

Augustana College

EDUC 335 Reading in the Content Field: Secondary

Concepts addressed:

INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION

Most schools have traditionally divided curriculum into separate subject areas (language arts, math, science, social studies, etc.). Each subject, then, is taught in isolation from the others. Thus, students are not apt to see connections between the curriculum areas. In addition, they are unlikely to gain the skills to integrate information or to understand how subject areas relate to each other and to real life. Curriculum can, however, be made relevant by presenting information to students in a thematic manner. Holistic, integrated learning empowers students to see connections, make generalizations, and transfer knowledge to their out-of-school lives.

Interdisciplinary instruction is a methodology that purposefully connects objectives, content, instruction and outcomes in order to explore a particular theme. According to Richard and Noreen Kellough (1999), interdisciplinary instruction "refers to both a way of teaching and a way of planning and organizing the instructional program so the discrete disciplines of subject matter are related to one another in a design that (1) matches the developmental needs of the learners and (2) helps to connect their learning in ways that are meaningful to their current and past experiences." Interdisciplinary units blend of two or more curriculum areas and may be called thematic instruction, integrated curriculum, multidisciplinary teaching or interdisciplinary units. No matter how we label it, the intent is the same: For students to realize that information, concepts, and skills can be shared by more than one subject area.

Students benefit from interdisciplinary instruction because they are more apt to transfer and apply their knowledge when learning is connected and not taught in a fragmented way. Ultimately, when learning makes more sense to our students, dispositions toward learning improve.

Teachers can work alone, with a team of teachers or the entire school can join in, the unit can be planned for one day or for an extended period of time, the unit can involve only two or all subject areas, and interdisciplinary instruction can be a teacher's primary means of instruction or only once a semester.

When choosing an interdisciplinary topic, select a broad-based topic such as values rather than a specific one such as oceans. Broad-based topics allow students to make connections across content areas.

An interdisciplinary unit on Japan might include the following content areas and activities:

Language Arts:	Japanese stories, Haiku
Art:	Origami
Music:	Japanese music and instruments
Social Studies:	Traditional customs of Japan, map study
Math:	Use bar graphs to analyze population trends
Physical Education:	Ping-pong tournament