



II. Enabling the Learner

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Enabling the Learner

Cultivating Shared Ownership

Setting the stage for learning in the classroom environment, including all the preparation we do, is for the learner. The students in classrooms across the province are unique individuals, created and loved by God. They are part of His plan. Each comes with his/her own gifts and talents, and commissioned to develop and use what has been given to them for the betterment of all and the glory of God.

Each child, and each Catholic, is on a journey as they work towards these expectations. The Catholic classroom has to be a place where students have been given the opportunity to grow in their faith, their intellect and their role in society.

At the same time Ontario students are under increased pressure from a curriculum that is rigorous in its demands and both wide and deep in content. Students are now required to be much more involved in the reporting structures. They are setting and assessing goals for their education and communicating these goals to parents and teachers.

Given the call of Catholic education and the challenge of the times, students working towards the vision of the Catholic learner need to view the classroom as a place where they can become engaged in the process of learning. The responsibility for creating this learning environment falls to the classroom teacher. One characteristic of a classroom that has achieved a rich learning environment is the presence of internalized democratic reasoning between students and teachers. In a democratic classroom, students will see that the classroom community decides how problems will be solved. Students and teachers work together in collaboration to uphold the rights of the individual. Within this environment, a code of behaviour can be set. All members of the classroom should agree to a classroom code of behaviour that is fair, reasonable and expressed in positive language. As with all curriculum areas, students will look for descriptive and specific feedback on their performance in the classroom that enables them to understand how to take the next step in their formation as learners. Students will also look to their teachers to model the behaviour that is expected. Establishing this discipline at the beginning of the school year and following it consistently will allow students to be comfortable in their classroom and engage in the business of learning.

Teaching and Learning Styles

Another sign of a classroom that 'works' has each student motivated, excited and involved in relevant and purposeful tasks. This presents a challenge to educators. Each learner is unique, yet the needs of all are to be met. In order to give students an opportunity to fully develop their role in the classroom it becomes 'crucial for teachers to understand the learners' individual learning styles. As teachers, our responsibility becomes managing an environment where each child finds success by learning in a style that is uniquely his or hers.

Lynne Sarasin, in Style Perspectives: Impact in the Classroom describes what is meant by the idea of learning styles.

"The concept of learning style is defined as the certain specified pattern of behaviour and/or performance according to which an individual approaches a learning experience, a way in which the individual takes in new information and develops new skills, and the process by which the individual retains new information or new skills. Understanding learning styles includes understanding behaviors when approaching a learning experience, when evaluating a learning experience, and when applying new information and skills to situations in life."¹

The three primary learning styles Sarasin explores in her work are visual, auditory and tactile/kinesthetic. In managing the classroom a teacher needs to be aware of these differing ways of learning and how attending to these differing styles will help meet the needs of the students.

Of the three learning styles, often the best-served learner is the visual learner. The visual learner learns through seeing observing and reading. Common traits of the visual learner include:

- Examining, looking at and reading about things
- An ability to plan ahead, writes things down
- Thinking in pictures, visualizing details
- Preferring to read rather than being read to
- A difficulty in remembering oral instructions but remembers what is written down.

These students learn best through written assignments, journals, displays and reports.



The auditory learner, who learns through listening, hearing and talking through a problem, may not be as well served in the classroom. Common traits of the auditory learner include:

- Preferring oral reading
- Remembering stories and directions after hearing them
- Enjoying music more than visual art
- Performing rote memory tasks well once they are attached to a tune
- Enjoys listening, but cannot wait to talk

These learners are enabled through tasks that allow them opportunity for discussion, debate, oral presentation, interviews and oral tests.

The tactile or kinesthetic learner may be the least served in our classrooms. Kinesthetic students learn through touching, moving, doing and making things. Common traits include:

- Gesturing when speaking
- Pointing with the finger while reading
- Drumming of the fingers or tapping of the feet
- Moving lips while reading
- Selecting options that allow for physical activity

Kinesthetic learners are enabled through tasks that allow them opportunity for simulations, presentations, demonstrations and exhibitions.

While learning style refers to the way in which a student best perceives and learns new information, learning preferences refers to the range of preferred environmental conditions for learning. Rita Dunn in [How to Implement and Supervise a Learning Style Program](#) focuses on preferred environmental conditions.

“While concentrating on new and difficult information an individual’s learning style preferences include:

- Quiet or background noise
- Bright or low light
- Formal or casual seating
- Uninterrupted study or intermittent breaks
- Perceptual modes (auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic)
- No intake or intake (snacking, chewing, drinking, or smoking)
- Specific periods during the day
- Passivity or mobility
- Global or analytic processing styles”²



<http://www.smarterkids.com/rescenter/learnstyle.asp?redir=true#5>

<http://www.scholastic.com/parentandchild/windows/98/12.htm>

Further, Dunn states, "Although some gifted students can learn proficiently without using their learning style preference, low achievers perform significantly better when they capitalize on their learning preference." (p.3) In her research Dunn has noted that there are characteristic learning preferences that can impact on the performance of students who might be struggling.

- Frequent opportunities for mobility
- Reasonable choices of how, with which resources and with whom to learn
- A variety of instructional environments, materials, and sociological groupings rather than routines and patterns
- To learn during late morning, afternoon or evening hours
- Informal seating (e.g., beanbag chairs and cushions)
- Soft illumination – bright or florescent light may contribute to hyperactivity
- Introduction to materials with tactile or visual resources, reinforced with visual or kinesthetic resources; or an introduction to materials with kinesthetic or visual resources reinforced with visual or tactile resources.

Dunn goes on to say that students who struggle in school often have poor auditory memory. If they learn visually they prefer drawings, graphs or symbols rather than text. If a classroom relies on traditional methods of teacher talking and students listening/reading, these students will struggle. If these struggling learners are to continue in their quest of spiritual and academic development, teachers need to attend to their learning preferences.

Another perspective on learning preferences is found in the work of Howard Gardner and the theory of multiple intelligences. It suggests that the traditional notion of intelligence, based on I.Q. testing, is far too limited. Instead, Gardner proposes eight different intelligences (and others have suggested there may be many more) to account for a broader range of human potential in children. These intelligences are:

- Linguistic intelligence ("word smart"):
- Logical-mathematical intelligence ("number/reasoning smart")
- Spatial intelligence ("picture smart")
- Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence ("body smart")
- Musical intelligence ("music smart")
- Interpersonal intelligence ("people smart")
- Intrapersonal intelligence ("self smart")
- Naturalist intelligence ("nature smart")

Gardner asserts our schools and culture focus most of their attention on linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence. The theory of multiple intelligence suggests that we should also place equal attention on individuals who show gifts in the other intelligences: the artists, architects, musicians, naturalists, designers, dancers, therapists, entrepreneurs, and others who enrich the world in which we live. Many children who have these gifts receive little reinforcement for them in school.

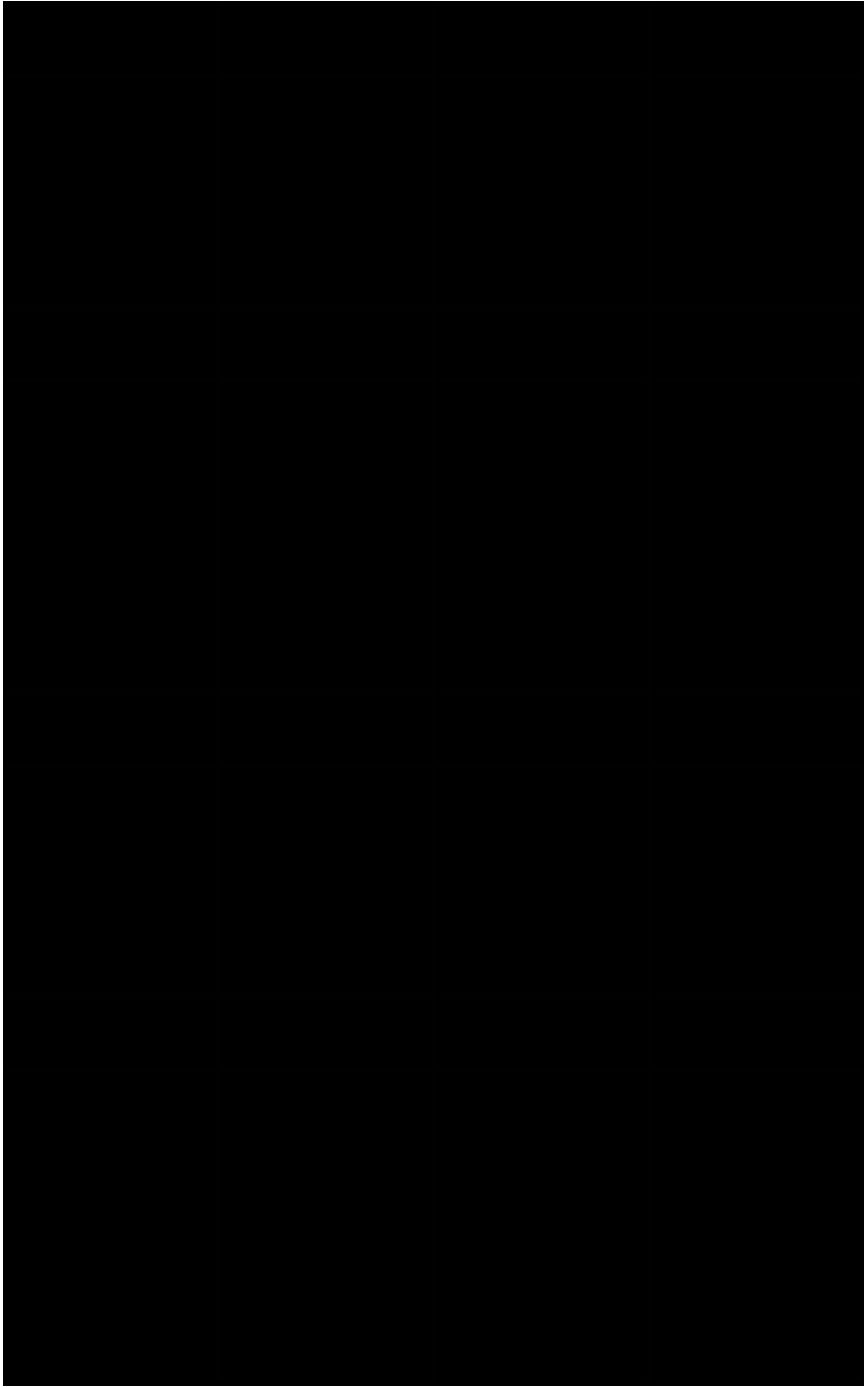
If we as teachers are going to meet the needs of learners with different intelligences we need to be trained to plan and present units of study, themes and lessons in a wide variety of ways. We should be using music, cooperative learning, art activities, role-play, multimedia, field trips, and inner reflection. If a teacher is having difficulty reaching a student in the more traditional linguistic or logical ways of instruction, the theory of multiple intelligences suggests several other ways in which the material might be presented to facilitate effective learning. When approaching a topic, unit or theme, efforts should be made to connect the learning with

- words (linguistic intelligence)
- numbers or logic (logical-mathematical intelligence)
- pictures (spatial intelligence)
- music (musical intelligence)
- self-reflection (intrapersonal intelligence)
- a physical experience (bodily-kinesthetic intelligence)
- a social experience (interpersonal intelligence), and/or
- an experience in the natural world. (naturalist intelligence)

One strategy to assist in planning for multiple intelligences would be to use a thought web. In the center of the web write the expectations to be addressed. Spokes are drawn out from the center of the wheel to an area for each of the intelligences. Write down connections and activities that could be made between the topic and each of the different intelligences. Use of a wide range of activities to engage a variety of intelligences will help ensure that all students are involved in learning.

See Figure 2.1

This table outlines a few of the activities that could be used to engage students in the different intelligences.



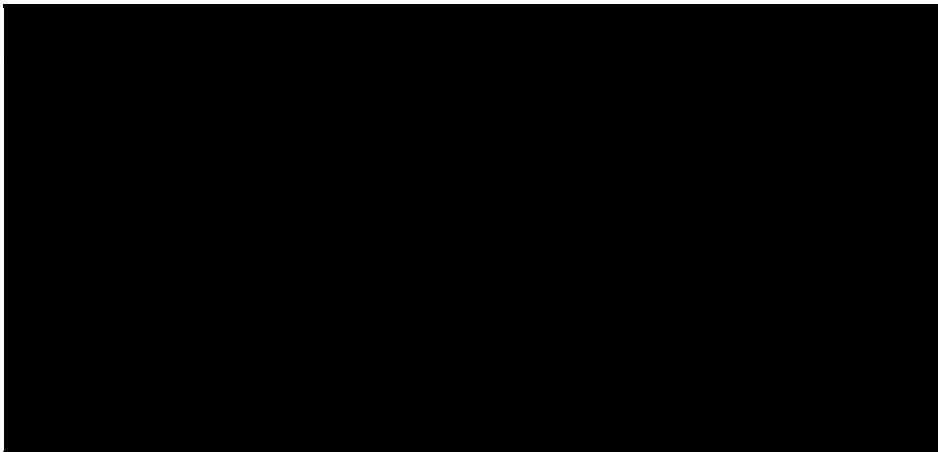
Adapted from
Toronto Catholic District School Board
Assessment of Student Achievement in Catholic Schools, 2001

For some students recognizing the particular learning style or preference will not be enough. The Special Education Companion that is found in the Curriculum Unit Planner outlines the steps that need to occur for a student with special needs to become fully engaged in a classroom. As with all students, these children require an encouraging and supportive classroom environment where they feel that they are valued members of the class. These students are looking for a classroom that promotes opportunities to contribute, participate, make choices, cooperate, and make friends. They want to be successful, needed, respected, valued and able to take risks. As learners, they want to feel useful, happy, free and confident. These students do require program accommodations that involve ongoing communication among teachers, parent/guardians, support staff, students, agencies and associations where appropriate. Students with communication, behavioural, intellectual or physical exceptionalities require the use of accommodations to ensure that they feel positive about their learning.

See Figures 2.2 and 2.3

Making Accommodations

When determining accommodations for students a teacher needs to consider content, process, product, and assessment.



The Special Education Companion found in the Ministry Unit Planner contains a description of and accommodation suggestions for the following exceptionalities:

- Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder
- Behavioural/Emotional Disorder
- Blind and Low Vision
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Deafblind
- Developmental Disability

- Giftedness
- Learning Disabilities
- Physical Disabilities.

Effective use of the accommodations suggested in the Special Education Companion will allow students with special needs to participate fully in the quest for academic and spiritual growth.

Along with the learning styles and preferences of the students and any special needs that require accommodations, classroom teachers need to consider the intellectual, physical, emotional and social developmental stage of the students with whom they are working. There are many theories and descriptions of the stages of development that occur. One frequently referred to is the work of Jean Piaget.

Piaget has four stages of development; sensori-motor, pre-operational, concrete operational and formal operational. Most students have well passed the first stage, sensori-motor, by the time they enter school. Typically lasting from birth to age two, children in this stage approach their environment in terms of non-verbal thought. The child is gradually learning that the environment has spatial relationships; contains things having location and movement in space; operates through cause and effect; and contains objects that are permanent. Children at this stage of development need many and varied opportunities to touch and manipulate things so they can build up images of the world around them.⁴

The pre-operational stage occurs from ages two to six. This is the stage where most children will enter school. Throughout most of the pre-operational stage, a child's thinking is self-centered, or egocentric. According to Piaget, during the pre-operational stage a child has difficulty understanding life from any other perspective than his own. In this stage, the learner is very me, myself, and I oriented. In the pre-operational stage, the student begins to develop the use of symbols (but can not manipulate them), and the student is able to use language and words to represent things not visible. Also, the pre-operational learner begins to master conservation problems. Although the learner is still unable to think in a truly logical fashion, he/she may begin to treat objects as part of a group. The pre-operational student may have difficulty with classification. Students in this stage of development need to:

- experience as frequently as possible, trips, music, literature, films, games and physical activities;
- have many and varied concrete sensory experiences;
- interact, solve problems and create with many different materials and classes of things;⁴
- engage in a variety of social situations in order to work with



**Stage 1
sensori-motor**



**Stage 2
pre-operational**

others, communicate with others, and become less self centered.;

- manipulate a variety of concrete materials in order to learn to discriminate, classify, quantify, measure, weigh and order.
- have many and varied opportunities to communicate in both verbal and non-verbal ways;
- have opportunities for symbolic construction and fantasy play.⁴

The third stage of development is concrete operational. It usually occurs between the ages of seven and twelve. During this stage, the learner begins to reason logically, and organize thoughts coherently. However, he/she can only think about actual physical objects, they are not yet ready to work with abstract reasoning. It is also during this stage that the learner becomes less self-centered. Students in the concrete operational stage of development need to:

- experience all the activities listed for a learner at the pre-operational stage, but with greater variety and more social, linguistic, and intellectual sophistication;
- have sufficient time to play with a wide variety of materials and games;
- have learning experiences based on concrete materials;
- have frequent opportunities to link 'doing' and 'telling' through talking, reading and writing about present and past experiences;
- be encouraged to persevere in activities;
- be given opportunities to make connections between things, between people, and between events;
- be encouraged to draw conclusions and make inferences.⁴

Students in grade 8 may be entering the last of Piaget's stages, formal operational. This stage is characterized by the ability to formulate hypotheses and systematically test them to arrive at an answer to a problem. The learner in the formal stage is also able to think abstractly and to understand the form or structure of a mathematical problem. Another characteristic of the learner is their ability to reason contrary to fact. That is, if they are given a statement and asked to use it as the basis of an argument they are capable of accomplishing the task. Students at this stage of development are able to consider others empathetically. Learners in the formal operation stage of development need to:

- be able to use strategies of the third stage when faced with new learning situations or when under emotional or mental stress;
- be provided with many opportunities to talk, read and write about abstract concepts;
- encounter many teaching-learning strategies which proceed from the concrete to the abstract.⁴



**Stage 3
concrete operational**



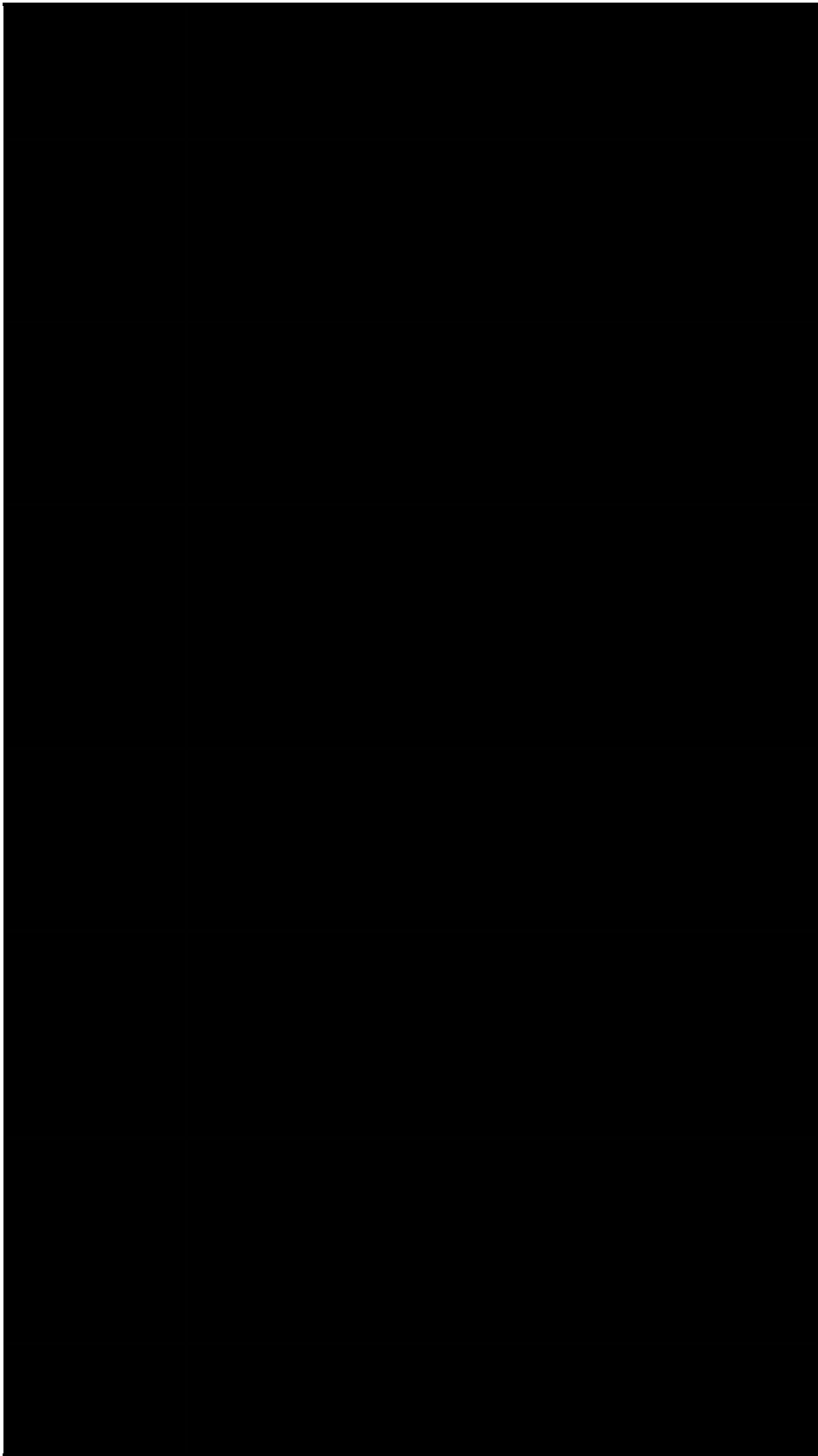
**Stage 4
formal operational**

The order in which human beings move through their developmental stages does not vary, but the age at which any learner enters or leaves a stage of development depends on a variety of factors. These factors include maturation, experience, and social interaction. Maturation is the physical and psychological growth that occurs in the student at a specific stage. Experience is when the student thinks and interacts with real or concrete objects in the external environment. Social interaction involves the child socializing with others, especially children. Teachers need to be wary of labeling children as being at any stage of development based on their chronological age. Students may operate in more than one stage at any given time and may regress to earlier stages of development if they are in new, embarrassing or otherwise stressful situations. Teachers should observe a student's development within a stage as well as their progression from one stage into the next and be conscious of the implications of each stage of development while planning curriculum and while teaching and evaluating students.

Instructional Strategies

Teachers make choices about the kinds of teaching strategies they will use with the students in their care. Well-crafted learning activities are ones that maintain a balance between enough organization to orient students' action and at the same time allow sufficient openness to accommodate the variety of interest, ability and experience found in the classroom. They are also open to the continued faith development of Catholic learning.

There is an enormous range of strategies a teacher can use in the development of learning activities. The Teaching/Learning Strategies Companion found in the Ministry Unit Planner contains detailed information about many teaching/learning strategies. The intent of the Teaching/Learning Strategies Companion is to assist teachers in making decisions about instruction. It provides detailed information on a wide range of strategies teachers may use when developing learning experiences, and determining the most appropriate teaching/learning strategies for the students. The Teaching/Learning Strategies Companion has grouped the strategies as outlined in the following table.



Conclusion

Each child in our classroom is unique and special, open to new experiences and ready to grow. Our vocation, expressed in the way we manage the environment and activities of our classrooms, is to ensure that the strengths of those children are capitalized on, and the weaknesses are compensated. Through our training, understanding and compassion we must create an environment that enables the learner. Each day they must have the opportunity to become more fully human, more fully alive.

Figure 2.1

Planning for Multiple Intelligences

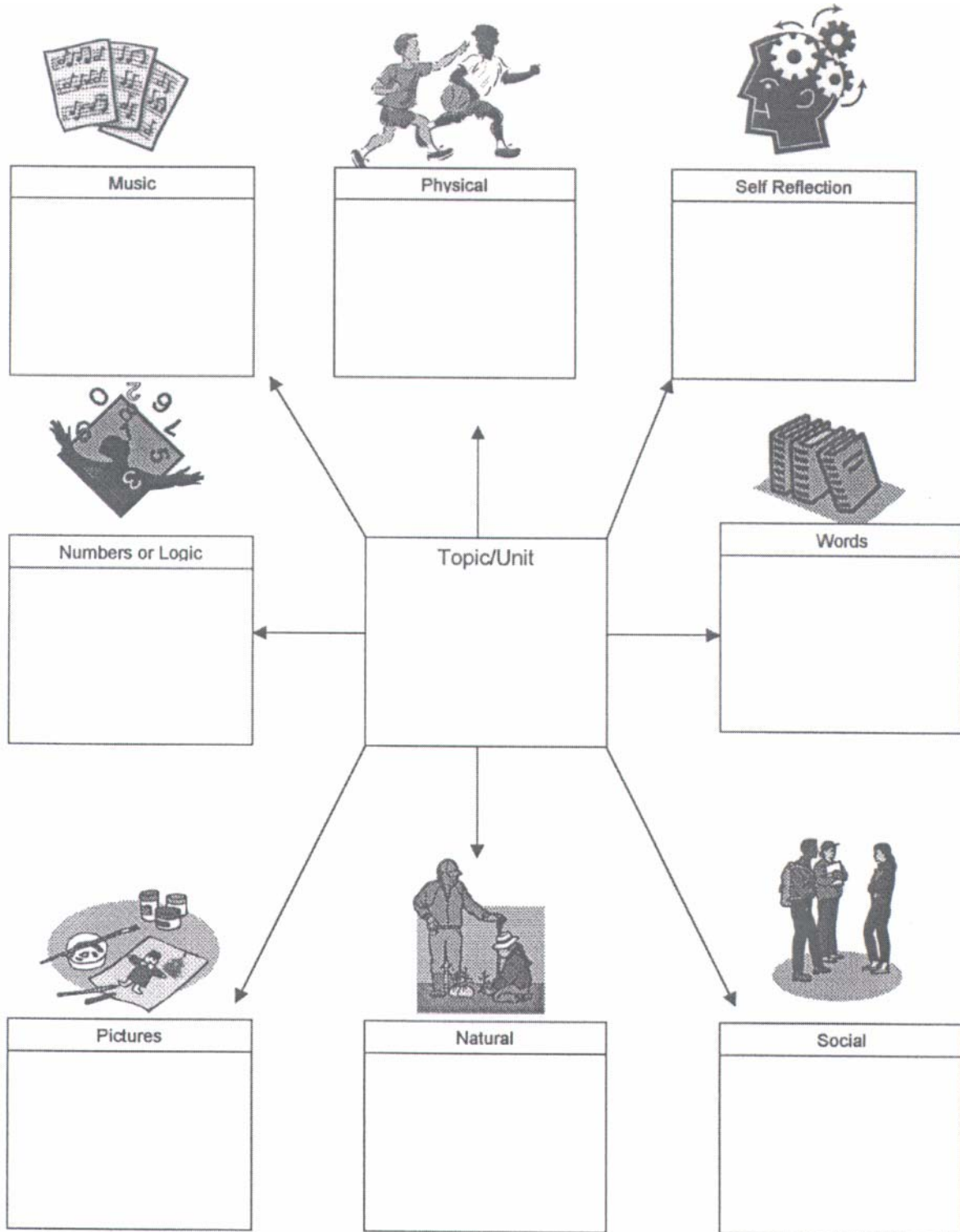
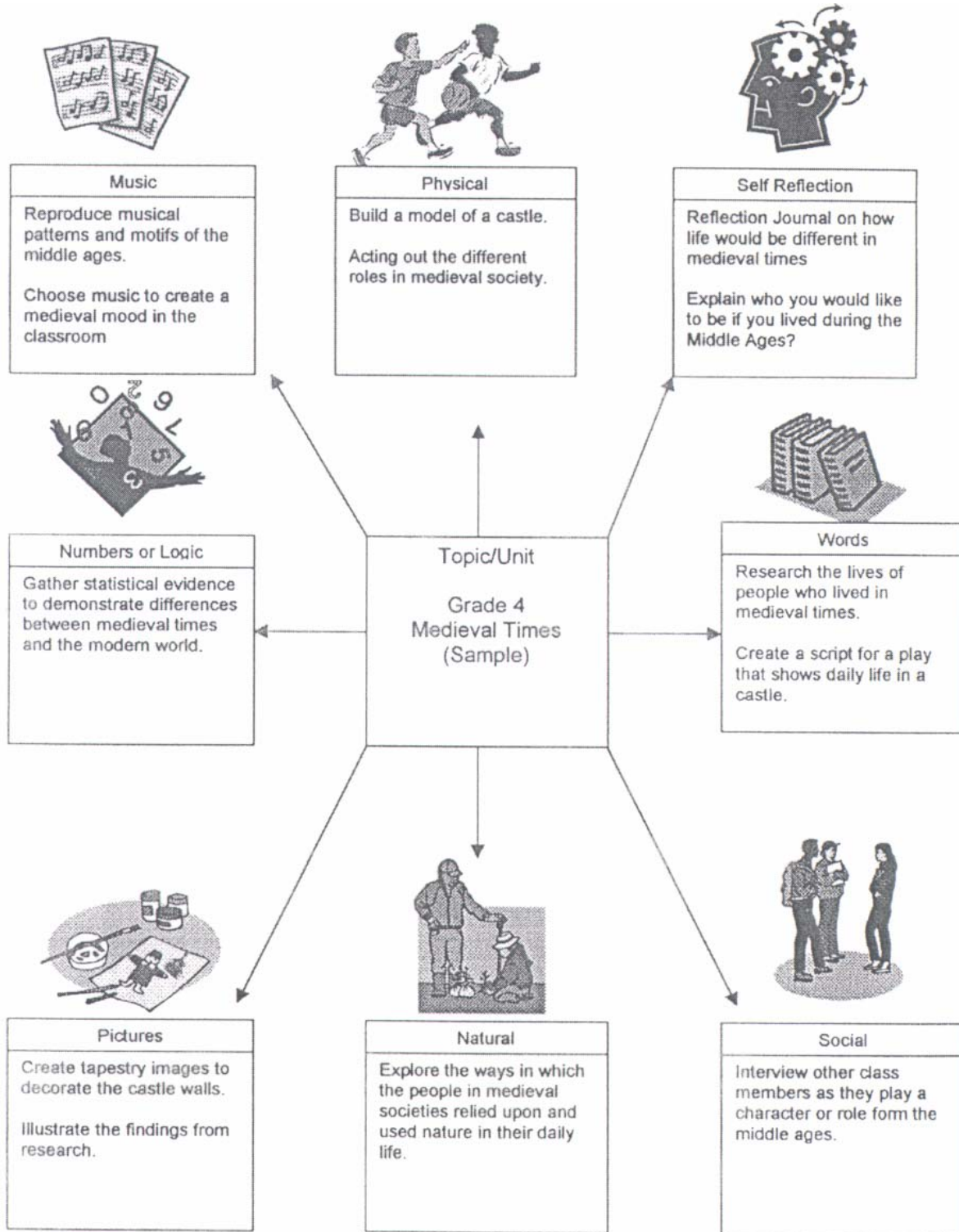
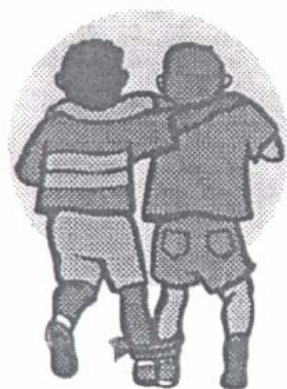


Figure 2.1

Planning for Multiple Intelligences



They are looking for a classroom where they can



Make Friends



Participate



Make Choices



Cooperate and
Contribute

Figure 2.3

Children with special needs have the hopes for school that all children have

