Teaching Language Through Theme Building
A Summary of Project and Materials

A Creative Project (HONRS 499)

by

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For my senior creative project, I decided to make materials that would be useful in my future career as a Speech-Language Pathologist. I based my project on a more recent approach to teaching language called "theme building". According to the article "Whole Language in Theory and Practice: Implications for Language Intervention" from the October 1990 issue of Language, Speech and Hearing Services in Schools, "Theme building makes use of recurring ideas and events that are common to a theme, and allows for multiple formats...to be used to develop and express ideas related to the theme." (Damico & Norris, 1990). Children's literature is one method for introducing theme building in a classroom. "Theme building allows for a variety of activities involving multiple formats to be used to develop topics, concepts, and/or overall themes." (Damico & Norris, 1990). For my project I chose ten pieces of children's literature and expanded on a theme for each book. I elaborated upon each of these themes through what Burke, Harste, and Woodward call collaborative activities (1984). These collaborative activities will "provide opportunities for generalization of concepts and language while at the same time meeting a variety of cognitive, motor, social, creative, and self-help goals." (Damico & Norris, 1990).

The themes chosen for this project are similarities and differences, descriptions, sequencing, emotions, rhyming, prepositions, opposites, problem solving, following directions, and imagination. The stories that correspond with these themes
The themes chosen for each of these stories should be taught in the lower elementary classrooms. My project is designed so that more ideas and materials can be added as my career progresses.

This project was developed for small group and classroom instruction. Each theme has a list of activities that will be used to teach that specific aspect of language. All the lessons begin with the introduction of the theme through the reading of children's literature. The theme will be discussed as it pertains to the story. The activities following the story promote facilitation of the theme through group discussions pertaining to the topic, group cooperation to perform specific tasks, individual responses, reasoning skills, and motor activities. Both expressive and receptive language will be enriched by the activities for the themes.

Along with the planned activities, I also made file folder games for each theme that the classroom teacher may use at a learning center for additional opportunities for the students to practice the specific theme taught.

A list of themes and activities follows:
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse will be used to introduce this theme. Activities include comparing pictures, students, and objects to discuss similarities and differences.
The game "Same or Different" is a group game in which the students answer questions written on cards about similarities and differences between objects. The players move their game pieces along a path of mice toward a piece of cheese.

DESCRIPTIONS

The Important Book will be read to introduce the theme of descriptions. Activities include discussing the meaning of several descriptive words and having students describe objects to other students without showing the objects.
The game "The Important Thing About..." is for one student. There are pictures of flowers, a glass of milk, a shoe, a car, pencils, and peanut butter. Three cards that describe each picture are to be placed next to the picture they describe.

SEQUENCING

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie will be read for the sequencing theme. Activities include having the students line up and have each student perform a specific task of a daily activity and playing the game "Simon Says". The sequence of events for these activities will be discussed.
"What's the Order?" is a game in which the students put the story events in the correct sequence. The event cards are placed on the correct spaces on a file folder. The student closes the file folder, turns it over, and opens it to find a picture of the mouse from the story.
EMOTIONS

Six Foolish Fishermen will be used to introduce this theme. Activities include discussing emotions felt in specific situations and describing different emotions and situations in which these emotions are experienced.

"How Do You Feel" is a game in which the students have to match situations to emotions. Situation cards are placed above pictures of children who are expressing certain emotions.

RHYMING

Stop Those Painters will be read for the rhyming theme. Activities include having the students provide the rhyming words to a story by choosing the correct word from three pictures, finishing sentences by providing the rhyming words, and brainstorming to see who can think of the most rhyming words for a specific word. "Stop Those Painters" is a game in which the students have to match words on paintbrushes to rhyming pictures on a file folder.

PREPOSITIONS

Bears in the Night will be used to introduce this theme. Activities include placing bean bags around the room when given prepositional phrases for their location, playing a guessing game in which the students have to guess an object when given the location through prepositional phrases, and by tossing a beachball with prepositions written on it to each other. The students will pick a preposition on the ball, and they will be given a location to go to by using that preposition.

"Bears in the Night" is a game in which the students move their game pieces along a path by drawing cards and moving to a color
or a bear at a certain location specified by a prepositional phrase on a game card.

**OPPOSITES**

*Go, Dog. Go!* will be used to introduce this theme. Activities include having the students provide opposite words to words in the story, provide opposite words to words on cards, and provide opposite words to a short story to change the meaning of the story.

"Go, Dog. Go!" is a game in which the students have to put opposite words together by putting dogs in buckets on a ferris wheel.

**PROBLEM SOLVING**

*The Together Book* will be read to introduce this theme. Activities include discussing solutions to problem situations and playing a game in which the students walk on circles around the room. When the music stops the student who is standing on a circle with an "X" will have to help figure out a solution to a problem. "What Should You Do?" is a game in which the students move their game pieces along a path by choosing the correct solution from two answers to a problem situation.

**FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS**

*Curious George Rides a Bike* will be used to introduce this theme. Activities include playing "Simon Says" and the "Bus Stop" game in which the students have to follow directions. "Monkey Business" is a game in which the students move game pieces around the board after following certain directions.

**IMAGINATION**

*Imagine* will be read to introduce this theme. Activities include
using imagination to discuss the pictures of the book and having the students imagine to be certain objects.

"Imagine That!" is a game in which the students can put colorforms on a jungle scene and then write a story about what they imagined happened.

I have field tested this project in two first grade classrooms in the Fort Wayne Community School System. The activities I planned worked well. The responses from the students showed that they understood the themes I taught. The students especially liked the activities in which group participation was required. Therefore, in the future when preparing additional themes, I will include more group participation activities. The students liked the stories that were used to introduce the themes, and several students told me they wanted to read the books again and would look for them in the school media center. Each time I returned to either classroom, the students appeared excited to see me and eager to begin the language lessons. Both teachers commented on the enthusiasm the students showed toward learning these language themes through familiar children's literature and fun activities. I am confident that this project will be very useful during my career as a Speech-Language Pathologist in a school setting.
REFERENCES
