, or memorization required. Students read from scripts, either commercially published or made by themselves or the teacher.

Art activities. This includes creative activities using any of a wide variety of art media such as colored pencils, clay, paper, and paints. It

was important for the activities to increase the understanding of the text or illustrator's craft, not just be frivolous additions (Cecil & Lauritzen, 1994). For example making a bunny out of cotton balls after reading <u>The Runaway Bunny</u> would neither increase the understanding of the text nor Margaret Wise Brown's use of illustrations.

<u>Role playing</u>. Students pretend they are characters in a story and act out an event the way they think their character would.

<u>Reading journals</u>. Students write down their reactions to a story before, during, and after reading it. These responses should be students' own personal reactions to, questions about, and reflections on the reading material. They may also be responses to open-ended questions from the teacher or peers.

<u>Whole class sharing</u>. The total group shares comments and thoughts about a selection. This usually follows a read-aloud by the teacher or a student. This is an excellent time for the teacher to call attention to a specific part of the story or literary element.

<u>Literature study group</u>. This is a small group of students who read the same book and get together to talk about it. Sometimes they may purposely focus on something in the text. Other times the conversation is more open to associations they made with the reading , intellectual and emotional.

<u>Home/school</u>. This is an activity which naturally lends itself to collaboration with the home, such as an interview with a grandparent to find out family stories that have been told over and over.

Retelling. One student or a pair of students tell their account of what happened in a story. This can also involve drawing pictures of the events in a story and then putting them in order.

Choral reading. Two or more students read poetry aloud. The poem can be divided up in a variety of ways, line by line, verse and refrain, or altogether in unison.

Visualization activities. Activities in which students imagine or make a picture in their minds of something; this may be a long guided imagery experience or a short visualization activity (Cecil et al. 1994).

Materials Construction

It was necessary to make many of the materials which will be required to do the suggested activities.

Poem charts. Selected poems were written on large 24"x36" tablet charts.

Flannelboard character. Characters from simple cumulative stories were made using pellon and pastels.

Featured author charts. Biographical information, a photograph, and some information about their books, content or illustrations were included.

Readers theatre scripts.. Scripts were typed up and multiple copies made. The parts were highlighted.

Audio tapes. Tapes were made to accompany books. Blank tapes were purchased for students to use when recording.

Suggested Organizational Framework in the Classroom

This project has not yet been implemented. The purpose of the project was to develop instructional materials to be used in an integrated theme. The following is a suggested organizational framework to follow when the theme is done.

Implementing this integrated theme will require a framework which allows for large group work, small group activities, and independent work times. Rigid time allotments would not facilitate in-depth explorations, but time guidelines can be helpful in planning. The following is a possible framework in which the entire morning is viewed as an integrated language arts/content workshop. The integrated theme could also be reinforced in the afternoon.

Theme study. (20-40 minutes) During this time the teacher would present materials relating to the theme to the entire class. For example, the teacher might read a story about a family to the students. Following the teacher's reading of a book, the class might have a conversation about what happened in the story, what it made them think of, or they might clear up anything in the story they did not understand. Depending on the material presented, a follow up activity could be done immediately.

Writers' workshop. (35-50 minutes) The students would work mainly on topics of their own choosing while following the recursive components of writing-prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing, as described by Donald Graves (1983). Sharing of pieces could be done at Author's Chair. Students could share either works in progress or pieces

they had published. Peer conferences and teacher-directed mini-lessons would also be a part of writers' workshop. For students who did not have an idea of their own or were not in the middle of a piece of writing, topics relating to the theme could be presented as possible writing topics. Two or three times during the theme, the teacher could assign a writing topic or activity for the whole class. For example, at the beginning of the theme, the teacher could direct all the students to write a personal memory of a family experience.

Readers' workshop. (60-85 minutes) The students would be involved for part of the time in literature study groups in which the literature would be theme-related. The teacher would be a participant in these discussions. A variety of reading materials and grouping arrangements would be used. These groups would change every week or so. One week one group could be involved in a shared reading of a big book while another group was discussing a chapter book. Other response activities would be encouraged at this time as well as follow-up activities to be done with a partner or independently. When not meeting with their group, students could do a variety of reading choices such as reading a book with a classmate, listening to a pre-recorded tape at the listening center, retelling a story at the flannelboard center, practicing poems and chants from large chart tablets, or reading with help from a volunteer. Many of these materials, though not necessarily all of them, would be related to the theme.

Read-aloud. (20-30 minutes, afternoon) The teacher would read a story aloud by a featured author. Biographical information could be given about the author so that connections could be made between the author's life and the writing. Most of the time, these books would be read for listening pleasure, not for lengthy discussions.

Poems. (15 minutes, afternoon) Students could be given a poem, often relating to the theme. The teacher would read the poem aloud and then the whole class could practice it. The students would be given options of reading the poem to themselves, practicing with a partner, or illustrating.

Sustained silent reading. (15-30 minutes, afternoon) Students could choose any reading material in the classroom. They would find a place to sit and read to themselves, or as quietly as they could.

Theme/project study. (45 minutes, afternoon) Students would work individually or with their "theme" groups on their particular interests in the theme. During the Family theme, one group might be the "Favorite Activities" group. They might do a survey to find out what the favorite family activities were for their class members. Individual students could be writing up questions to take home to learn more about their heritage. Though the teacher would need to facilitate children's efforts, the topics of interest would ideally come from the students. Students could present their learning to the rest of the class either verbally, through pictures or displays.

Project

The Cedar Rapids District objectives for first-second grade combination classrooms for the Family theme and for integrated language arts were listed. Placing them at the beginning of the project notebook made them easy to refer to as literature selections were reviewed.

An individual sheet was written for each literature selection. On the paper were listed the title of the piece, the author, the illustrator, the reading level as listed by book publishers, a summary, and response activities, along with assessment possibilities. A place for comments was included at the bottom of each sheet.

Materials were purchased or made to support the suggested activities. When possible the materials were inserted immediately behind the information sheet for easy access. For example, the readers theatre script for Mama, Do You Love Me? was put right after the information sheet.

Poems were typed up and put in the folder. These were also copied on large chart tablets to be used in the classroom.

Biographical information about possible featured authors was put into the notebook. At least some of the books written by the author related to the theme.

Materials to support activities which could apply to several literature selections were included. Such things as questions to guide responses in

reading journals, comments to use in writing conferences, and checklists to use in evaluating literature study groups were added.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

I gained several insights from the process of developing this project. These insights were primarily in the areas of topic selection and practical application.

In terms of topic selection, the universal nature of the topic Families made it a good choice for an integrated literature-based social studies theme. There was an abundance of literature which made it possible to offer choices to students of varying abilities and interests. There was also a wide variety of literature available in terms of genres. A more narrow topic such a "birthdays" would have yielded fewer literature selections and less variety for teachers and students to choose from.

The choice of a topic familiar to children also insured that learners would have a great deal of prior knowledge to support their new learning. Each child has first hand experiences with his or her own famly and can thus make meaningful connections. Though a less familiar topic, such as "outer space," may sound exciting to young children, it would not capitalize on their prior knowledge or level of understanding.

Deciding which materials were of the desired quality took time. It was important for me to keep in mind that I wanted good literature to

further teaching the objectives, not just anything with the word "family" it it. Gathering just anything with the word "family" in it would most likely have yielded a large volume of contrived pieces of boring material. The availability of multiple copies also had to be considered when choosing books for small groups. The school library, the area education association library, and my personal collection were all used in selecting materials.

In terms of practical application, perhaps the most realistic thing I did was to concentrate on the books in my school library and my personal collection. Consequently, I know I have the resources to implement the theme. The potential problem with commercially prepared thematic units is that they may suggest titles which are unavailable or cost prohibitive. Making materials, such as readers theater scripts, to correspond to suggested activities also assures that , if needed, these will be all ready to use.

Suggesting reader responses which included art and drama activities, in addition to the more traditional activities of discussion and writing, made the project more exciting for me to develop. I found myself engaged in broader reader responses than I have before. I hope this enlarged view of response will also be more exciting for my students.

The essential element in developing this project was time; time for reflection about books, poems, and authors; time for thought about the possible directions students might take with the materials and how to best guide them; and time for constructing or purchasing the materials.

<u>Recommendations</u>

Many professional organizations and texts support the use of integrated themes. The purpose of this project was to coordinate a group of quality materials and suggest response activities to support an integrated theme. When teachers do start developing their own integrated themes, there are some important things for them to consider.

The main recommendation I would make in terms of this project would be to evaluate the activities as they are implemented. It will be important to refer back to the objectives throughout the theme and at its conclusion in order to evaluate the theme's effectiveness.

Having the objectives listed at the beginning of the theme was beneficial for quick, easy reference when developing the project and should also facilitate evaluation during and at the end of the project. Duplicating the integrated language arts objectives along with the specific content objectives for future themes may be worthwhile.

Putting the additional materials necessary to do suggested response activities immediately after the literature information sheet should prove efficient while implementing the theme. Making another copy, however, and putting it with selections of the same type would prove helpful when developing other themes. Because many literature selections were presented to allow for choice, it is likely that not everything will be used during the Families theme. Placing the poems in a poem folder, readers theater scripts in a readers theater folder, and author blurbs in an author file will make them readily accessible for other themes.

Taking the time to reflect after implementing the specific suggestions listed on the literature information sheet is important. Writing those thoughts in the "comments" section could help insure that this project becomes an evolving one, rather than an outdated one. Organizing the project in a loose leaf binder allows for additions to be made easily, or for materials to be removed, used, or discarded.

Because the school librarian can be such a valuable resource for implementing literature-based themes, discussing in advance themes to be taught would be a good idea. In addition to having suggestions of currently available materials, the librarian could then be watching for quality material to purchase to support the themes.

Encouraging students to begin taking the initiative for selecting response activities should be done during the Families theme and sucessive topics of study. As students do this, they should steadily improve, and the responsiblility for their learning should start shifting towards them. As students become more adept at choosing response activities, teacher will have to devote less of their time on this aspect of project development.

Integrating the social studies and language arts for this project yielded a product superior to discrete lessons in either area alone. Because of the synergistic effect of this type of integration, I believe that teachers should seek opportunities to capitalize on the interrelationships between other subject areas that they may have previously taught as separate entities.

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