PLANNING A THEME BASED UNIT

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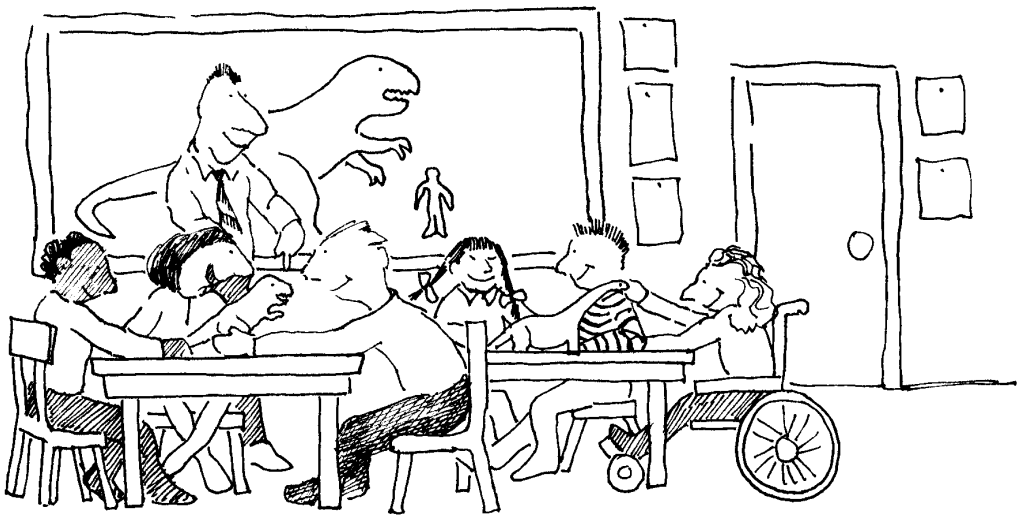
PLANNING A THEME BASED UNIT



Integrating various subjects in the curriculum can contribute to a greater awareness of the interrelationship of school programs and make learning more relevant. Integration of subject content is intended to help students make sense of the many dimensions of their world. Integration also enhances students' ability to transfer the competencies and skills acquired in one context to other appropriate situations. Teachers determine the extent to which curriculum integration is appropriate and the manner in which it is achieved.

The Intermediate Program Policy Grades 4 to 10
December 1993, Province of British Columbia

USING A THEME STUDY APPROACH

Theme based units are a vehicle for teaching a range of skills and content by integrating curriculum areas around a topic. This method of teaching links curriculum strands and capitalizes on children's interests, creating a sense of purpose and community in the classroom. By building on their interests and life experiences, young people's attitudes, skills and knowledge are developed in meaningful ways. Inquiry and communication are activated by a desire to know more, resulting in enthusiastic participation in the learning process.

By building on their interests and life experiences, young people's attitudes, skills and knowledge are developed in meaningful ways.

The integrated studies approach, based on collaboration with the learners, is a new organizational model for some teachers. It can be threatening to those who are accustomed to a more traditional model, because the teacher no longer has the same kind of control over the content of the curriculum. However, the more that students become involved in how and what they study, the more interested they become in learning. This model can be implemented in cautious steps, with the teacher relinquishing decision making at any rate that feels comfortable. Many teachers do the planning themselves or with other teachers, but remain flexible, allowing students' interests to lead the unit in unexpected directions.

The role of the teacher becomes one of coordinator or facilitator.

Although students may be given a greater voice in the topics they study and the strategies they use, the teacher's role is not diminished, but changed. Young people still need teachers to help them reflect on their learning and lead them to make connections between prior and new knowledge. The acquisition of skills needs to be planned and the possibilities for application of these skills in other situations needs to be illustrated. The role of the teacher becomes one of coordinator or facilitator, who maintains a sense of the whole picture and a vision of the skills the students need to acquire through classroom activities.

An excellent strategy for teachers wishing to make the transition from teacher directed to more student directed learning, is to begin planning thematic units with another teacher. Working in cooperation with a colleague—sharing ideas, reflecting on activities attempted, developing resources, planning activities—affirms the skills of both teachers and provides an opportunity to build on each other's expertise to create something that neither would have accomplished alone.

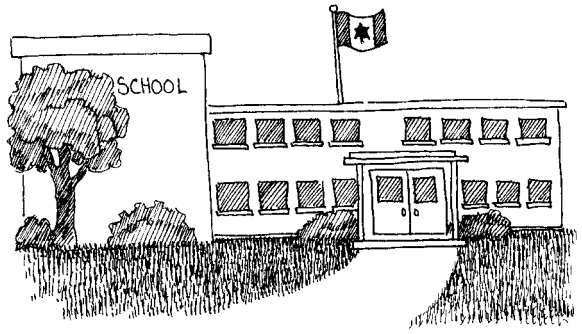
Begin by planning thematic units with another teacher.

SCHOOL-WIDE THEMES

School-wide theme studies are usually planned for multi-aged groups created by combining the student population in different ways than the usual grade level groups. The structure and duration of the theme study vary according to the resources available and the objectives of the unit. Often this type of activity is limited to a single day or several half days because of the complexity of organization required.

One advantage of school-wide theme studies is that teachers benefit from the interchange of ideas when they come together to work collaboratively.

One advantage of school-wide theme studies is that teachers benefit from the interchange of ideas when they come together to work collaboratively. Also, the sense of the school as a community is enhanced when teachers and students from different classes become acquainted and when students work with others of different ages.



Community members can be invited to bring their skills and perspectives into the school, and parents recruited for assistance. This type of activity can be planned by the staff, or a joint committee of staff and students.

Plan your student groupings according to your goals for the theme study and the types of activities you wish to use. If you want senior students to work with younger children, pair

Grade 7 with Grade 3,
Grade 6 with Grade 2,
Grade 5 with Grade 1, and
Grade 4 with Kindergarten students

so that there is the maximum age range between paired students. This would work well if you wanted senior students to read to younger children or to help with art projects.

Sometimes it may be more appropriate to group primary and intermediate students separately, e.g. different primary and intermediate activities might be planned for a fitness day that encourages students to strive for personal achievement.

School-wide theme days can be wonderful spirit builders and an excellent way to celebrate special days (e.g. World Food Day) and holidays.

CLASS THEMES

Many teachers plan their classroom programs around themes, integrating curriculum areas into a single unit of study. These units vary in length depending on the resources available and whether or not the study is extended by the students' enthusiasm and interest.

The theme may be chosen by the teacher or in collaboration with the students, or may develop from the interests of one or two students whose enthusiasm spreads to all their classmates. The teacher remains responsible for ensuring that skills are practised, but the subject matter and activities may be directed by the students.

Learning becomes more meaningful when learners choose their methods and topics of study.

Although many teachers plan their theme based units themselves or with other teachers, there are advantages when theme studies are developed by teachers and students together. The students bring innovative ideas, resources and strategies and become committed to the learning process that is driven by their own interests. Learning becomes more meaningful when learners choose their methods and topics of study; the model of lifelong learning is brought into the school setting. Interpersonal relationships between teachers and students are improved when authority is put aside, and teachers become collaborators rather than lecturers.

The movement toward student directed learning is not a movement away from responsibility—the responsibility becomes shared with the students.

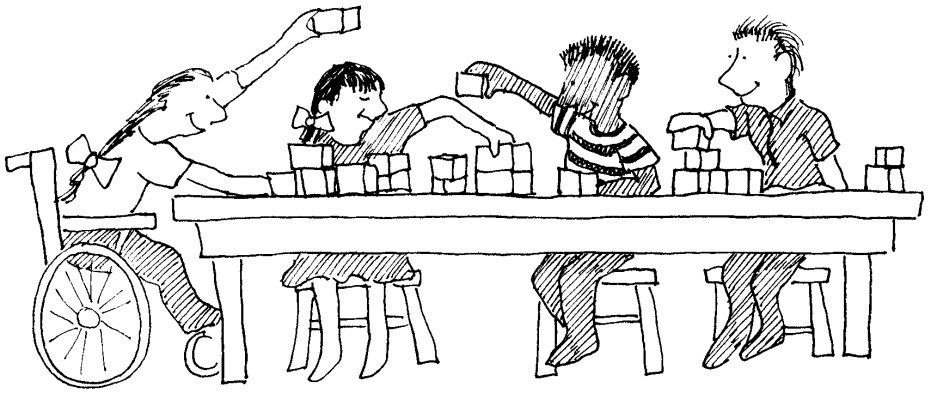
Of course, the teacher retains ultimate control over behaviour and remains accountable for ensuring that students are engaged in worthwhile projects that extend skills and result in increased knowledge and positive attitudes. The movement toward student directed learning is not a movement away from responsibility—the responsibility becomes shared with the students.

INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP STUDIES

This type of study is used when the aim is to help young people become independent learners. The topic may be initiated by a student or the teacher, or may be an extension of a class theme, when particular children are motivated to continue their exploration beyond the general interest of the class. The teacher offers resources and teaches the skills and strategies needed to proceed independently either individually or through class lessons.

Individual needs are most likely to be met when the child has his own reasons for reading, writing or computing and has a sense of control.

Small group and independent studies offer many advantages to the learner. The learning is not contrived or forced but a natural outcome of an interest. Individual needs are most likely to be met when the child has his own reasons for reading, writing or computing and has a sense of control.



IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

This implementation process may provide a bridge from the traditional model of teacher directed learning and segregated subjects to a more innovative way of planning units of study. It is a process that may be used by a single teacher, by a team of teachers who choose to plan together, or by a teacher who wishes to include students in the planning process. Templates are provided on the following pages that can be used for planning, or as models for designing your own planning tools.

STEP 1: *CHOOSE A THEME*

The first task in the planning process is to meet with your collaborators to discuss and define a theme that will form the basis of a unit of study. You may need to brainstorm for new ideas, refine an idea already suggested by one member of the planning team, raise awareness of all members of the team, or narrow a large topic down to a manageable size. Goal(s) pertaining to the theme (i.e. not specific to curriculum areas) should be agreed upon by all members of the planning team.

STEP 2: *PLAN AHEAD*

Now develop a realistic plan around the chosen theme: you may split the planning tasks among the members of the planning team, deciding who will plan for specific curriculum areas, and set a date for completion of the planning; plan the entire unit together; or if you are working alone, map out a plan to meet specific objectives for the unit.

Tasks that should be completed before you begin teaching the unit include:

- set objectives (for curriculum areas)
- determine evaluation strategies
- divide planning responsibilities
- set deadlines for completion of planning
- gather/locate resources
- plan activities: an introductory activity to kick off the unit, whole class activities, small group activities, individual projects or assignments, and a culminating activity to mark the end of the unit
- reach out to the community for assistance
- map out the entire unit using weekly planning templates

STEP 3: *PUT THE PLAN INTO ACTION*

Launch the unit. At this point you will need to be flexible, as student ideas and interests may take you in unexpected directions. Continue to meet with the planning team for inspiration and support as the unit progresses, and adjust your plan as the need arises.

STEP 4: *EVALUATE • CELEBRATE*

Evaluation of students' progress should be addressed throughout the unit using tools that reflect the objectives that were set in Step 2. When you have completed the activities, evaluate the success of the unit, share information with other classes, parents, and community groups and celebrate your accomplishments.

PLANNING FOR INTEGRATION: SHARING RESPONSIBILITY

DIVIDE THE TASKS IDENTIFIED IN STEP 2 AND SET DEADLINES.

THEME _____

TASK	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE

PLANNING FOR INTEGRATION: CHECKLIST

Step 1 Choose a Theme

Theme: _____

_____

_____

_____

Goals: _____

_____

_____

_____

Step 2 Plan Ahead

- ☐ Objectives set
- ☐ Evaluation strategies determined
- ☐ Responsibilities shared/deadlines set
- ☐ Resources located
- ☐ Activities planned
- ☐ Community/families involved

Step 3 Put the Plan Into Action

- ☐ Be open to changes in the plan
- ☐ Meet with colleagues often

Step 4 Evaluate • Celebrate

Evaluation of Student Progress

- ☐ Intellectual Development
- ☐ Human and Social Development
- ☐ Career Development

Evaluation of the Unit's Success

- ☐ Logistics
- ☐ Student interest and involvement
- ☐ Celebration/sharing planned

PLANNING FOR INTEGRATION: OBJECTIVES

IDENTIFY YOUR OBJECTIVES FOR THIS UNIT.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

LANGUAGE ARTS

LITERATURE (appreciation, forms)

READING (comprehension, phonetic analysis, structural analysis)

WRITING (creativity, sentence/paragraph structure, punctuation/capitalization, spelling)

SPEAKING

LISTENING

MATH

SCIENCE

SOCIAL STUDIES

FINE ARTS

MUSIC

DRAMA

ART

HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT	SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

USE OF TECHNOLOGY	TIME MANAGEMENT, PLANNING	COOPERATION WITH PEERS

PLANNING FOR INTEGRATION: RESOURCES

LOCATE OR CREATE SUITABLE RESOURCES: PRINT, A.V., MANIPULATIVES.

LANGUAGE ARTS

LITERATURE (novel, poetry, short stories)

READING (skill development materials, selections from basal reading series, library books,etc.)

WRITING (pictures, skill development materials, templates)

SPEAKING

LISTENING

SCIENCE

MATH

SOCIAL STUDIES

FINE ARTS
(MUSIC, DRAMA, ART)

PLANNING FOR INTEGRATION: HUMAN RESOURCES

PLAN FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: PARENTS, GUEST SPEAKERS, FIELD TRIPS.

EVENT:

CONTACT PERSON:

PHONE:

NOTES:

EVENT:

CONTACT PERSON:

PHONE:

NOTES:

EVENT:

CONTACT PERSON:

PHONE:

NOTES:

EVENT:

CONTACT PERSON:

PHONE:

NOTES:

PLANNING FOR INTEGRATION: ACTIVITIES

PLAN A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES USING YOUR GOALS AS A GUIDE.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

WHOLE CLASS ACTIVITIES

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

PLANNING FOR INTEGRATION: WEEKLY PLANNING

PLAN FOR A WEEK OR THE ENTIRE UNIT, BUT REMAIN FLEXIBLE.

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	

WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY

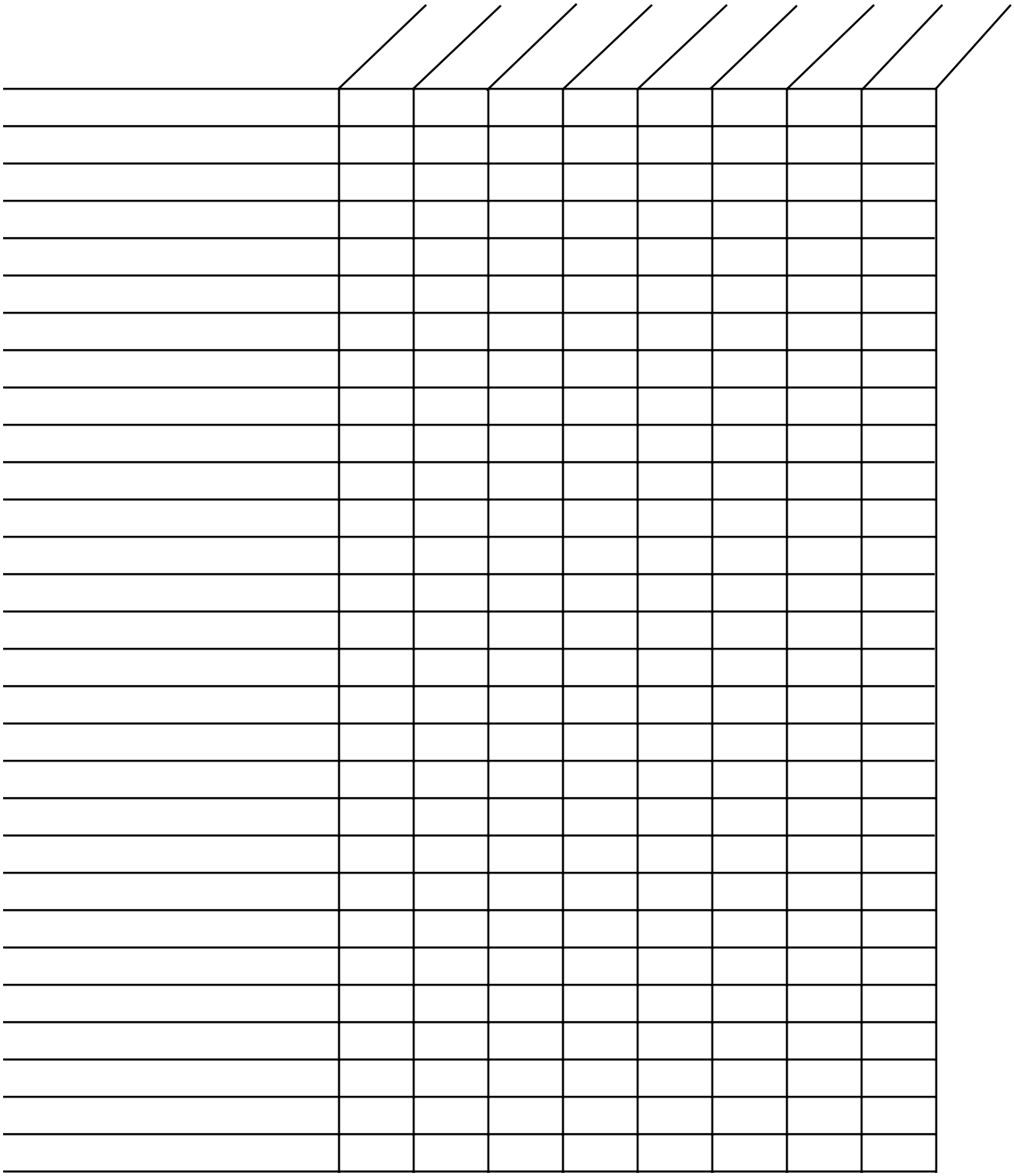
EVALUATION: THEME BASED UNIT

USE THESE QUESTIONS WITH THE PLANNING TEAM TO EVALUATE THE UNIT.

- ☐ Did we meet our goals for
  - Intellectual Development?
  - Human & Social Development?
  - Career Development?
- ☐ Did we keep our planning flexible to allow for children's interest?
- ☐ Were our students challenged to be creative in their thinking and representing?
- ☐ Did we require higher level thinking skills?
- ☐ Did we encourage cooperative learning?
- ☐ Did we use a good balance of whole class, small group and individual activities?
- ☐ Did the students appear to be interested and actively engaged in learning?
- ☐ Was there contact between community members and our students?
- ☐ Did we involve parents/guardians in the learning process?
- ☐ Did we integrate curricular areas to maximize student interest and provide large blocks of time for in-depth study?
- ☐ Were there logistical problems?
- ☐ Were the resources we used appropriate for our students and relevant to the unit?

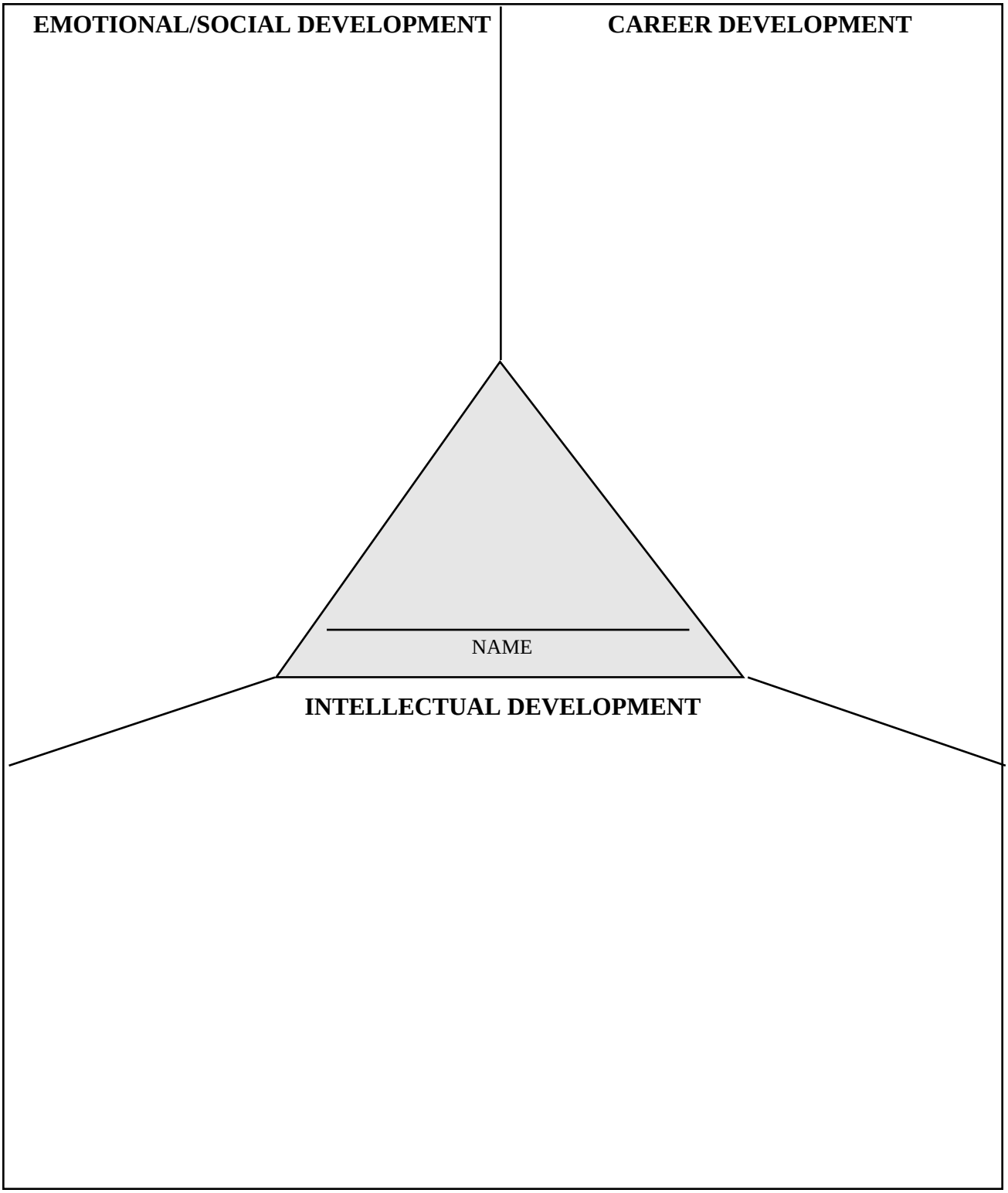
EVALUATION: ACTIVITIES IN THEME BASED UNIT

USE THIS CLASS LIST TO RECORD MARKS OR TO INDICATE COMPLETION.



EVALUATION: STUDENT PROGRESS

USE A CLASS SET OF THIS FORM TO RECORD COMMENTS THROUGHOUT THE UNIT.



CELEBRATION: HAPPY NOTES

GIVE A HAPPY NOTE TO EVERY STUDENT AT LEAST ONCE DURING THE UNIT.

Well Done!

_____

is awarded this certificate in recognition of

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

teacher's signature

Congratulations!

_____

has shown _____ **by**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

teacher's signature

EVALUATION: GROUP WORK

Theme:_____ Date _____

Names of group members:

_____

_____

We worked on:

_____

_____

We learned:

_____

_____

_____

_____

We needed help with:

_____

_____

Next time we would:

_____

_____

SELF EVALUATION

Name:_____ Date _____

My project was:

_____

_____

My work on this project was:

❑ NOT GOOD ❑ OK ❑ PRETTY GOOD ❑ GOOD ❑ FANTASTIC

I am good at:

_____

_____

_____

_____

I need to improve:

_____

_____

_____

_____

EVALUATION: END OF UNIT

Name:_____ Date _____

We have been studying:

_____

_____

My favourite activities were:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Some of the interesting things I learned are:

_____

_____

_____

_____

I would like to learn more about:

_____

_____

_____

NOTES