

Original Article

Thematic Approach in Teaching Kindergarten (A Colloquium)

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the sweeping change of time, the goal of education caters to the development of not only the tertiary level, secondary and elementary levels but to the preschoolers in their formation years. The enactment of the Basic Education Act of 2001 provides that the general goal of basic education is to develop the Filipino learners by providing them basic competencies in literacy and numeracy towards acquiring critical thinking and learning skills and developing desirable values to become caring, self-reliant, productive, patriotic and socially aware, and responsible citizens.

In line with what is mandated in the Basic Education Act of 2001, House Bill 3826 was enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines, institutionalizing the Kindergarten Education into the Basic Education system, appropriating funds thereof, and such is now known as the Kindergarten Education.

The fact that kindergarten education is now institutionalized, it is necessary that the educational system, especially the teachers, should look into the curriculum, its content, the knowledge, and skill in the delivery of services to its constituents.

The Bureau of Elementary Education (BEED), which conducted research titled "The Various Preschool Programs: An Assessment on Effectiveness," found out that in all regions except in the NCR and in Region 1 where the Integrated Core Curriculum prescribed by the region is used by a most public preschool in all Local Government Units (LGU) income classes used either the DepEd School curriculum or the curriculum patterned after it. Furthermore, it was found out that the DepEd preschool curriculum is described as "interrelated or thematic to all learning areas, following the principle that no learning areas is taught in isolation." Likewise, the study found out there were three (3) noted modes of delivery of the curriculum among the various preschool programs, namely: structure/formal, unstructured/informal, and a combination of both structured and unstructured programs. The unstructured/informal programs use blocks of time which include meeting time, activity

time, story time, and outdoor/indoor activities with. The structured/formal programs utilize a close formal structure with a focus on the different learning areas.

A. Historical Background

In 1734, Christian Wolf formulated the Mind Theory, which states that the mind has mental powers or faculties, such as memory, reason, judgment, attention, will observation, and the like, but it functions as a separate entity, and it can be improved through exercise. The exercise of all these powers in the area of content makes one more competent in the use of the same power in other materials.

The Gestaltists, on the contrary, emphasize the integration of learning. They recognize that the whole gets its meaning from its parts, and thus, will only be understood if relationships between and among parts are determined. They further believe that learning is not complete unless new reactions have been thoroughly related to the experiences of the learners. The total of these experiences will then function as a unit in meeting similar places later. For them, learning takes place between the interaction of the individual and his environment.

A thematic approach to learning and teaching originated from an integrated curriculum approach, which is not new to the field of education. The respective ideas of this approach have been around since the days of John Dewey (1993) and progressive education. Even before this movement, there were rumblings of the importance of providing students with a curriculum that was correlated and connected. Herbart, a German philosopher, was influential in promoting these ideas in American education in the late 1890s. For him, correlation involved the interlinking of different ideas of different subjects. Concepts presented in one area of the curriculum, thereby establishing a correlational between the two or more subjects. The process of interlinking and correlating ideas across content areas enables students to unite experiences and generalize knowledge.



In accordance with Herbart's ideas, Dewey and his colleagues during the progressive education era were committed to ideas presented in an integrated curriculum approach to learning and teaching. So that, the writings in the early 1930s about school reform, the process of reflective of constructing knowledge through associations and relationships. Integration can occur only in and through a pathway of associations. Associations are made as thoughts that are connected together in a coherent manner. Dewey held to the belief that in order to understand the meaning of a thing, an event, or a situation, one must perceive it in relation to other things: how it works, what causes it, what the consequences are that follow it, and uses could be put to it. The significance of the relationship established between concepts is what is important to learning.

The conceptualization of Dewey on the association of thoughts to other disciplines has been developed and had been the basis in the development of an integrated thematic approach to learning and teaching. Thus, according to Rand (1994), teachers continuously explore paths to increase the effectiveness of their teaching, employing the integrated thematic approach to learning and teaching.

B. The recency of the Issue

The thematic approach involves a group of correlated activities that are designed around topics or themes and cross several areas of the curriculum. It provides an environment that fosters and encourages process learning and active involve discovering, relating themes to learning to be implemented in the classroom, determining criteria for appropriateness of themes, and restructuring the instructional activities for the day; hence, the thematic approach becomes a collaborative process between teachers and students. The Thematic Approach, according to Rand (1994), has been in the field of education since 1967 and was employed but teachers at the primary level. It has been observed that while the theme has been fully developed in the primary grade, it is being used in an upper grade with a different focus and intention.

Likewise, Shubert (1993) commented that the expanded nature of themes requires teachers to think about the appropriateness of the idea generated from a theme. In most instances, themes cross boundaries and grade levels. So that, pupils in kindergarten and upper primary level will be studying similar themes, but the difference lies in the depth and breadth of the themes and instructions.

C. Situational Analysis

Literacy practices in preschool settings generally involve bedtime routines, exposures such as signs, billboards, posters with explicit ways of talking

about the texts, and a belief that written literacy is highly practiced to continue developing literacy practices that are aligned with the home setting. However, the demographics of our country and schools are changing due to having learners across ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Activities are linked to the school to establish the bridge from home to school.

It is at this point that a socially constructive perspective to thinking and learning emphasizes the social nature of the development of the idea that learning occurs as a process. The knowledge is constructed by making connections between past and present experiences. These experiences are generated through the social interactions learners engage in. Thus, students have to participate in interrelated classroom activities so that new meanings are explored and shared. The impact of these innovations/negotiations may lead to new ways of thinking and viewing the learning environment.

The emerging use of the integrated curriculum approach to learning and thinking is, coming about as teachers and educators develop understanding up the social constructivist perspective of learning, the whole language viewing process-oriented thinking patterns, problem-solving, and discovering. Recognizing the culturally diverse learners and their development has also increased interest in integrated thematic units to develop learning and thinking. As the learning process unfolds, learners integrated their knowledge, leading to constructive representations, and one of these representations is the thematic approach in teaching, which is different from the traditional way of the teaching-learning process.

D. Degree of Implementation

The use of thematic teaching in kindergarten pupils is an integrative approach that is applicable to all subject areas.

According to Follo (1992), children learn better from thematic teaching than from a traditional single-subject curriculum: According to Bloom (1976), as cited by Weber (1990), the amount of active participation kindergarten displays in any learning activity is an s clearer as the indication of how much a pupil learns. Furthermore, many pupils will achieve higher learning as a result of active participation, whether working individually or in a group. On the other hand, Moore (1992) uses a talk show format in teaching science concepts to children who appear to the show as they learn concepts they are studying. Likewise, Watson stressed that thematic teaching enhances the retention of learning for a longer period of time. If pupils are provided with appropriate materials with what is learned and with what is already known, and retain concepts for later use. Furthermore, this approach claims that the skills

needed for any subject are developed in the learners through participation in the different learning activities, particularly in the development of manipulative skills.

In the 1970s and 1980s, numerous research studies were connected to evaluate the effect of the thematic approach to teaching in kindergarten classes. It revealed very satisfying evidence of good results. Recent references found several studies that reviewed research employing a thematic approach in teaching. These include three reviewers by Rand (1994), Smith and Johnson (1994), and Newkirk (1991). Though similar in nature, these reviewers have different findings: According to Rand, the use of theme provides both an organizational tool for identifying learning objectives and a supportive context to construct meaningful and relevant knowledge. It allows teachers to have a sense of the overall pictures of pupil's growth and development. Hence, the overall picture provides both the teacher and the learners the parameter within which to work.

Likewise, Smith and Johnson found out that the teacher takes so into consideration the needs, interests, and development levels of the pupils. On the other hand, Newkirk's study revealed that brainstorming with the pupils also encouraged them to gain an understanding of how themes and ideas are generated. The modeling process is especially helpful for the pupils as they begin brainstorming their own list for writing topics and other projects.

To find out whether the thematic approach in teaching kindergarten classes is used in the field. A survey questionnaire was fielded to kindergarten teachers.

This particular empirical study involved 50 teachers: 10 teachers from Catarman 1 & 11 Districts 10 from Laoang 1 & 11 Districts, and 10 from San Roque District. Purposive sampling was used.

Table 1 shows the personal characteristics of the teachers. The data revealed that 17 or 57% were below 30 years old, and 21 or 70% were married, and only 9 or 30% were single; as to their educational attainment, all of them were Bachelor's Degree holders and were eligible teachers. There were 23 or 77% who were in the service for below 10 years, only 7 or 23% who had been teaching profession for more than ten years. All of them were teacher 1.

Table 1. Personal Characteristics of Kindergarten Teachers

Personal characteristics		F	Percent
Age	30 years up	13	43%
	Below 30 years	17	57%
Civil status	Married	21	70%
	Single	9	30%
Educational	Bachelor's	30	100%

attainment	Graduate		
Eligibility	LET	30	100%
Length of service	10 years up	23	77%
	10 years below	7	23%
Teaching position's	Teacher 1	30	100%

The data in Table 2 shows the awareness level of the respondent of the Thematic Approach in Teaching Kindergarten. It reveals that 7 or 23% of the respondents were aware of the approach, and 23 or 77% were not aware of such an approach in teaching.

Table 2. Awareness of the Thematic Approach in Teaching Kindergarten

Awareness level	F	Percent
Aware	7	23%
Not aware	23	77%
Total	30	100%

The data shows that a majority were not aware of thematic teaching as one of the approaches in teaching kindergarten subjects. This might be due to attendance in relevant seminars and training related to pedagogy in teaching preschool. Secondly, teachers were still adopted to old ways of teaching and were not adopted to innovations that may enhance the preschool teaching-learning process. These are the teachers who are resistant to change.

II.PRESSING PROBLEMS AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques in any teaching-learning situation. Problems are always encountered in the process.

The implementation of the thematic approach in kindergarten teachers who are unaware of the techniques in shifting sessions from one to another in different learning situations may not implement the approach well since lessons took up may adopt unidirectional teaching.

The time constraint will be one of the limitations as it needs team planning and usually takes additional time in selecting themes that suit the lessons in all subject areas.

The attitude of the teachers on their perception of the approach may be negative since they do not want to do away with their usual adopted practice in teaching.

A. Beneficiaries and Benefits

Kindergarten Learners. Learning a single topic can have a domino effect that will connect one piece to other pieces, which are inseparable and are interconnected. Learning is more exciting and interesting on the part of the learners and increases/enhances their desire to learn more. They are growing academically with critical and analytical minds. Kindergarten could bring all subject areas closer to their hearts and will find learning enjoyable as well as develop a positive attitude towards their studies and schooling because they will be motivated to learn. In effect, critical and analytical thinking are deeper forms of learning.

Kindergarten Teachers. Teachers who practice cross-curricular teaching and gradually benefit from the ease of lesson planning. Much more, the teachers provide the kindergarten with the utmost benefit in learning using the thematic approach. They provide a wide array of educational units for learners to pick up topics to absorb in one discussion.

A great benefit also for higher year teachers for they are teaching learned students. They will enjoy smoother discussion, easier explanation, and sounder arguments and debates in a classroom due to the expose of integrated teaching, learners solely exposed to traditional teachers than learners exposed to integrated teaching. Learners solely exposed to traditional teachers than learners exposed to integrated teachers have a higher degree of acquiring learning and thinking abilities.

Kindergarten Curriculum Framers. They can have insight in framing curriculum with the thematic approach used considering the result that is more beneficial for both learners and teachers.

Kindergarten Administrators. This will encourage them to let their teachers practice integrated teaching for the enormous benefits in terms of learning.

Parents. With this study, the parents will be properly directed in giving their assistance to children in their studies.

Researches. This study will generate information for future researchers on researchable areas related to the improvement of pedagogy in the classroom.

B. Implication for Education

The implementation of the thematic approach in teaching kindergarten is expected to generate varied changes. However, just like any other approach or thrust, the benefits are not absolute, for it

also has its own share of positive and negative implications.

III. CONCLUSION

Cross-curricular thematic instruction allows kindergarten to contemplate problems and situations that reflect the world as they experience it. For teachers and kindergarten alike, exploration and discovery become paramount; the teacher as the dispenser of knowledge is secondary. Learning is interrelated, and information is connected. The common link in the literature and other texts through which pupils learn about the world and from which they branch out and investigate.

Schools can implement the models that best meet the needs of their young learners and the community. Integrated curriculum as a menu of the thematic approach in teaching kindergarten must be supported by appropriate instruction and assessment. Instructional methods and team-teaching strategies so that learning is more contextualized, more integrated or interdisciplinary, pupil-centered, active, and project-based. As a learner-centered approach that encourages pupils to be active participants in their own learning, instead of emphasizing memorization and abstract learning, teachers focus on authentic instruction to promote contextual learning. Using thematic kindergarten teaching, contextual learning occurs in a real-life context or a close simulation of a real-life context. These teaching and learning processes require children to solve problems and complete tasks that are found in real-life situations, especially, but not solely in workplace situations. Kindergarten work in small groups to acquire and use information, make a decision and apply academic knowledge to vocational or real-world frames of reference. Teamwork and hands-on activities are emphasized. Such instructional practices make learning more meaningful, help kindergarten to see the applications of their knowledge and skills and connect learning to the world outside the classroom. Because this type of learning is very different from learning that occurs in the traditional classroom, teachers need to develop new assessment practices. Approaches to authentic assessment may consist of children's portfolios, presentations, or exhibits.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the researcher on this study, several recommendations were drawn.

1. Before the session, it is important to select themes that are not only interesting to kindergarten but those that are meaningful and substantive.
2. Once themes are determined, the goal is to select tasks that encourage investigation, speculation, and problem-solving and asking

questions that enable them to explore other topics more fully.

3. To facilitate planning, it may be helpful to sketch a web of teaching plans for the thematic unit. During webbing, cross-curricular connections are determined, and a variety of reading materials and contextually embedded activities should be identified.
4. Planning a schedule and timeline for instruction is also important. Teachers must prefer "theme immersion" in the entire day, week, or month and all subjects of the preschool curriculum should revolve around the theme.
5. When planning the schedule, consider the teacher's role in facilitating, providing explicit instruction, and serving as a resource person where the teacher should direct activities.
6. Within cross-curricular instruction, skills and strategies should be the means for developing reading and writing abilities rather than the result of the thematic study.
7. Opening activities should stimulate thinking and speculation.
8. On structuring of the bulletin board, the teacher should involve the children in the preparation and should be placed at children's eye level. Comprehensive ideas/concepts should be displayed for the theme. Each concept should bear a purpose and teaches a specific skill.
9. Design the scoring guide to assess the performance task. Additional types of assessment may be used to measure progress.
10. A further research on thematic instruction is highly recommended by the researcher to come up with a clearer understanding of the approach.

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