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Elementary Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Thematic Unit Instruction Versus Single-Subject Instruction

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ELEMENTARY PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEMATIC
UNIT INSTRUCTION VERSUS SINGLE-SUBJECT INSTRUCTION

by

SHANA SHEA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Elementary Education
In the College of Education and Human Performance
The Burnett Honors College
At the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term 2014

Thesis Chair: Dr. Elizabeth Hoffman

ABSTRACT

The focus of this research project was to determine whether thematic unit instruction or traditional, single-subject instruction was perceived to be the more effective and engaging way of teaching as decided by pre-service teachers. Research has shown that incorporating multiple subjects into one unit or topic of study helps to create more engagement and connections to which students can relate. In creating these connections, students can relate the content to their real life and in turn, better comprehend and retain the material. The pre-service teachers attend the University of Central Florida's College of Education and Human Performance. They voluntarily participated in completing a survey about their perceptions of single subject instruction versus thematic unit instruction. In the survey, the pre-service teachers seemed to be varied on what they believed was a better method of instruction for their future students. The pre-service teachers were split 50/50 as to whether they will teach traditionally, single-subject, or thematically. The pre-service teachers were unanimous in the idea that if they had the support of other teachers and administration as well as resources and research to guide them, that thematic instruction is a method of teaching that they would consider using. Nearly all of the teachers surveyed referred back to doing what is in the best interest of their students.

DEDICATIONS

For my husband and children. Thank you for supporting and encouraging me through this venture in my life. I know that it has been a long haul in achieving my degree but this is the culmination of all my hard work and the passion I have for the education of my future students.

I love you all so much for loving me and always being there when I need you.

For my professors, thank you for giving me the academic tools and knowledge that I will need to be an effective teacher and showing me the passion that is needed in this profession.

A special thank you to Dr. Elizabeth Hoffman. You opened my eyes to children's literature and its importance in the classroom. When I decided to take on this task you were the first pre-service teacher that I thought of to be my thesis chair. Thank you for all that you have done and given to me. I will take it and be the teacher that I know I can be and that you can be proud of.

For my intern mentors, thank you for guiding me through the real life experience of being a teacher. Through your guidance and support, I hope to be the kind of teacher that you all are. Each one of you has inspired me and shown me what it means to be a teacher and that the most important aspect of this profession is seeing the success and growth of each student. I appreciate and thank each one of you and you hold a special place in my heart.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Teachers have incredible amounts of content to accomplish during the course of a school year. They are guided by the standards developed by the state to ensure that all students are receiving the necessary skills needed to be successful in school and beyond. In my schooling experience, most elementary school teachers teach one subject at a time. This method is very structured and it does not lead from one subject to the next in a way that flows cohesively or that brings meaning to each subject. In my own schooling, this instructional practice appeared to limit students' ability to relate, retain, and reflect on what they are learning, as well as limited their ability to find purpose in what is being taught.

The use of thematic units is an alternative teaching method that helps to attain all these goals while meeting the standards and making the curriculum exciting and engaging. Thematic unit teaching incorporates multiple content areas into one theme where they can be interrelated and the students can then see how a variety of subjects build on one another to convey a commonality within their education and correlate to the world around them in a way that they can understand and appreciate. This method of teaching may initially take extra planning time but after units have been planned it becomes second nature and makes more sense. I believe that students learn better when they have a purpose for what they are learning and understand what it means to them now and in the future. The more students are engaged, the more they will get out of their education and ultimately they will learn more.

Every study needs to have a purpose for it to have meaning and hopefully make a difference in the teachers teaching methods and the students' education. Research takes extensive planning and data gathering to be accurate and effective. In the end, you must first figure out the purpose of why you are doing research and what the intended outcomes may be.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of my research is to determine pre-service teachers' perceptions of whether they prefer to teach through single subject instruction, which is the traditional way of teaching, versus thematic unit instruction, which links multiple subjects together to create connections and meanings.

Most educational research revolves around the ideas, feelings, or attitudes of adults. I originally set out to determine students' perceptions of their learning with thematic units vs. single subject instruction, but was unable to continue that path. I then decided to talk with classroom teachers, but again due to unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to pursue that avenue of research. Finally, I enlisted the aid of pre-service teachers' to determine their perceptions of the method of instruction that best suits them individually. After gathering the data and the teacher candidates' input, I have determined which instructional method these pre-service teachers prefer. My hope is that by sharing this data with other teachers it may help them understand a different, yet effective and engaging, method of instruction to use in the classroom in order to meet the needs of their students.

Chapter 2: Rationale

I have a passion for teaching thematically. I believe that students learn better when they can understand how the different subjects relate to each other and make sense. Making learning meaningful and engaging is crucial for a positive and beneficial outcome in each student's academic education. I feel that teachers who can teach thematically show their students how school will help them in the real world and it makes them more well-rounded students. I remember in high school asking one of my teachers why I needed to learn geometry and she told me because it is part of the curriculum and I have to teach it. To this day I still do not know why I had to learn geometry because I can't think of a time, other than helping my children with their geometry homework, that I have ever needed geometry. If, as teachers, we cannot give students a reason and show them how what they are learning affects them personally, then they will have no desire to learn it or be engaged while being taught. Relating lessons to students' lives is necessary in teaching effectively and assuring that the students will learn.

I became interested in this topic in my junior internship while in a fourth grade class. I saw how the teachers would teach one subject and then switch to another and then another with no connection or linkage between the subjects. Teachers just taught the next chapter in each subject because that is what they believed they were supposed to do. I believe if teachers sat down before the beginning of the school year, looked at the textbook chapters and the standards, put the topics together in a way that made sense and then developed thematic units that integrated a variety of subjects, this would be a much more effective and engaging way of teaching and learning for the students.

Teachers should always have a fundamental reason or reasons serving to account for something. We need a rationale for what we teach. Teachers need to know what and why they are teaching so that it can be explained to the students. Students need to have a reason for what they are learning or they will not connect and therefore will have no desire to learn what is being taught. If teachers start by explaining the purpose and reasons for the lesson and relate these lessons to the students' lives and world around them, they will feel more connected which hopefully encourages engagement and ultimately, learning. Pulling multiple subjects into a single unit; thematic units, can help to engage all students who find interest in different subjects. Not every student will like every subject, but if adding a little bit of what they do like can possibly help them gain an interest in the unit being taught, then that is a worthwhile effort.

Thematic units are defined as “the process of integrating and linking multiple elements of a curriculum in an ongoing exploration of many different aspects of a topic or subject. It involves a constant interaction between teacher and students and their classroom environment” (Loughran, 2005, p. 112). This method of teaching is also often referred to as integrated curriculum units, interdisciplinary studies, or cross-curricular teaching. All of these methods focus on “students actively constructing their own knowledge” (Loughran, 2005, p. 112). Creating lesson plans should focus on the 5 C's of learning-“communication, culture, connections with other disciplines, comparisons with students' native languages and cultures, and the use of foreign languages in communities outside the classroom by using ‘content-related’ or ‘theme-based’ curricula” (Haas, 2000, p. 1). Using the “...thematic approach encourages interdisciplinary connections among economic and social history, literature, geography, and culture. Students critically analyze a wide variety of primary sources, including songs, prose,

poetry, and culture” (Resor & Gandy, 2014, p. 1). Teachers need to understand the curriculum that needs to be taught, the state standards, their abilities, but most importantly, the needs of their individual students and the class as a whole. Using thematic units help a teacher to develop lessons around a theme or topic and incorporate, or integrate, a variety of subjects as opposed to teaching one subject at a time with little or no connection between them. Thematic units are also an effective way of adding the arts (art, music, dance, and theatre) into daily or weekly learning (Trent & Riley, 2009, p. 14). “‘Using art to learn things was helpful because you can express what you have learned’ (4th grade student interview 5/9/08). Art can be used in curriculum to support learning in other school subject areas, as well as art learning.” (Trent & Riley, 2009, p. 15). “Thematic units are exciting because they encourage students to pursue ideas more thoroughly so that they can develop deeper understanding” (Shanahan, Robinson, & Schneider, 1995, p. 718). Deeper understanding lets “students recognize that certain themes are consistent across time and place and that realization can lead students to explore their own dreams and how those dreams reflect the realities of their own cultures” (Resor & Gandy, 2014, p. 1).

The following chapter shares some of the literature regarding thematic units and the benefits for the teachers and the students. Having previous studies and literature to help guide teachers in learning how to teach thematically will make them more confident and in turn help the student’s transition to a new kind of learning.

Chapter 3: Review of Literature

Much has been written on the topic of thematic unit instruction. The following information shares a sampling of the literature and specifically pieces that resonated with me based on project.

The Beginnings of Thematic Unit Instruction

Thematic unit teaching has been in practice since the 1800's and it was Dewey (1954) who stated:

...old subject centered system subdivides each topic into studies; each study into lessons; each lesson into specific facts and formulae...emphasis is put upon the logical subdivisions and consecutions of the subject matter... subject matter furnishes the end and it determines method. The child is simply the immature being who is to be matured; he is the superficial being who is to be deepened; his narrow experience which to be widened. It is his to receive, to accept. His part is fulfilled when he is ductile and docile (Bogan, King-McKenzie, & Bantwini, 2012, p. 1054).

Dewey believed that traditional instruction separates students' learning and this fundamentally harms them. Learning should be a continuation of home and life, not an interruption. Dewey says:

... the child's life is an integral, total one. He passes readily and quickly from one topic to another, as from one spot to another, but is not conscious of transition or break. There is no conscious isolation, hardly conscious distinction... He goes to school, and various studies divide and fractionize the world for him (Bogan, King-McKenzie, & Bantwini, 2012, p. 1054).

Teaching thematically allows for each student's specific needs and interests to be met. Burns, Roe, and Ross (1992) found that to get the most out of the lessons being taught in the classroom they must be tailored to fit the students' particular needs, this will benefit the student and the teacher.

“Research by Yorks and Follo (1993) suggests that children learn more from thematic, integrated teaching than from traditional, single-subject curriculum” (Loughran, 2005, p. 112). Much research has been done exploring this concept.

As teachers reconfigure the traditional scope and sequence of the curriculum in new ways...the subject-area textbooks are viewed as just another tool, rather than as the sole decision maker for instruction. The outcome, however, is generally a more comprehensive curriculum, filled with extensive learning experiences, rather than the former minimal content considered necessary for basic mastery (Vardell, 1995, p. 2).

Children need to have connections to what they are learning. They need to understand how it relates to them, what it means to them, or how it affects them. If they do not find meaning in what they are doing, they have no reason to learn what they are being taught. Teachers who teach thematically encourage better readers and writers engaged in authentic tasks through related themes and topics.

Authentic tasks are defined as ‘ones in which reading and writing serve a function for children...’ and which ‘involve children in the immediate use of literacy for enjoyment and communication’. They focus on student opportunities; extend beyond the classroom walls; involve a variety of reading and writing opportunities; promote discussion and

collaboration; and build upon students' interests, abilities, background, and language developments. Cross-curricular themes integrate the language arts (reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and thinking) across a variety of content areas, such as science, social studies, art, and so forth (Vogt, 1997, p. 1).

All of these factors help to create effective thematic units and align with Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory of Learners (Liu & Wang, 2010). Gardner believes that everyone has particular strengths in at least one of the nine different intelligences explained below:

Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

1. Verbal-linguistic intelligence (well-developed verbal skills and sensitivity to the sounds, meanings and rhythms of words)
2. Logical-mathematical intelligence (ability to think conceptually and abstractly, and capacity to discern logical and numerical patterns)
3. Spatial-visual intelligence (capacity to think in images and pictures, to visualize accurately and abstractly)
4. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (ability to control one's body movements and to handle objects skillfully)
5. Musical intelligences (ability to produce and appreciate rhythm, pitch and timber)
6. Interpersonal intelligence (capacity to detect and respond appropriately to the moods, motivations and desires of others)

7. Intrapersonal (capacity to be self-aware and in tune with inner feelings, values, beliefs and thinking processes)

8. Naturalist intelligence (ability to recognize and categorize plants, animals and other objects in nature)

9. Existential intelligence (sensitivity and capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence such as, What is the meaning of life? Why do we die? How did we get here?

(Gardner, 1999, pp. 38-67)

If planned and executed correctly, teaching thematically can reach more students, hopefully every student, by addressing a variety of these intelligences. In classrooms, teachers may encounter all nine of these intelligences or just a few. Some students may fall into more than one category of intelligences. It is our job, as teachers, to create lessons that address the intelligences in our classroom to make learning successful.

Teachers may find mathematics difficult to teach thematically. Most teachers teach mathematics by topics because this is how we learn mathematical content easily. To teach thematically, math needs to be integrated into other subjects themes and not individual content topics. “A thematic approach to teaching mathematics is said to benefit students because it has the power to capitalize on students’ real-world knowledge and experiences and enhance cognitive and affective outcomes” (Handel & Bobis, 2004, p. 3). Adding math into time lines in social studies and conversions in science are effective ways of integrating math into other subjects.

Integrating the arts adds interest and an outlet for creativity in children and is an easy way to begin teaching thematically. “An expanding arts education literature base touts multiple benefits of arts education including cognitive development increased academic achievement, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for democratic citizenship” (Trent & Riley, 2009, p. 14).

Research has found that many students felt that thematic teaching related more to their life and the world due to the connections and meaningful content being used. “Subject integration provides an opportunity for students to make natural and meaningful connects between and among multiple content areas” (Bogan, King-McKenzie, & Bantwini, 2012, p. 1055). “Creativity, adaptability, critical reasoning, and collaboration are highly valued skills. When it comes to fostering those skills in the classroom, integrated study is an extremely effective approach, helping students develop multifaceted expertise and grasping the important role interrelationships can play in the real world. Many students felt that integrated curricula were more relevant to the real world; due to real world problems being of an interdisciplinary nature and this increased both their learning and motivation. The human brain does not separate knowledge into discrete partitions but creates a complex web of information that recognizes patterns. Integrating curriculum is a way to capitalize on the existing features of the human brain and work with it rather than counter to its natural function” (Bogan, King-McKenzie, & Bantwini, 2012, p. 1055).

This excelled their desire to learn and fostered motivation to want to succeed. Additionally, it appears that there may be some research that supports the theory that teaching curriculum thematically is good for the students academically, socially, and personally.

Academically, students get to practice reading different kinds of literature and get to explore different types of reading materials. “Narrative and expository literature serves as the focus of thematic instruction, but there are also multiple opportunities for reading other types of text, including poetry, student-written pieces, and ‘real world’ texts such as magazine articles that contain challenging facts” (Vogt, 1997, p. 2). Socially, “students explore topics individually, in small heterogeneous groups, and together as a whole class” (Vogt, 1997, p. 2). Giving students a variety of ways to learn and interact with their peers helps them to be more successful in their own work and working with others.

Understanding the beginnings of thematic unit instruction is beneficial in knowing how we, as teachers, are able to develop lesson plans and thematic units based on previous research. Knowing the benefits, for our students, to learning thematically should encourage teachers to want to teach this way. In order to create thematic units, we need to first start with the standards. The standards are set up by the state and should guide our instruction via our lesson plans. Teachers can give students a variety of ways to learn but we always must remember that our instruction needs to be guided by the standards that were designed by the states. These standards ensure that most students across the county are learning the same skills and content in each grade level.

Chapter 4: Standards

When planning thematic units, teachers must always remember that all learning must align with the standards set up in their state, which align with the Common Core Standards that are nearly nationwide. This allows all students, no matter where they live, to be learning the same basic skills that all students in their same grade level are learning. There are certain skills that all children need to learn and the standards tell teachers what these skills are and at what point in their education they need to be taught.

Teachers must learn how to teach thematically. Once I understood the process, it became easier and I actually found myself trying to plan thematically, as best I could, in every unit of every subject. In order to understand this process, you need to know where to start. First, you need to decide which subjects you would like to include in your thematic unit. Next, determine which standards you will use to guide your instruction and lesson planning. Then, decide what type of theme that you want to base your unit/lesson around. Next, start planning by finding activities and interactive tasks that fit with your theme, the subjects that you have chosen, and most importantly the standards. Always remember that you know your students and what they will like and what they can do. I always start by following the standards and then seeing what other standards across curriculum that I could add to the unit. I found quite a few standards in multiple subjects tend to work together very well and make sense while making the unit more interesting. I created a thematic unit based around the voyages of Christopher Columbus (see Appendix C). I knew I wanted to plan a social science lesson. Then I looked at the curriculum maps that my county has set up for us to follow. Next, I looked at the standards to see which of them would work together well in a thematic unit. I found that I could integrate social science,

science, math, reading, writing, art, music, and drama. The whole unit had a social science focus as it addressed Christopher Columbus. For science, I planned to discuss water current and wind speed as related to his boats. In order to address reading, we read “journal” entries and poetry about Christopher Columbus. I also did several read alouds. For writing, the students wrote based on a prompt daily. Art was integrated as each student created his or her own ship in a bottle. For music, the students referred back to the poem we read and in groups were asked to write and perform a rap. For drama, the students participated in readers’ theatre. I was able to incorporate all of these subjects and include nearly twenty standards in this one unit. I had a great time teaching it and the students had absolutely great time learning. They were actively engaged and the grades were amazing.

In Florida, in 2014, the Mathematics Florida Standards (MAFS), the Language Arts Florida Standards (LAFS), Science Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, and the Social Studies Next Generation Sunshine State Standards are what teachers use to drive their instruction of their students. These standards ensure that every student in every part of the country- the 45 states plus the District of Columbia that have adopted and/or modified the standards to what their individual states needs are- will all learn the same concepts and curriculum. The Standards are driven by the Common Core Standards guidelines; however, each school district develops their individual curriculum and content based on these standards. Florida has changed these standards, slightly, to make them unique to Florida and to better meet the needs of the students. Standards were created because “high standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life upon graduation from high

school, regardless of where they live. These standards are aligned to the expectations of colleges, workforce training programs, and employers” (About the Standards, 2014). Having these clear-cut standards invites the usage of thematic unit instruction. Teachers know what standards must be taught each school year, so I believe developing thematic units is just a matter of deciding which standards can work together to form a cohesive, engaging unit. Thematic units allow teachers to cover more standards in a timelier, more effective manner while encouraging an environment for higher order thinking and better learning.

With thematic teaching, reading leads to writing. It stimulates ideas, serves as a model, and helps students connect. They have opportunities to talk, to role-play, to debate, to brainstorm, to read, and to write. To hear their classmates’ various opinions, Themes immerse students in particular topics, enrich their reading, and deepen their understanding (Gaughan, 2003).

Students tend to learn better if they find meaning in what is being taught as well as a personal connection to the curriculum content. If teachers found that their students were more captivated they may become increasingly advantageous learners through thematic unit instruction, would they be more apt to create them? I have found the answer to this question, from a pre-service teacher’s point of view, based on my research.

The purpose of this research was to determine the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching by thematic unit instruction as opposed to the traditional single-subject instruction. The next several chapters will explain the process of how I conducted this research, the results, and

what future research should be done to continue to understand which method of teaching is best for the teacher and especially for the students.

The following chapter will share the methodology this project followed, that is the “branch of pedagogics dealing with analysis and evaluation of subjects to be taught and of the methods of teaching them” (Definition of Methodology, n.d.). In other words, the methodology is the who, what, where, when, why, and how I executed my research.

Chapter 5: Methodology

The methodology section explains how I conducted my research and the timeline, which helped me accomplish each individual requirement. I explain how I gathered my data, and what I did with the gathered data. I also explained what I achieved from the study and my expected outcomes.

The pre-service teachers were given a survey created through Qualtrics asking their opinions of single unit instruction and thematic unit instruction. (See Appendix A) These questions helped to determine the preferred method of teaching they may do. The questions helped to determine the advantages and disadvantages of these types of teaching. This process of using a survey came about because I had first planned on teaching thematic units to students and getting their perception of whether they prefer single-subject instruction versus thematic unit instruction. However, after the University of Central Florida had accepted and approved all of my research, my proposed study was sent to the county where I would be performing the study in the school. The county decided that there would not be valid results for my study to deem approval worthy. So, I revamped my study and decided that pre-service teachers would be a better option and probably give me better results in the end. I came up with a variety of questions for pre-service teachers about their perceptions of single-subject instruction versus thematic unit instruction. I then submitted those questions for approval and upon receiving approval they were then sent out, by email, to pre-service teachers at the University of Central Florida in the College of Education and Human Performance. The survey was open for two weeks and then at the conclusion of the survey, I analyzed the responses and compiled them in the results section of this study.

Timeline

The timeline for my research is as follows:

May 2014- CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative at the University of Miami) training

June 2014- Start University of Central Florida Internal Review Board process

July 2014- Complete proposal

July 2014- Submit proposal for committee review

Late July 2014- Receive UCF IRB approval

August 2014- Submit proposal to Burnett Honors College

Late August 2014- Start data collection

September 2014- Apply for intent to graduate

Late September 2014- Complete data collection

Early October 2014- Write thesis

Early October 2014- Request defense

Late October 2014- Submit thesis for initial format review

November 13, 2014- Thesis defense

November 30, 2014- Submit thesis approval form and thesis attachment to

Burnett Honors College

December 1, 2014- Submit final thesis

December 5, 2014- HIM exit survey

December 12, 2014- Graduate

Target Population of this Study

The target population of this study was pre-service teachers who attend the University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. These are students in the College of Education and Human Performance at the University who were in the intern population and will be graduating in the near future and seeking employment in schools.

Pre-service teachers at the University of Central Florida in the College of Education and Human Performance were asked, by email invitation, to participate in a survey asking their perceptions of single-subject instruction versus thematic unit instruction. The survey consisted of 24 questions with the results presented in the next chapter. There were twenty-two pre-service teachers. However, five were excluded from this research because of not answering more than half of the questions. I deemed their responses to be not beneficial to my research.

Creating the Survey

The original survey that was created was to question fifth graders. Then it was revised to interview current teachers. Finally, it was modified to focus on pre-service teachers at the University of Central Florida, College of Education and Human performance in the intern

population via email. I developed the questions and my thesis chair helped to revise and restructure them. The survey was then submitted to IRB for approval. Upon receiving approval, the survey was sent to the department chair who emailed them to the current intern population at the university. The pre-service teachers were given two weeks to respond with a completed survey before the survey closed and I retrieved the results and continued to write this thesis. Seventeen pre-service teachers responded and completed the survey.

Chapter 6: Results

This study was created to determine the perceptions of pre-service teachers, at the University of Central Florida in the College of Education and Human Performance, on the concept of single-subject instruction versus thematic unit instruction. The following information shares the pre-service teachers' opinions on the subject of different methods of instruction. There were seventeen pre-service teachers in this survey.

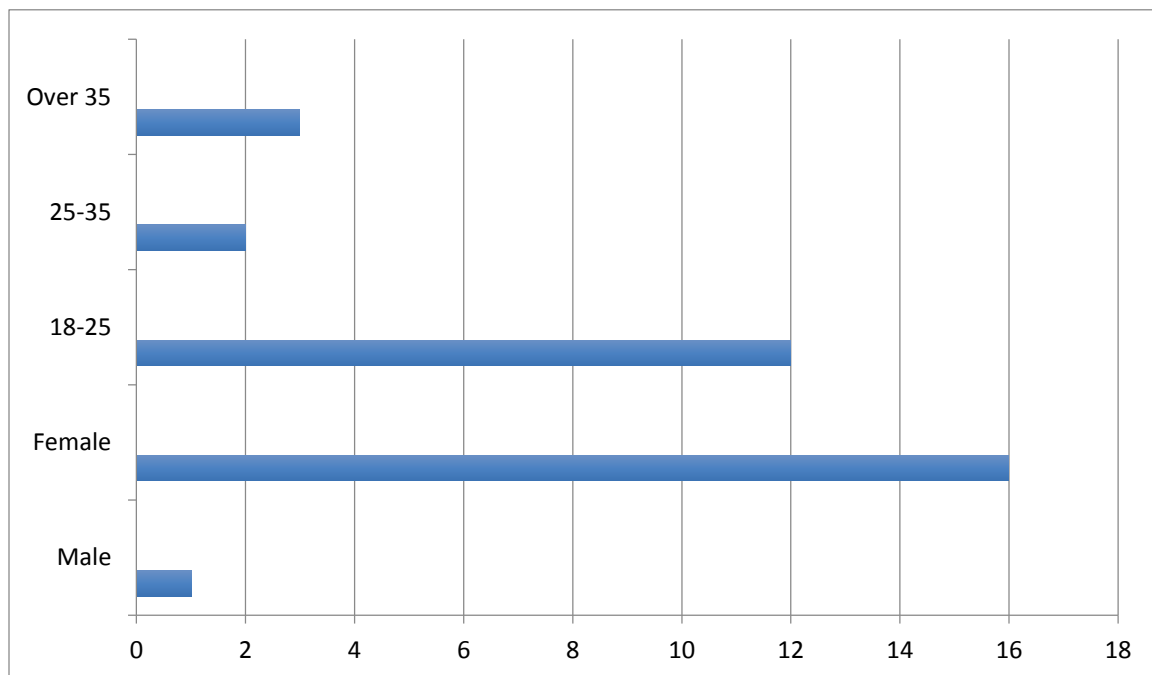


Figure 1- Age and Gender of the Survey Pre-service teachers

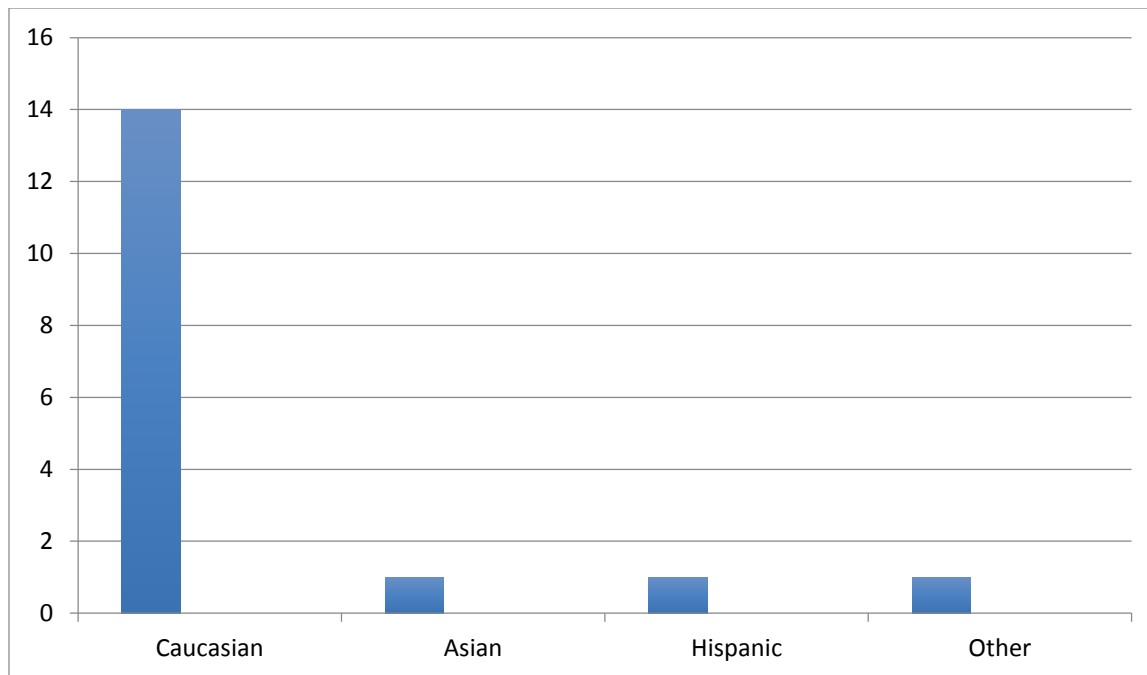


Figure 2- Race of the Survey Pre-service teachers

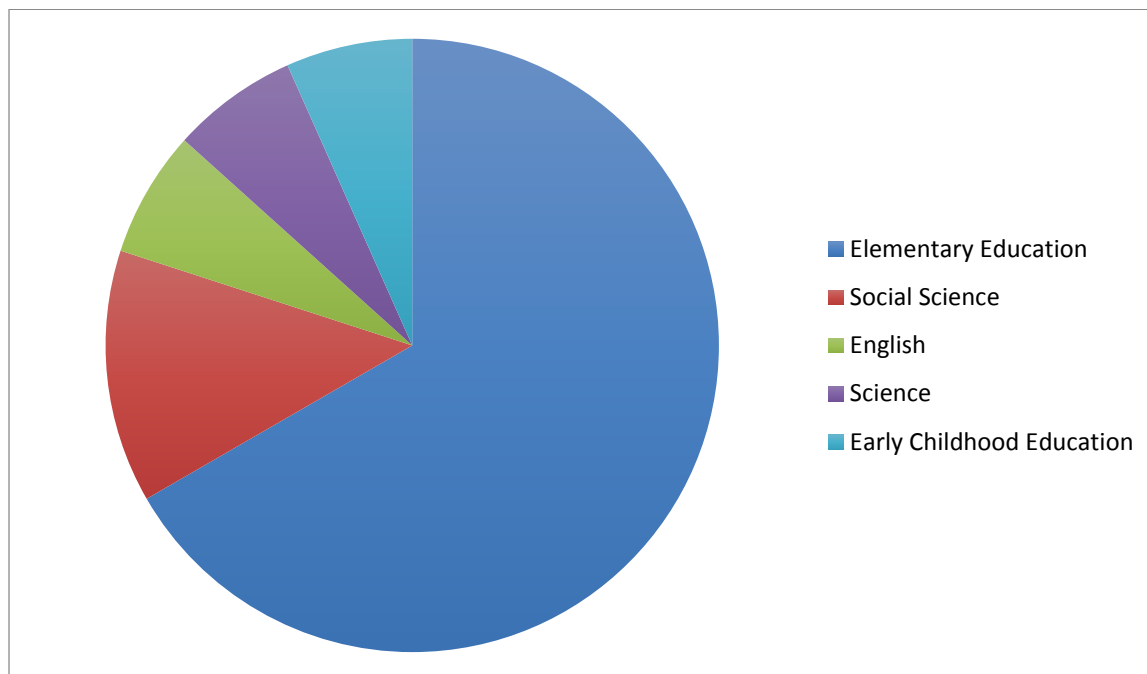


Figure 3- Majors of the Survey Pre-service teachers

Definition of Thematic Unit Instruction

The first question asked, “How do you define thematic instruction?” The answer was evenly divided, 50% of the pre-service teachers believed thematic instruction are where teachers teach students based on one particular theme. They, however, had not responded as to whether they meant one theme per subject, one subject using a theme, or one theme for all subjects. Of all the pre-service teachers, 50% of the pre-service teachers said that thematic instruction is incorporating more than one, if not all, instructional subjects into one common theme. This question by far seemed to be one of two that pre-service teachers decided on two common answers.

The next question was “What do you believe must be included in a unit in order to label it a thematic unit?” Of the pre-service teachers, 39% had thought that thematic units needed to include multiple subjects. Of the pre-service teachers, 26% understood it to mean instruction had to be around a centralized theme. Another 45% perceived thematic units must include multiple texts, materials, and resources. Blending all three of these ideas would make a perfect thematic unit.

Challenges of Thematic Unit Instruction

The pre-service teachers were then asked about the challenges of teaching thematic units. Question four was “How difficult is it to integrate multiple subjects into one unit?” The first 63% of the pre-service teachers believed it would be very difficult to integrate multiple subjects into one unit because of the extra planning time, pacing guide set up by the school/district, grade level being taught, and keeping student focused on the lesson. The final 38% concluded that it should not be difficult at all. According to most of the pre-service teachers, they feel that

teaching thematically is a great idea, it gets students more involved, helps them make connections to their life, texts, and the world and it is a way to make more subjects work together.

“What do you think the challenges of thematic instruction will be for you and for your future students?” were questions seven and eight asked of the pre-service teachers. One pre-service teacher thought that getting administration or other teachers on board might be a challenge. One believed they would have outside issues, such as required pacing guidelines, being a new teacher, teaching thematically is to complicate for them. One pre-service teacher thought that students would be confused. An overwhelming 88% of the pre-service teachers deemed that the biggest challenge would be to ensure at all of the necessary components are included in the lesson plans, the standards, the components to regard the lesson as a thematic unit, and enough content and interest to reach the students. Of the pre-service teachers surveyed, 19% thought that there would be no challenges for their future students by being taught thematically. Another 19% of the pre-service teachers believed it might be a challenge to hold the students attention because this way of teaching is not what their students are accustomed to. And 13% of the pre-service teachers concluded that thematic teaching might help their students but that it will take time for them to adjust. Of the pre-service teachers surveyed, 56% found the challenge of changing their students’ way of learning would be the hardest obstacle for them to overcome. There seemed to have been valid concerns about the challenges involved in creating thematic units but deciding whether the benefits outweigh the challenges needs to be determined. These concerns were compelling, but an effective teacher should be able to make the transition from single-subject instruction to thematic instruction based on the benefits of their students.

Question thirteen examined whether “Thematic unit planning may take more time. Does that extra planning time outweigh the connections students may make across the curriculum?” One pre-service teacher said the planning time should be the same regardless as to which way a teacher teaches. A few teachers had thought that extra planning time would take away from focusing on the students. Two did not answer this question. Most of the pre-service teachers thought that the extra time is completely worth it when they see that the students are making the important life connections and give them a deeper understanding with relevant benefits. It comes down to whether teachers want to spend the extra time planning to give their students the necessary connections across the curriculum.

Benefits of Thematic Unit Instruction

Question five and six inquired: “What do you think the advantages of thematic instruction will be for you and your future students?” Of the pre-service teachers surveyed, 19% thought thematic instruction would be more beneficial to the student’s learning. Next, 38% deduced that thematic instruction is a better way to organize lesson plans and material for themselves. Finally, 43% understood that thematic instruction would make for better connection and more formidable discussion about the curriculum and content for their students. No one believed that thematic instruction would not work and that thematic instruction would be good for everyone involved. All of the comments referred back to what’s in the best interest of the students. Of the pre-service teachers who responded, 50% said that their students would be able to understand how all subjects are connected. Thematic units provide consistency and better understanding, according to 50% of the pre-service teachers. They had believed children learn better through thematic units and are able to make connections to life, school, text, and the

world. This was the second question that had been equally divided in the answers. The pre-service teachers had thought one way or the other when answering this question.

Question nine dealt with “Do you believe that differentiated instruction can be accomplished using thematic instruction?” No one thought that thematic instruction could not be differentiated. Of the pre-service teachers surveyed, 25% thought that differentiated instruction is a possibility but fear that when planning thematically they may forget about ensuring that differentiated instruction is included in the plans. An awe-inspiring 75% of the pre-service teachers realized that differentiated instruction can be accomplished; it is just a matter of finding the right connections that meet everyone’s needs because the students are able to discover more meaning to their learning. Differentiated instruction through thematic teaching just takes careful planning and knowing your own students.

Question ten inquires as to “Does thematic instruction promotes effective learning?” One pre-service teacher didn’t answer this question. One pre-service teacher believed that thematic instruction does not promote effective learning. Of the pre-service teachers who participated, 13% concluded that thematic instruction could be a possibility; the ability to provide effective learning through thematic instruction depends on the grade level, subject matter, and the teacher’s ability to teach thematically. An overwhelming 81% of pre-service teachers responded affirmatively because they felt thematic instruction makes learning more effective in the way that it makes all subjects relevant to students. Each subject reinforces other subjects and fosters a better understanding with meaningful connections and understanding how things can relate to each other cohesively.

The following question and question fourteen asked “Do you think incorporating more than one subject into a unit is beneficial?” and “Will teaching thematically allow you to address all students’ needs?” One pre-service teacher did not answer. Of the pre-service teachers, 69% said yes because incorporating more than one subject will support all the subjects and increase learning through repetition through integration and cross-curriculum. Thematic teaching provides for a more global and interconnected way of thinking. Time is also a factor and by teaching thematically it will enable all subjects to be taught daily with an adequate amount of time devoted to incorporate everything effectively. Of the pre-service teachers, 12% had thought that incorporating more than one subject into a unit depends because some students might get confused in this way of learning and would not be able to separate what subject the primary is that is being taught. Of the pre-service teachers, 19% said no because focusing on one subject allows you to teach it to your best ability with the most benefit overall. And 18% of the pre-service teachers did not answer the question. It is possible due to the diverse nature of classrooms today and the different academic levels of each student, 14% of the pre-service teachers chose maybe, likely in accordance with the notion that incorporating more than one subject into a unit may make thematic unit difficult to address their needs. Of the pre-service teachers, 13% said no because a teacher already has to juggle some many things in a day that trying to concentrate on teaching thematically as well as meeting every students needs may become more difficult than they wish to take on, especially first year teachers. According to 50% of the pre-service teachers, by teaching thematically it allows students to focus on one theme at a time, which integrates multiple subjects, which can let the teacher emphasis on small group differentiated instruction. Thematic teaching takes getting use to but once it is mastered; it

can be beneficial for everyone. Knowing each student is the important factor in addressing all of their needs and teaching thematically allows more time to make connections and develop understanding.

Question twelve asked, “Do you feel you will be able to address more standards when teaching thematically?” The first 12% of the pre-service teachers were unsure if they would be able to teach all the standards in thematic units. Another 12% believed that they could hit most of the standards but maybe not all of them. Of the rest of the pre-service teachers, 12% did not answer. Another 63% of the pre-service teachers responded absolutely because the standards often overlap or that the same activities could be crossed over into different standards. It would also save time and would be easier to fit everything into one day. Planning accordingly with the curriculum in hand along with the standards for that grade level for all subjects, teachers should be able to see how many standards flow together in a cohesive manner that makes sense to teach them together in one unit.

In question fifteen, the pre-service teachers were asked to consider “Would teachers who team plan be able to create thematic units and would this be harder or easier?” Of the pre-service teachers surveyed, 13% did not answer this question. Next, 19% of the pre-service teachers answered maybe because team planning can be done but it would definitely be more difficult to plan thematically as opposed to single-subject planning. Another 68% of the pre-service teachers said that it might be easier trying to plan all together so that every team member can combine all their individual ideas into one complete, effective unit, or team members could each take a section of the themed lesson and plan it and then come together to combine it into one lesson/unit. More teachers planning are better than one teacher planning. One pre-service

teacher said that they did not think that team planning would make a difference to creating thematic units because each teacher has their own way of thinking and teaching it team planning could pose problems between them. Some teachers want to plan on their own because they know their own strengths and weaknesses and know how their students learn best. Other teachers want to plan together to take the pressure off themselves of having to plan alone. The whole grade level needs to decide what is best for each of them and ultimately what is in the best educational interest of students.

Next, the pre-service teachers were asked, “Do you believe more students can be engaged in single-subject instruction or thematic instruction?” The first 12% of the pre-service teachers said that students could be engaged in both types of instruction. Student engagement is up to the teacher to try to make the lesson interesting enough for the students to remain engaged for the entire lesson. Another 12% did not answer this question. The next 64% of the pre-service teachers chose thematic instruction because there are recurring themes that allow the student to develop a better understanding of each subject collectively. One pre-service teacher was unsure which type of instruction they would feel comfortable teaching. Of the pre-service teachers, 12% prefer single-subject instruction because integrating multiple subjects into one theme may cause some confusion among certain students because of their learning style, level, and if they have language barriers. The style of teaching needs to depend on which way they are more effectively teaching their students. In the end, the students’ success in their education needs to be the most important focus in teaching.

Utilization of Thematic Unit Instruction

Question seventeen and question twenty requested the pre-service teachers answer the following questions, respectively; “Which type of instruction will you feel more comfortable implementing- single-subject instruction or thematic unit instruction?” and “How do you believe you will be teaching your first year in a classroom, single-subject instruction or thematic unit instruction?” The first 19% of the pre-service teachers concluded that they would feel comfortable teaching both forms of instruction. They believed that they could adapt to whichever method based on the circumstances that are placed before them. Two did not answer. One pre-service teacher was not sure which way they would like to teach. Single-subject instruction and thematic unit instruction were split amongst the rest of the pre-service teachers. According to 31% of the pre-service teachers, they chose single-subject instruction as their comfort zone and 50% believed that they will teach single-subject instruction their first year because that is how they were taught and how most students are accustomed to how the classroom is operated. They also think it would be much easier to plan and teach. Another 38% chose thematic unit instruction for both questions because this way of teaching is more applicable to the real world. It allows students to see how things are interrelated. Thematic teaching permits students to make connections to themselves, to their class, to their peers, and to the world around them by showing how most subjects blend together into one cohesive theme that makes sense to them. Just the idea of their own classroom is overwhelming enough without learning a different method of teaching. Of the pre-service teachers who responded, 30 % realized that maybe incorporating both single-subject instruction and thematic unit instruction is what will be best for them but only ten percent believed that they would try it their first year of teaching. Teaching both single-subject instruction and thematic unit instruction gives them the

comfort of what they are familiar with but allowing them to experience something new that they may eventually implement completely in their teaching. Even though some may be afraid to try this style of teaching because it is newness and unfamiliarity, pre-service teachers are excited to try thematic teaching for the betterment of themselves and their students.

The next two questions inquired, “Would you be willing to try teaching thematically if you were made aware of research supporting its use?” and “Would you be willing to try teaching thematically if you had access to resources to help you plan units?” An overwhelming number of pre-service teachers responded absolutely yes; if the research is there to back up if effectiveness and benefits for the teacher and the students. One pre-service teacher offered, if given the choice, that they would consider it but not sure if they would implement this way of instruction. Two pre-service teachers chose not to answer this question. Most pre-service teachers are willing to try thematic unit teaching if research and resources are there to help them know how to teach thematically and the advantages are to teaching this way. When the open-ended question was posed, a staggering 100% of the pre-service teachers said yes if they had the necessary resources to plan thematic units they would certainly try to plan and teach thematic units. Having the help and support could influence these pre-service teachers to learn to teach in a different method that they are accustomed to.

Finally, the pre-service teachers were asked “How do you feel about teaching thematically?” and “How difficult is it to integrate multiple subjects into one unit?” Of the pre-service teachers surveyed, 56% deduced that teaching thematically would be very effective and beneficial to the students. Then, 38% of the pre-service teachers concluded that it would be a good idea because it was how they learned and it makes sense. One said that he/she does not like

this type of teaching. One pre-service teacher thought that it would depend, based upon the subjects that need to be integrated. Finally, 63% of the pre-service teachers believed it would be very difficult to integrate multiple subjects into one unit because of the extra planning time, pacing guide set up by the school/district, grade level being taught, and keeping student focused on the lesson. Next, 38% concluded that it should not be difficult at all. Based on the data gathered, most of the pre-service teachers felt teaching thematically was a great idea, gets students more involved, helps them make connections to their life, texts, and the world and it is a way to make more subjects work together. They felt there would be extra planning time needed, but if the thematic was effective then it should not be too hard to plan. The pre-service teachers deemed that a little more preparation needed on their part was not a deterrent compared to the benefits afforded to their students by teaching thematically.

The results of this survey were very informative and varied. Some of these pre-service teachers may have made a permanent decision about their method of teaching. Others may start out with one method and then choose to try a new one or possibly integrate both methods into their teaching strategy. The teaching method that these teachers choose will all depend on what they feel will make them most effective in the classroom while considering the standards that need to be taught and the resources given to help them along with the research to convince most of them. Most important is to give their students what they need in order to receive the education that they deserve.

“We can promote deep learning by encouraging multiple teachers working together in helping students to understand math in the context of science, coordinating timelines of scientific discovery and literature, and demonstrating how a painter uses

light to express meaning.... When professional educators combine their energies and reinforce the same deep learning, the stream of information is clearer for the student, the learning activities are more fluid, and the student's reservoir of knowledge and skills fills faster." (Deeper Learning: Why Cross-Curricular Teaching is Essential, 2013, p. 1)

Chapter 7: Implications of the Study

This thesis was designed to investigate which method of instruction pre-service teachers perceived to be more effective and ultimately better for their future students. I believe that if you do not have meaning when teaching, you will not provide learning for the students. The data gathered from this study examined pre-service teachers' perceptions of single-subject instruction versus thematic unit instruction. If both methods of instruction were effectively addressed and presented in the pre-service teacher's program of study, pre-service teachers would be aware of the benefits and challenges associated with both styles, but this may not be the case. Based on the results of this project, the following are several important ideas to consider, especially with regard to unit planning content in the various undergraduate programs of study in colleges of education:

1. Based on the outcome of the survey, pre-service teachers are not certain of their understanding of thematic unit instruction. This leads to the question of are a variety of methods of instruction being addressed in the various programs of study.
2. Most of the pre-service teachers believe, with the proper resources and support from other teachers and administration, teaching thematically would help the students make better connections across curriculum and to the real world and their life. Requiring more training for all teacher and administration regarding thematic instruction is one option to get more pre-service teachers on board with the benefits of thematic teaching. Providing proven research will encourage administration and teachers that this is a more effective way of teaching.

3. The biggest concern was the extra time involved in planning each lesson/unit to ensure that it integrated multiple subjects. Others were concerned that thematic instruction might cause some students to lose focus and cause confusion. At first, planning thematically does require more time but once teachers become accustomed to this method it will become easier and make more sense because multiple subjects fit together and the standards flow together in a logical sequence for thematic instruction.
4. Addressing the state standards was not a concern to most of the pre-service teachers because many standards cross the grade level curriculum because they are interrelated amongst multiple subjects. Creating thematic units just allows for more standards to be addressed at the same time. Again, allowing students to make those necessary connections needed to be successful.
5. A considerable number of pre-service teachers felt that team planning would be the most effective and easiest way of lesson planning. Letting each teacher take a portion of the lesson and plan it and then come back together to develop a cohesive lesson could be the most effective way of planning. More pre-service teachers sharing ideas makes for a better, more interesting unit, which ultimately will benefit the students, especially when they see a united front among teachers. A caution here would be for teachers to be sure what is planned meets the needs of their students, regardless of who plans the material. “Working together, teachers can help students re-acquire the thirst for knowledge they were born with” (Deeper Learning: Why Cross-Curricular Teaching is Essential, 2013, p. 3).

6. The responses offered by many of the pre-service teachers indicates they are torn between teaching thematically or using single-subject instruction during their first year because they believe there are already enough challenges as a first year teacher so why add learning a new method of teaching. Other pre-service teachers believed that if they start out teaching thematically then they will always teach this way and changing methods won't be an issue.
7. Part of the current curriculum is that teachers are to plan and teach for 120 minute reading blocks which is already difficult but to mandate exactly what is taught during every minute of that time makes teaching difficult. This, however, leads itself to a perfect time to incorporated thematic units into lessons.

Each pre-service teacher in this survey had his or her own thoughts about single-subject instruction and thematic unit instruction. Some were set in single-subject instruction because that is what they are used to and what seems like a natural way to teach. Others wanted to make a change and teach in a way that integrates lessons from across the curriculum; thereby making the teaching easier for them and in turn their students will be more engaged in their learning and find the necessary connections that will prepare them for the real world. It ultimately comes down to if you do not have meaning, then you do not have learning. As teachers, our job is to teach and our students' job is to learn. It starts with teachers creating the necessary meaning and connections to have students want to learn not just have to learn.

All of the pre-service teachers who responded to my survey had their own ideas and perceptions of single-subject instruction and thematic unit instruction. Some pre-service teachers had a clear path to the mode of instruction they would deliver and other pre-service

teachers were not sure and were open to new options. This leads to wanting to develop future research on the topic on single-subject instruction versus thematic unit instruction.

Implications for my teaching

This thesis has enabled me to believe more firmly in thematic unit instruction and that it is what is best for my students. Allowing them to see how what they learn at school can be interconnected and how it affects the world around them as well as themselves needs to be an important factor in teaching. This makes what I will teach meaningful and thus results in learning. Knowing the benefits for my students and myself to teaching thematically certainly, for me, outweighs any struggles there may be. I have taught a few thematic units during my internships and found it to be successful. The students were very receptive and engaged in my teaching. My only conflict is meeting the time constraints that the school I work at sets up along with the districts' curriculum maps/blueprints that tell me what I should be teaching at what point of the year.

Limitations of My Survey

The limitations of my survey were the amount of time allotted to complete the survey to the pre-service teachers and the field of pre-service teachers that were available to respond. Due to the approval process and the revisions to the topic of this research, I was only able to allot two weeks for this survey to be completed which did not allow for as many pre-service teachers as I would have liked. An additional limitation was my participant group; pre-service teachers. They have not been in a classroom fulltime nor have they taught thematically on a consistent basis, so they were answering based on what they know about thematic unit instruction as well as what they know of typical, or "normal" method teaching or what they have observed in classrooms. In

the future, I hope that thematic unit instruction will become the “normal” method of teaching for the betterment of the future students’ education.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was conducted to determine the perceptions of pre-service teachers concerning single-subject instruction versus thematic unit instruction. Future research could focus on how thematic unit instruction should be incorporated in the training of teachers. Teachers need to have the resources, data, research, and support of administration in order to understand how thematic unit instruction could be a valuable asset in the classroom.

Future examinations could also focus on how to improve administrators and school districts understanding of thematic instruction. A possibility would be to show them how to incorporate thematic unit instruction into curriculum maps/blueprints. Informing them about how the standards already lend themselves to thematic instruction because the standards tend to work with each other across the curriculum as it stands now. Explaining to administrators and the district how thematic unit teaching helps students make connections and provides for meaningful learning.

Finally, research could be executed in how to best educate experienced teachers in this method of teaching will allow them to see the benefits for themselves and their students. Teachers who have never seen or heard of thematic unit instruction may be reticent to the idea. They may be set in their way of teaching but opening them up to a new way, supported by research, may make for more successful students and increased performance on standardized tests across the board.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This research was conducted in order to determine pre-service teachers' perceptions of two different methods of instruction. The traditional method of instruction is single-subject instruction, but this method does not help students see a connection within or between subjects. This can, in turn, lead to a disconnection between students and the world around them and how what is being taught matters to them. Alternative methods of instruction are available; in fact, much literature that supports the use of thematic instruction. Research has shown that thematic instruction is beneficial to teachers but especially to students. "...themes increase confidence, improve reading and writing, expand concepts and background, and foster positive attitudes about reading and writing" (Vogt, 1997, p. 1). "Research indicates that using an interdisciplinary or integrated curriculum provides opportunities for more relevant, less fragmented, and more stimulating experiences" (Stohlmann, Moore, & Roehrig, 2012, p. 29). "Other benefits that have been found are that it is student centered, improves higher level thinking skills and problem solving, and improves retention" (Stohlmann, Moore, & Roehrig, 2012, p. 29). It allows them to make connections to other subjects as well as texts, pre-service teachers, life, and the world. These connections are necessary for students to make or they can end up feeling lost and confused as to why they should be learning the material being presented. Some view thematic unit teaching as an easier way to teach. "With thematic instruction, it is not necessary to divide the day into separate learning periods. Instead, the day may be spent exploring an interesting topic in a variety of ways over a longer period" (Vogt, 1997, p. 2). It might involve more planning but it is more interesting in the end. By students being able to learn this way it makes

them more appealing to colleges and future employers. “Students who are taught with an interdisciplinary technique in which the students master higher order thinking skills and integrated pedagogy become very attractive to top colleges and wealthy business” (Jones, 2009, p. 78).

State standards are a critical component in planning lessons. Teachers need to teach specific standards and must teach every standard of their particular grade by the end of the year. Teaching thematically allows more standards to be taught at the same time under one cohesive, interesting theme.

The data gathered offered the pre-service teachers and thoughts about which method of teaching they prefer and most enjoy. The pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their preferences for teaching need to be taken into account by other teachers, administrators, parents, and everyone who makes important educational decisions about the students who will be taught. Students should be involved in their own education and as pre-service teachers become first year teachers they need to determine the best way for their students to learn. Asking and observing them can do this. “It is time that we count students among those with the authority to participate both in the critique and in the reform of education” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 1). When teachers, administrators, and parents start to listen to the students, they begin to understand what the students want to learn, how they best learn, and what engages them so that they will better learn. “Decades of calls for educational reform have not succeeded in making schools places where all young pre-service teachers want to and are able to learn. It is time to invite students to join the conversations about how we might accomplish that” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 9).

In the end, teachers need to find which method of teaching works best for them and their students. But with the research, resources, and support of other teachers and administration, thematic unit instruction can be a highly effective way to teach as well as an engaging method of learning for students.

Appendix A: Pre-Service Teacher Survey

Thematic Instruction

Q1 How do you define thematic instruction?

Q2 What do you believe must be included in a unit in order to label it a thematic unit?

Q3 How do you feel about teaching thematically?

Q4 How difficult is it to integrate multiple subjects into one unit?

Q5 What do you think the advantages of thematic instruction will be for you?

Q6 What do you think the advantages of thematic instruction will be for your future students?

Q7 What do you think the challenges of thematic instruction will be for you?

Q8 What do you think the challenges of thematic instruction will be for your future students?

Q9 Do you believe differentiated instruction can be accomplished using thematic instruction? If so, how? If not, why not?

Q10 Does thematic instruction promote effective learning? If so, how? If not, why not?

Q11 Do you think incorporating more than one subject into a unit is beneficial? If so, how? If not, why not?

Q12 Do you feel you will be able to address more standards when teaching thematically? If so, how? If not, why not?

Q13 Thematic unit planning may take more time. Does that extra planning time out weigh the connections students may make across the curriculum? Why or why not?

Q14 Will teaching thematically allow you to address all students' needs? If so, how? If not, why not?

Q15 Would teachers who team plan be able to create thematic units? Why or why not? Would this be easier or harder? Why?

Q16 Do you believe more students can be engaged in single subject instruction or thematic instruction? Why?

Q17 Which type of instruction will you feel more comfortable implementing; single subject instruction or thematic unit instruction? Why?

Q18 Would you be willing to try teaching thematically if you were made aware of research supporting its use?

Q19 Would you be willing to try teaching thematically if you had access to resources to help you plan units?

Q20 How do you believe you will be teaching your first year in a classroom; single subject instruction or thematic unit instruction?

Q21 What is your gender?

Male

Female

Q22 What is your age?

18-25

25-35

Over 35

Q23 Please share your major.

Q24 What is your race?

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138
To: Elizabeth S. Hoffman and Co-PI: Shana C. Shea
Date: October 13, 2014

Dear Researcher:

On 10/13/2014, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination
Project Title: Pre-Service Teachers' Perception of Thematic Unit Instruction vs.
Single Subject Instruction
Investigator: Elizabeth S. Hoffman
IRB Number: SBE-14-10643
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: n/a

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in IRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

IRB Coordinator

Appendix C: Thematic Unit Example

This is one day of a five-day unit on Christopher Columbus.

Christopher Columbus Unit

Unit: Explorers

Grade: 3rd

Lesson: Getting to Know Christopher Columbus

Day: 4

Time: 30-45 minutes

Standards:

SS.3.G.4.4- Identify contributions from various ethnic groups to the United States.

LACC.3.L.3.4- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 3 reading and content, choosing flexibility from a range of strategies.

- a. Use sentence-level content as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

LACC.3.RF.3.3- Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

- b. Decode multisyllabic words.

MACC.K12.MP.1.1- Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.

MU.3.F.2.2- Describe opportunities for personal music making.

MU.3.F.3.1- Collaborate with others to create a musical presentation and acknowledge individual contributions as an integral part of a whole.

PE.3.C.1.2- Understand the importance of safety rules and procedures in all physical activities.

PE.3.C.1.7- Explain how appropriate practice improves performance of movement skills.

LA.3.1.4.3- The students will decode multisyllabic words in isolation and in context.

LA.3.1.6.1- The student will use new vocabulary that is introduced and taught directly.

LA.3.1.6.2- The student will listen to, read, and discuss familiar and conceptually challenging text.

LA.3.1.6.3- The student will use context clues to determine meanings of unfamiliar words.

LA.3.1.6.5- The student will relate new vocabulary to familiar words.

LA.3.1.6.9- The student will determine the correct meaning of words with multiple meaning in context.

Objective/Goals:

The student will be able to read and understand poetry. The student will be able to incorporate music in content area collaboratively. The student will be able to manipulate numbers in multiple ways. Student will be able to see the differences between the past and present. The student will be able to explain, in writing, what this unit was about and what they have learned.

Content:

Review vocabulary words. (Point them out on the board)

Review what we have learned this week.

Introduce 1492 poem and discuss poetry.

Pass out rap sheet; explain how this relates to poetry and explorers.

Divide the students into small groups and have them create their own rap.

Do Columbus Now and Then on board. (Whole group)

Do math challenge.

Hand out writing prompt- "Who is Christopher Columbus?"

Remind the students what we are doing tomorrow.

Procedures:

Opening: Remind the students what we have been studying in Social Studies this week.

Ask the students what an explorer is?

Ask them who Christopher Columbus is?

Ask what he was trying to find?

Ask what did he find?

Ask who sent him on his journey?

Ask how many journeys did he go on?

Ask if they were all successful? If not, which ones and why? Which ones weren't and why?

Point to the vocabulary words on the board and quickly review them.

Discuss what poetry is and how it can be incorporated into Social Studies.

Introduce the 1492 poem on Dot Cam.

Read the poem out loud.

Check for understanding: Ask comprehension questions about poem as a whole group.

Divide students into small groups. (4-5 pre-service teachers per group)

Pass out rap sheet.

Explain that music can also be incorporated into academics.

Guided Practice: Tell the students they are going to create a rap about what they have learned this week about Christopher Columbus and exploration.

Have students share their rap with the class. (Collect the rap when done performing)

Now that we have used music and poetry in Social Studies, let's add math. We have seen numbers throughout our lessons this week- 1492, 3 ships, dates, and length of time it took for each voyage.

Hand out the math challenge. (Have question on the board)

Independent Practice: Have the students do this independently. Write math problems using any of the numbers we have discussed in social studies this week.

Check for understanding: Do Columbus Now and Then, together on board. Ask students for their input. (Each student must give one answer)

Closing: Good job today! Remember tomorrow we are performing our readers' theatre about Christopher Columbus. I am looking forward to seeing how much you have learned and your acting skills.

Evaluation: Check the math challenge, and rap. Must have completed the math challenge and rap 100%.

Questions to ask:

How can poetry be used in Social Studies?

How can music be used in Social Studies?

What are some of our vocabulary words?

Who is Christopher Columbus?

What do explorers do?

Are they successful all the time? Why or why not?

What differences do we see between 1492 and 2013?

Rationale:

We have learned about Christopher Columbus and exploration this week. We will now incorporate other subject areas- math, language arts, and music. The students will practice using reading skills, listening skills, observation skills, writing skills, and comprehension during this unit.

Materials:

Dot Cam

Pencil

Vocabulary Words

1492 Poem

Rap Sheet

Columbus Now and Then

Math Challenge Sheet

Smart board

Evaluation:

A= 90%-100%, B= 80%-89%, C= 70%-79%, D= 60%-69%, F= 59% and below. Students must receive an 80% on the writing prompt or they need to redo it with help.

ELL Accommodations:

Place ESOL students with higher-level students in small group activity. Allow ESOL students to work with a partner during the math challenge. Point out the vocabulary visual.

Resources:

Rayofkindergartensunshine.blogspot.com

Theholidayzone.com

Amy Grout: Adventures in Teaching

1492 Poem



In 1492

In fourteen hundred ninety-two
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

He had three ships and left from Spain;
He sailed through sunshine, wind and rain.

He sailed by night; he sailed by day;
He used the stars to find his way.

A compass also helped him know
How to find the way to go.

Ninety sailors were on board:
Some men worked while others snored.

Then the workers went to sleep:
And others watched the ocean deep.

Day after day they looked for land:
They dreamed of trees and rocks and sand.

October 12 their dream came true.
You never saw a happier crew!

"Indians! Indians!" Columbus cried:
His heart was filled with joyful pride.

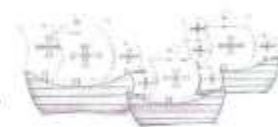
But "India" the land was not;
It was the Bahamas, and it was hot.

The Arakawa natives were very nice;
They gave the sailors food and spice.

Columbus sailed on to find some gold
To bring back home, as he'd been told.

He made the trip again and again,
Trading gold to bring to Spain.

The first American? No, not quite.
But Columbus was brave, and he was bright.



Graphics courtesy of www.100yearsago.com

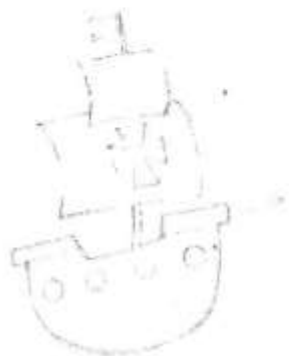
1492 Math Challenge

How many different ways can you think of to name the number 1,492?

Make a poster to display all of the ways to make 1,492.

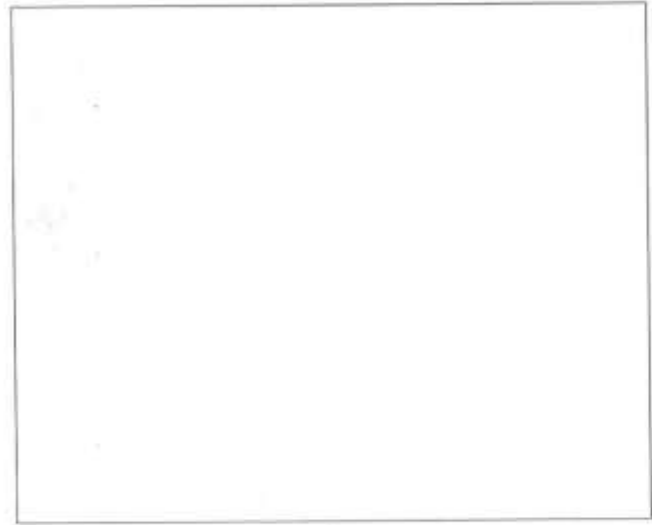
You may use digits, equations, words, symbols and pictures.

Make sure your poster is colorful and easy to read.



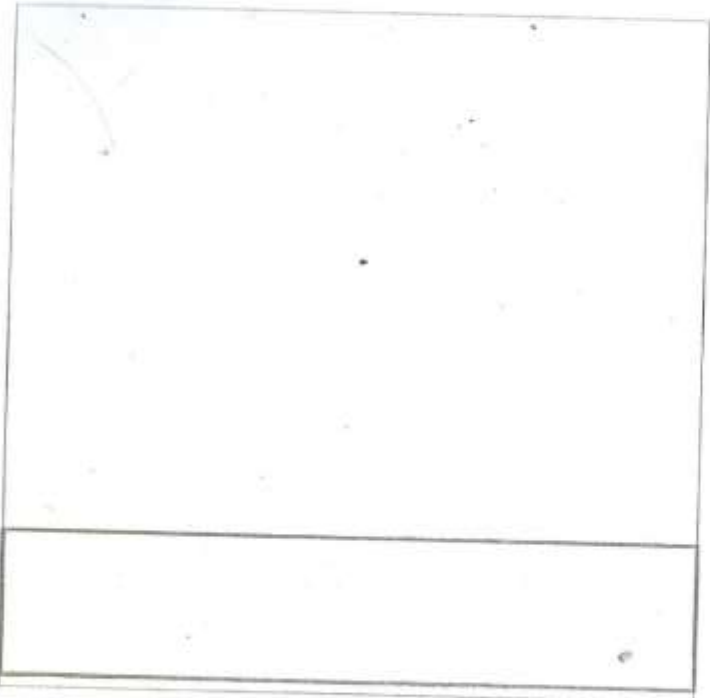
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A
Christopher
Columbus
Story



Then & Now. . .

When Christopher Columbus
discovered San Salyador in 1492 he saw. . .



If he came back to visit in 2012, he would
be surprised to see.....



Christopher Columbus Vocabulary



map



king



ocean



queen



sail



sailor



ship



spices



stars



treasure



Columbus

compass



flag



gold



island

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