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**A Programmatic Approach to Teaming and Thematic
Instruction**

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Abstract

This paper explores a programmatic approach by the Middle Level Education Program at the University of North Carolina Wilmington to develop teaching candidates' thematic instruction competencies in order to better meet the 21st century learning needs of young adolescents. Prior research supports the rationale for integrated instruction, demonstrating that thematic instruction increases student motivation and academic achievement. In addition, recognizing that today's increasingly global world requires students to use higher order thinking skills and participate in shared learning further justifies the implementation of thematic instruction in middle schools. This article reveals the collaborative approach undertaken by the middle grades faculty at UNC Wilmington to design and implement a thematic unit lab to assist in preparing middle level teaching candidates for effective, 21st century instruction. The authors of this article advocate for

exploring different options to make teaming and thematic instruction a main focus of middle level teacher education programs.

A Programmatic Approach to Teaming and Thematic Instruction

Thematic instruction represents a developmentally appropriate approach to organizing content in middle level classrooms and responds to the needs of diverse, 21st century learners. *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2011) identifies "...Challenging, Exploratory, Integrative, and Relevant" curriculum as a research-based characteristic of effective middle grades education (NMSA, section 2, para. 3). The very structure of thematic units enables teachers to readily challenge students thinking around themes of universal interest while presenting content in an integrated manner rather than as discretely separate subjects. Research demonstrates that thematic instruction increases students' learning motivation and academic achievement (Beane, 1997; Guthrie, Wigfield, & Vonseker, 2000; Kovalik, 1994; Stephens, 2007). The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (n. d.) recognizes the importance of integrated instructional approaches; it suggests that core subjects address important themes. This process promotes "...understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving 21st century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects" (Partnership for 21st Century Skills Overview, para. 2).

Current brain research and cognitive theory also support the importance of integrated instructional strategies. The human brain seeks patterns to create meaning (Caine & Caine, 1991; Jensen, 2000). It naturally connects facts and ideas in an attempt to make sense of the world. This pattern detection strength of the brain requires immersion in a context rich with details, emotional tones, and imagery. The very structure of thematic instruction serves to connect ideas together around a larger whole (i.e., theme, concept, problem).

Recognizing the importance of integrated instruction in addressing young adolescents' 21st century learning needs and preparing them to develop higher order thinking skills necessary in today's increasingly global world, the question remains: How do teacher education programs develop these competencies in future middle level teachers? In this article we explore how one teacher education program responded to this challenge.

Context

The Middle Level Education Program in the Watson School of Education at the University of North Carolina Wilmington strongly supports developmentally appropriate practices. All of the program faculty members acknowledge the importance of preparing teaching candidates to develop the competencies necessary to design and implement thematic units. Although they philosophically support this instructional approach, program evaluation revealed that in practice not all students are given sufficient training in this area. As a result, faculty decided to create a structure that assures that all Middle Grades Education teaching candidates exit with the skills needed to design and

implement thematic units, as well as advocate for thematic instruction, which is unfortunately nonexistent in many of today's middle schools.

Limitations

Initially, the content methods courses were identified as the most appropriate place in the program to develop thematic instruction skills. Faculty discussed using the current structure of separate methods courses (mathematics, language arts, social studies, science) to deliver this instruction. In order to model teaming, they sought ways to co-teach thematic unit planning. As planning progressed, several limitations to this approach became apparent:

- Concerns over content coverage in methods courses if two-to-three class sessions were devoted to thematic unit development;
- Varied faculty expertise and experience with thematic unit development and teaching;
- Scheduling in a program where content methods courses are taught on different evenings;
- Inability to organize students on interdisciplinary teams; and
- No opportunity for students to share completed units with students in other methods courses.

Given these limitations, faculty began examining alternative ways to reach this program goal.

Meeting the Challenge

After considerable discussion, frustration, and brainstorming, faculty found an answer to their prior concerns. The Middle Grades Education program area created a new one-hour course, Thematic Unit Lab, as a vehicle for all students enrolled in the program to develop the competencies necessary to design a thematic unit in a team context.

The course proposal went through the curriculum approval process, which included the following steps: Departmental review and approval; review and approval by the Watson School of Education's Curriculum Committee; and submission to the University Curriculum Committee for inclusion in the 2010-2011 catalogue. In order not to add an additional hour to the program requirements, the seminar accompanying the internship was reduced from three to two hours.

Thematic Unit Lab Structure

The Thematic Unit Lab is designed to meet once a week throughout the semester. In order to model teaming, the content methods faculty in the Middle Level program collaboratively plan and teach the lab. Teacher education candidates work in interdisciplinary teams to develop a unit with a faculty member assigned to monitor their progress and serve as a resource person.

Two methods faculty evaluate each unit. During the first semester of implementation, all middle grades methods faculty evaluated each unit. This process established uniform interpretations of the rubric's evaluation criteria and inter-rater reliability. In the process of grading the units, faculty discussed their interpretations and reached a shared interpretation of the criteria, as well as refined the rubric.

Thematic Unit Lab Content

The content methods faculty members share the teaching responsibilities for the lab. Based on areas of interest and expertise, each faculty member has responsibility for planning and teaching two class sessions. The sessions address a variety of topics: rationale and research supporting thematic instruction; effective teaming and common team planning; identifying themes, essential questions, and developing unit cohesion; integrating 21st century skills, technology and literature in units; formal and informal assessment; and creating culminating experiences. In order to provide the reader with a more in-depth understanding of the lab class sessions, here is a brief overview of what we did in each of these topical sessions.

Rationale and Research

The graduate students enrolled in the thematic unit lab were asked to research thematic units and present a rationale for using thematic units in the middle level classroom. Graduate students engaged undergraduate students in a whole group discussion based on research about the history, structural components, and current use of thematic units in middle level education. After concluding the research-based discussion, the class collaboratively created a list of reasons for using thematic units with young adolescents; the list included advantages such as building learning motivation, increasing retention of knowledge, and encouraging the use of 21st century skills.

Effective Teaming

This session focused on two objectives: understanding the characteristics of effective teams and organizing students into three-to-four person interdisciplinary teams. An initial discussion on the characteristics of effective teams based on research and personal experiences guided students in self-selecting their teams. Teams represented different areas of expertise in the core disciplines and a balance of leadership and learning styles. Once established, teams examined a model of stages of team growth. They then discussed scenarios of challenges often faced by teams, resolving differences, and the importance of establishing team goals. These interactions gave students the opportunity to begin functioning as a team before tackling the collaborative design of a thematic unit.

Unit Cohesion

How do you create focus and flow in a thematic unit? In this session, students explored several strategies to create a truly integrated unit: selection of a universal theme to

apply to a topic; identification of two-to-four essential unit questions; and creation of an interdisciplinary planning web around the theme, topic, and essential questions. The first challenge was to guide students in differentiating between a topic and a theme. Each team brainstormed potential themes to enrich the study of their selected topic. Once a theme was selected, teams generated essential questions to explore the topic and theme throughout the unit. Table 1 provides three examples of identified topics, themes, and essential questions to further illustrate this process.

Table 1

Examples of Topics, Themes, and Essential Questions

<p>Topic: How people and animals adapt, change, and depend on the environment in Oceania compared to Wilmington, NC</p> <p>Theme: Adaptation</p> <p>Essential Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do people and animals adapt to, change, and depend on their environment? 2. Do we have a responsibility to protect the land?
<p>Topic: Leaders in WWII</p> <p>Theme: Leadership</p> <p>Essential Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is leadership? 2. What does it take to be a leader? 3. What are the consequences of positive and negative leadership?
<p>Topic: American Revolution</p> <p>Theme: Freedom</p> <p>Essential Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is freedom? 2. Why do people desire freedom? 3. Is freedom really free?

21st Century Skills

Students began this session by collaboratively brainstorming the phrase “21st Century Skills” aloud. After discussing this term, students were guided to independently create cluster diagrams based on individual perceptions of 21st century skills. The class then examined the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (n.d.) and added any missing information to their cluster diagrams. Students engaged in small group discussions about the importance of building 21st century competence in the middle grades and the many ways that thematic units promote the development of 21st century skills. Students were also asked to consider the essential components of 21st century skills such as technology, literacy, collaboration, and creativity. A faculty member assisted students in extending their thinking about each of these categories by participating in the small group discussions and showing the class the following online videos on 21st century learners and learning (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_A-ZVCjfWf8 and

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2L2XwWq4_BY). The session ended with student teams reexamining their units with a more enhanced understanding of 21st century skills. In teams, students discussed specific methods to incorporate 21st century skills within their thematic units and various ways to create opportunities for middle grades students to build 21st century competence.

Assessment

The format for this session revolved around instructor presentation of content and team discussion of the ideas. Typically one-to-two semesters passed since students studied assessment. As a result, the instructor reviewed basic assessment concepts: why assess; formative and summative assessment and examples of each; and how assessment impacts achievement. In teams, students examined a previously created thematic unit. They discussed the types of assessments used, appropriateness of the assessments, and the match between objectives, instruction, and assessment. This was followed by a discussion of assessment strategies that could be incorporated in their thematic unit. By the end of this session, teams produced a tentative outline of their unit's assessments.

Culminating Experiences

During this session students independently read an excerpt from the book *ITI: The Model Integrated Thematic Unit* (Kovalick & Olsen, 1994). After reading about culminating experiences or what the authors refer to as “celebrations of learning” (p. 235), students discussed celebrations, both in theory and in practice. Kovalick and Olsen explain that, “Celebrations of learning give our students a chance to share their knowledge in ways that solidify long-term memory... [and] show off their newly acquired skills and expertise” (p. 235). Based on actual culminating experiences designed for thematic units previously taught at the middle level setting, a faculty member shared different possibilities for designing and implementing culminating experiences. This discussion included the following ideas:

- Having students create visual displays to celebrate their learning, and sharing these displays around the school or in the community; for example, after teaching a thematic unit on advocacy, students may design advocacy displays on different issues such as the responsible use of environmental resources, addressing illiteracy, prevention of classroom bullying, increasing affordable housing in America, and providing food for those in poverty.
- Having students plan and oversee a celebratory event that reflects learning; for example, after teaching a thematic unit on the topic of diversity, middle school students may create a multicultural fair for school peers, family, and friends.
- Taking students on a field trip that reflects the thematic unit topic and celebrates student learning; for example, after teaching a thematic unit on the topic change, students may take a school field trip to an amusement park and celebrate attained knowledge about change in a more abstract way, i.e. change being visually symbolic in the curves and loops of rollercoaster rides.

- Having students write and produce a play that showcases their learning; for example, after teaching a thematic unit on the topic of friendship, students may put on a play demonstrating interdisciplinary knowledge attained from the unit for the grade level, school, or community.

Students in the thematic unit lab were then encouraged to brainstorm ideas for culminating experiences relating to their thematic unit.

Common Planning Time

Approximately one third of the class sessions were reserved for common team planning periods. During these sessions, teams met to engage in the next step of thematic unit development. In an effort to support 21st century learning, teaching candidates were given the option to conduct common team planning in face-to-face meetings or online formats, such as Skype, discussion boards, chat, and email. Additionally, the assigned faculty mentors were available to answer questions and coach students in the development process during each session allocated for common planning time.

Collaborative Planning

The Middle Grades methods faculty met a number of times during the 2009-2010 academic year to collaboratively plan for the Thematic Unit Lab. Meetings focused on several topics, including but not limited to the following: content of thematic unit lab; designing a culminating experience for students in the lab; creating an assessment instrument; sharing the content of the initial class sessions on the assignment components and selecting a theme; discussing articles supporting thematic units; and creating opportunities for students to teach lessons and showcase their thematic units. Meetings were generally scheduled for an hour and a half timeframe. Here is a sample agenda from one of the collaborative planning meetings.

Agenda:

1. Discuss the selected reading
2. Review the thematic unit rubric
3. Co-develop guidelines for the unit development plan
4. Review the schedule and topics (i.e. who will facilitate each session)
5. Set the next meeting date and session focus

Since the content methods faculty members represent a wide range of expertise regarding thematic units (some having extensive experience with thematic instruction and others having minimal or none), a professional development component became part of the planning process for the lab. Faculty members with extensive experience designing and implementing thematic units lead sessions on the assignment components and selecting a theme. In order to create a shared forum for learning, each faculty member led a discussion on an article supporting thematic instruction. Here is a list of the articles shared by faculty members.

Horton, R.M., & Hedetniemi, T., Wiegert, E., & Wagner, R. (2006). Integrating curricula: The SC Studies Model. *Mathematic Teaching in the Middle School*, 11(8), 408-414.

Ferguson, C. (2002). Using the revised taxonomy to plan and deliver team-taught, integrated, thematic units. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(4), 238-243.

Randle, I. (1997, Nov-Dec). The measure of success: Integrated thematic instruction. *The Clearing House*, 71(2), 85-87. Retrieved July 14, 2011 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30192090>

Wallace, J.J. (2007). Effects of interdisciplinary teaching team configuration upon the social bonding of middle school students. *Research in Middle Level Education*, 30 (5), 1-18.

Engaging in ongoing discussion on thematic instruction and the opportunity to learn together was most welcome, and proved to be immensely valuable. In addition to building a lab to develop thematic instruction competencies in future middle grades educators, this process resulted in promoting teaming and building an active community of learners among program faculty. Modeling teaming and thematic instruction for teaching candidates became an essential part of this process, and confirmed the effectiveness of model-based teaching.

Assignment Components and Rubric

In order to guide students through the thematic unit planning process, the assignment is divided into stages. The assignment components of each stage for undergraduate candidates follow (See Appendix A for the complete assignment description).

1. Create teams and explore thematic instruction through research (rationale for thematic instruction; advantages and challenges of thematic instruction; examples of middle level thematic instruction).
2. Select theme and identify unit's essential questions.
3. Create a unit development plan and select a related young adolescent novel.
4. Develop lesson plans.
5. Design unit's culminating activity, including the assessment method.

The thematic unit rubric rates teacher candidates' proficiency on several criteria: introduction and rationale supporting the unit; the team's plan for collaboratively developing the unit; unit lessons; the unit's culminating learning experience; cohesion of the unit around the theme; and the presentation of the unit including voice and mechanics. The thematic unit is rated on a 3-point scale with ratings of "Meets Expectations" and "Exceeds Expectations" being proficient (See Appendix B).

Thematic Unit Lab Pilot

The thematic unit lab faculty piloted the thematic unit assignment, rubric, and lab content. This pilot served to provide unit models to share with future students, suggested minor clarifications to the rubric, and offered suggestions for improving the lab's structure and content. At the end of the semester, students completed a self-assessment on the unit development process (See Appendix C). The instrument asked students to rate themselves on six elements of thematic unit planning. Based on how well prepared they felt to address each unit component, students used a three-point rating scale ranging from "Not prepared" to "Well prepared." Table 2 summarizes students' responses.

Table 2

Student Feedback on Thematic Unit Self-Assessment, n=11

Item	Not Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Well Prepared
Selecting theme	0	3	8
Meaningful rationale	0	3	8
Developmentally appropriate lessons	0	4	7
Lessons addressing diversity	1	8	3
Integrate 21 st century skills	0	3	8
Unit cohesion	0	5	6

Student responses indicated that overall the lab guided them toward developing the competencies necessary to develop a thematic unit. The number of "somewhat prepared" responses suggests the importance of ongoing opportunities to collaboratively develop thematic units. Furthermore, it identified areas (addressing diversity, unit cohesion) that could benefit from additional attention in the lab and program.

In addition, the instrument asked three open-ended questions. A sampling of student feedback on these questions offers other benefits and challenges of collaboratively designing a thematic unit. The 3 questions included on the survey and a sampling of student responses is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Survey Questions and Student Responses

Survey question	Sample student responses
"As a result of collaboratively designing the unit, what did you learn about yourself and others?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I learned that I need to leave room for other people to lead sometimes. I need to listen and follow more." • "The effort taken to collaboratively work together is not as easy as it

	seems. All must be on board and on the same page. Cooperation is key.”
“What was personally and professionally worthwhile from the process of creating a unit?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I was able to see different points of view within the study.” • “It was great to see an idea blossom and grow to a complete product. It was exciting to think about doing these things in a real class.”
“What suggestions do you have for improving the Thematic Unit Lab?”	The suggestions focused on two areas: time for project and depth of coverage. Students suggested that they begin developing their units earlier in the course and receive more in-class time to collaborate with teammates. In addition, they felt that viewing more examples of units would be helpful along with more time to explore the lab’s topics.

These responses gave faculty members input on revising the thematic unit lab class sessions. In addition, faculty members were able to strengthen the structure and delivery methods of content by incorporating the students’ feedback.

An Invitation

The creation of a Thematic Unit Lab enables this Middle Level Education program to assure that all of its teacher education candidates develop the competencies necessary to design thematic units and experience teaming in an authentic context, as well as utilize 21st century skills. With this knowledge and experience, these future middle grades teachers can more effectively advocate for integrated approaches to teaching. Such approaches help students see connections between disciplines, their own prior knowledge, and real-world contexts. We invite our colleagues in teacher preparation programs to explore unique formats to develop teaming and thematic instruction competencies among future middle level educators. Thematic instruction is reflective of effective 21st century education and provides authentic learning opportunities for students of all ages, especially young adolescents. After all, discovering the inter-relatedness of life is truly the challenge and reward of learning!

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Appendix A

Thematic Unit Assignment

Introduction

Interdisciplinary thematic units are a powerful tool for guiding young adolescents in “seeing” the connections between the disciplines they study. Aiding students in recognizing the patterns that weave facts, ideas, generalizations together across time and space helps them better understand themselves and the larger world. The universality of these patterns (themes) makes them relevant to young adolescents thus making it easier to link instruction to their lives. Thematic instruction immerses the learner thereby creating a multi-sensory, rich context for optimizing the brain’s natural inclination to seek patterns.

A thematic unit incorporates a macro or broad theme. Thematic units can be across grade level and/or interdisciplinary. Examples of themes include freedom, adaptation, change and continuity, diversity, human rights, communication, interdependence, service, and culture. A universal theme serves as a lens for understanding self and diverse groups of people in the world. Thematic units integrate two or more content

areas and language arts skills/concepts such as authentic viewing, reading, writing, speaking, and media.

Assignment Components

Please note that sections in **bold blue font** indicate assignment requirements that only apply to Master of Arts in Teaching Middle Grades candidates. These assignment additions reflect the added rigor and research expected of graduate level candidates.

Stage I.

Conduct and share research on integrated thematic units (also known as interdisciplinary units) as a developmentally appropriate best practice at the middle level. Share your findings with undergraduate EMG candidates enrolled in methods classes. Incorporate the use of technology and a visual component in your presentation, i.e. PowerPoint, flyer, poster, video, etc. Your presentation should include a minimum of three citations (cited using APA Publication Manual, 6th edition) and clearly emphasize how integrated thematic instruction supports student learning and the development of 21st century skills.

Stage II.

1. Organize into teams of 3-4 colleagues, preferably with individuals representing a variety of content areas. Select a theme and grade level that the unit will address. Identify a young adolescent novel related to the theme (you can select either the novel or the theme first).
2. Write an introduction and rationale for the theme you plan to develop in the unit. Describe the rationale for your unit in 1-2 paragraphs. How is it relevant to young adolescents? How will it prepare young people to be more effective global citizens? Why is the content worthy of study? In addition, explain how the theme relates to the NC Standard Course of Study for the grade level you identified.
3. List your unit's essential/focus questions. These essential/focus questions guide students throughout the unit. They create a unit focus that is woven into each lesson. Limit your unit to 2-4 essential/focus questions. The unit's meaningfulness is increased if one question assists students in directly linking content to their lives.

Stage III.

1. Create your introductory lesson plan. This describes how you will introduce the novel and unit to your students. It should activate and/or build upon background knowledge to grab student's interest, relate the theme to students' lives, and predict or anticipate what is to come.
2. Assume that you will be teaching this unit for two weeks with 62 minute periods that meet daily (for a total of 10 class periods). Design lesson plans for nine days

(includes introductory lesson). The final lesson will consist of a culminating activity that will be created in Stage III. Lessons should integrate the following components.

- a. Differentiated Instruction – Lessons address learning styles, individual learning needs, cultural differences, and developmental levels.
 - b. 21st Century Learning – Lessons incorporate global awareness, technology integration, media literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration.
 - c. Content Integration – Lessons identify the goals/indicators from the NC Standard Course of Study that are addressed. Unit reflects at least two different core content areas (language arts, social studies, science, mathematics) and one encore subject (art, music, physical education, foreign language, etc.).
 - d. Supporting Resources – Unit includes at least two resources representing different medium, i.e. films, poems, virtual field trips, music, etc. Cite all sources using APA style.
 - e. Assessment – Each lesson incorporates informal and/or formal assessment strategies.
3. Team members designate roles, responsibilities and timeline for completion of unit development tasks. The team leader submits the unit development plan to a methods instructor.

Stage IV.

1. Design a culminating activity for the unit that requires students to synthesize and share their understandings. Include opportunities for students to apply their learning strengths in the activity. The culminating activity celebrates and applies students' knowledge gained from the unit. Create an assessment instrument appropriate to the activity.
2. **Describe a possible role for parents/guardians and those in the community to play in your unit. How will you involve them in the learning process? What mode of communication will you use? Develop a communication strategy. Discuss how you will involve parents/guardians, local business owners, neighboring colleges/universities, and/or community service organizations.**
3. **Reflect on the formal and/or informal assessments that your team incorporated throughout the unit. Does the unit use a variety of assessment formats? Are the assessment formats appropriate for young adolescents? Do the assessments reflect the stated learning objectives of the lessons? Do the assessments reflect student growth in regards to the unit's overarching goals? Are the assessments and evaluation processes well developed?**

4. Submit the completed unit using the Unit Builder feature in TaskStream¹. Upon submission of the unit, team members self-assess on the required unit components indicating how they addressed each component.

Appendix B

Integrated Thematic Unit Rubric

Criteria	Does Not Meet Expectations 1-5 pts.	Meets Expectations 6-8 pts.	Exceeds Expectations 9-10 pts.	Total
	Not Proficient	Proficient		
Introduction and Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incomplete description of theme's relationship to NCSCOS, relevance, preparation for global citizenship Does not establish significance of theme and content Focus questions are vague or missing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acceptable descriptions of how theme relates to NCSCOS, relevance, preparation for global citizenship Some discussion of significance of theme and content Includes relevant focus questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descriptions of how theme relates to NCSCOS, relevance, preparation for global citizenship are elaborated, clear, and include examples Clear discussion of significance Coherent and relevant focus questions that assist in pattern detection 	
Development Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not all members given tasks Very vague task descriptions Timeline for completion is vague or absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some imbalance in planning tasks Somewhat clear description of tasks Timeline is basically realistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equally shared planning and leadership Clear description of tasks Timeline shows effective use of time 	
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Missing 1 or more lessons Introductory lesson fails to capture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 lessons per team member using TaskStream template, some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 well developed lessons per team member using TaskStream 	X 4 =

¹ TaskStream is a Web-based software and supporting services platform used in the Watson School of Education at UNCW.

	<p>interest, activate prior knowledge, create relevance, introduce novel & relate to unit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons do not identify NCSCOS goals/indicators & integrate 2 core & 1 encore subject • Minimal evidence of integration of 21st century skills • Most lessons do not differentiate instruction • Most lessons do not include an assessment or includes unsuitable forms of assessment • One or no resources representing different medium included in lessons 	<p>need elaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory lesson somewhat captures interest, activates prior knowledge, creates relevance, introduces novel & relates to unit • Most lessons identify NCSCOS goals/indicators & integrate 2 core & 1 encore subject • Integrates 21st century skills • Lessons somewhat differentiate instruction • Most lessons include an assessment reflecting objectives • Includes 2 resources, some errors in APA citations 	<p>template</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory lesson powerfully captures interest, activates prior knowledge, creates relevance, introduces novel & relates to unit • All lessons identify NCSCOS goals/indicators & naturally integrate 2 core & 1 encore subject • Excellent integration of 21st century skills • Lessons strongly differentiate instruction • Includes variety of assessments reflecting objectives • Includes 3 or more resources reflecting different medium, proper APA citations 	
Culminating Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity inadequately reflects the unit's theme and key ideas • Celebration & application are weak or absent • Poorly designed assessment or it is missing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity reflects the unit's theme and key ideas • Celebration & application are somewhat present • Assessment somewhat reflects activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity synthesizes understandings related to theme and key ideas • Celebration & authentic application are strongly evident • Developmentally responsive assessment system 	X 2 =
Unit Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons do not directly address at 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most lessons address at least 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All lessons address at least 1 	

	least 1 focus question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons are not linked to each other or are minimally linked 	focus question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most lessons are linked to each other 	focus question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons are clearly linked 	
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall voice is missing and/or dull • Lacks organization • Numerous errors are evident in one or more areas (assembly, mechanics, structure, clarity, consistency, analysis, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall voice present but fluctuates in style & strength • Adequate organization • Occasional errors one or more areas (assembly, mechanics, structure, clarity, consistency, analysis, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall voice is powerful & consistently captures attention • Superb organization • Virtually error free (assembly, mechanics, structure, clarity, consistency, analysis, etc.) 	
			Total Points (100 possible)	

Comments:

Appendix C

Thematic Unit Development Self-Assessment

Name:

Rate yourself on each of the following elements of thematic unit planning based on how prepared you feel to address that unit component.

1 Selecting a conceptual lens (theme) that is universal and timeless

Not prepared.....Somewhat prepared.....Well prepared

2. Creating a rationale that links the unit meaningfully to the lives of young adolescents

Not prepared.....Somewhat prepared.....Well prepared

3. Developing lessons that are developmentally appropriate

Not prepared.....Somewhat prepared.....Well prepared

4. Developing lessons that address diverse learners' needs

Not prepared.....Somewhat prepared.....Well prepared

5. Developing lessons that integrate 21st century skills

Not prepared.....Somewhat prepared.....Well prepared

6. Linking lessons to the conceptual lens (theme) and to other lessons

Not prepared.....Somewhat prepared.....Well prepared

7. As a result of collaboratively designing the unit, what did you learn about yourself and others?

8. What was personally and professionally worthwhile from the process of creating a unit?

9. What suggestions do you have for improving the Thematic Unit Lab?

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