

Designing Thematic Units for Powerful Learning

Part 2

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Our Purposes:

Review the essential tenets of integrated thematic units.

Begin planning an integrated, thematic unit you can use this year to address your “essential content” plus “21st century skills.”

Essential Elements Checklist

- **Focus on significant questions**
- **Clear goals and expectations**
- **Clear connections to standards and requirements**
- **Student voice and choice**
- **Cooperative Learning philosophy and activities**
- **Firsthand inquiry and research**
- **Real world/work connections, experiences, skills**
- **Rigor, relevance, and quality**
- **Tangible product(s) / appropriate audience(s)**
- **Assessments and self-assessment based on rubrics**

Focus on significant questions

Why do we get sick?

What determines the foods we eat?

Why do humans tell stories?

What makes someone a “Hero”?

Essential Questions:

- Have no one right answer: require thinking, not just answering.
- Raise important questions across content areas
- Reflect Concepts and Big Ideas
- Are framed to provoke and sustain student interest
- Are accessible to all students

- Enable all students to learn
- Make students investigators
- Challenge students to demonstrate understanding of relationships between content and larger world issues
- Enable students to begin from personal experience/understanding

WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

Logistics First:

Alone



Theme Selection

Teamed



Members



Theme Selection

What potential themes
would be interesting/
meaningful to the students
and to me ?

Frame as essential question

WHERE DO WE BEGIN?



*Starting
Points*

*The END
in Mind*

Map Standards/requirements

Curriculum Mapping for Coherence

Seeing the whole picture...

	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
SCI									
MATH									
SOC STDS									
LANG ARTS									

*Starting
Points*

*The END
in Mind*

Map Standards/requirements

Students' Questions and Concerns

Perceived need: Problem/Project

Convert existing topics

Selecting the theme

Using one exit slip topic:

Convert the topic to an
essential theme question

Using that essential theme question:

What content, concepts and principles do I want my students to know and be able to apply?

What important skills do I want my students to develop?

- academic
- metacognitive
- social

What types of problems do
I want my students to be
able to solve?

What tangibles do I want
my students to produce
to demonstrate their
learning?

Other Considerations:

Time constraints

Resources

Sequencing/Scaffolding

What must final product(s)
look like/include?

Write Rubrics

Select Activities to address:

- questions
- standards
- needed skills

Describe purpose, requirements,
and rubrics for activities chosen

Prioritize and Sequence

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Checklist

Challenging

Accessible

Coherent

Meaningful

Relevant

Empowering

Chris Stevenson's

15%
Rule

For materials and information:

www.teacher-to-teacher.com

Username = PWCS

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<http://>

www.allianceforpowerfulearning.com