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WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY?
(Extracted)

By Martin Weller, Open University Professor, 14 October 2021

What is interdisciplinary study?

It seems to be a buzzword in education and one that gets thrown around quite a lot these days. But what does 'interdisciplinary' study really mean? And why is it so desirable?

This type of study allows the student to learn by making connections between ideas and concepts across different disciplines. Students learning in this way are able to apply the knowledge gained in one discipline to another different discipline as a way to deepen the learning experience. The most effective approach to interdisciplinary study enables students to build their own interdisciplinary pathway by choosing courses which make sense to them. For example, it is not too difficult to find a theme which crosses over disciplinary boundaries in literature, art and history or science and mathematics. Studying topics thematically is one way to bring ideas together resulting in more meaningful learning. This can occur by allowing students to choose their own subjects and their learning is deepened when they reflect on the connections between what they are learning in different disciplines.

One of the biggest barriers to achieving true interdisciplinary study in education environments is the necessity for collaboration of educators. This can be difficult to achieve, but not impossible. Interdisciplinary teaching and learning is maximised when professionals from different disciplines work together to serve a common purpose and to help students make the connections between different disciplines or subject areas. Such interaction is in support of the constructivist paradigm which allows for new knowledge construction and a deeper understanding of ideas than disciplinary study.

What is a constructivist paradigm?

Constructivism is a theory about how people learn. This theory suggests that people create their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences and reflection on those experiences. It goes on to suggest that when students encounter something new, they have to integrate it with previous ideas and experiences by connecting the new knowledge to something already known. It may mean the students are studying something completely new and different. Sometimes it will result in the student rejecting the ideas completely. Above all, the theory assumes that we are active creators of our own knowledge requiring students to ask questions, explore, and assess what is known or learned. Students engaging in interdisciplinary study are therefore creating their own understanding and knowledge of the world through their study choices.

What is so beneficial about this type of study?

Making connections between different concepts is essential in interdisciplinary study. Here are some other benefits of studying in this way:

- Students are highly motivated as they have a vested interest in pursuing topics that are interesting to them. As a result, the content is often rooted in life experiences, giving an authentic purpose for the learning and connecting it to a real-world context. Consequently, the learning becomes meaningful, purposeful and deeper resulting in learning experiences that stay with the student for a lifetime.
- Students cover topics in more depth because they are considering the many and varied perspectives from which a topic can be explored.
- Critical thinking skills are used and developed as students look across disciplinary boundaries to consider other viewpoints and also begin to compare and contrast concepts across subject areas.
- Students begin to consolidate learning by synthesising ideas from many perspectives and consider an alternative way of acquiring knowledge.
- Exploring topics across a range of subject boundaries motivates students to pursue new knowledge in different subject areas.
- Transferable skills of critical thinking, synthesis and research are developed and are applicable to future learning experiences.
- Interdisciplinary knowledge and application of different disciplines can lead to greater creativity.
- Worthwhile topics of research can fall in the 'spaces' between the traditional disciplines.

Final thoughts

Students studying more than one subject (or discipline) have a unique opportunity to readdress those subjects and their approaches. I believe that multi-subject students are able to take 'knowledge' from one subject area and apply or compare it to another. Multi-subject students should always question how the knowledge has been created and how this can vary between different subjects. It teaches you to think critically about the subjects you are exploring and finding areas where there is convergence as well as areas which might seem to contradict. By fully understanding one topic, you can build on that knowledge *in relation* to what you already understand. Multi-subject study makes this easier, because instead of building up a ladder, you are building around a topic and able to explore it from different angles, a bit more like a hill, perhaps. The thing about the hill is that it allows more flexibility in moving 'up' in knowledge and is also conducive to spreading that knowledge in different areas, which are connected. If you extend this approach to interdisciplinary learning, you can see the benefits of how you might be able to really generate new knowledge across different subjects.

By learning in one context, you should be able to extend that knowledge in both the original context and in a new subject by thinking about how they might relate to each other. Do they work together? Do they seem to work apart? This approach leads to a deeper learning and understanding and ultimately *interdisciplinary* thought and understanding, which can be beneficial in the workplace. It is that relationship building of knowledge that can allow

for deeper understanding and highlight the patterns that are common between different subjects.

This is not easy. Not only is it difficult to think in new ways, it is also the case that there may not be any hard and fast rules as to how to express your interdisciplinary work. It can help to identify patterns or intersections *between* subjects, and ultimately achieve the profound knowledge that can be represented *within* a range of different subjects. And, using a 'building' approach to knowledge, learning by relating one thing to another, may offer a key to being able to think in a truly interdisciplinary way.

Interdisciplinary study allows for synthesis of ideas and the synthesis of characteristics from many disciplines. At the same time, it addresses students' individual differences and helps to develop important, transferable skills. These skills, such as critical thinking, communication and analysis are important and continually developing at all stages of life. Educational systems are serving students best if they enable and encourage students to build their own interdisciplinary pathway. This approach is sure to foster a love of learning, ignite a spark of enthusiasm and address learning differences for students.

1.- LINES 56 - 69: TRANSLATE THE PARAGRAPH INTO SPANISH OR BASQUE (AT YOUR OWN CHOICE) TRYING TO CONVEY THE EXACT MEANING AND STYLE FROM THE ORIGINAL TEXT. (1 POINT)

2.- EXPLAIN (IN ENGLISH) THE MEANING OF THESE EXPRESSIONS AS THEY APPEAR IN THE PARTICULAR CONTEXT OF THE TEXT. (0,2 x 10 = 2 POINTS)

1- **buzzword** (line 1)

2- **gets thrown** (line 1)

3- **engaging** (line 30)

4- **vested interest** (line 35)

5- **subject boundaries** (line 47)

6- **approaches** (line 57)

7- **highlight** (line 75)

8- **hard and fast rules** (line 78)

9- **foster** (line 88)

10- **address** (line 89)

3.- **CASE STUDY (7 POINTS):**

You are the English teacher of a 5th grade group, with 19 students, in a neighbourhood Infant and Primary school. This school has got around 200 students and only one line per group.

30% of students are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Along the school year, the school also receives new students that come from abroad (Morocco, Pakistan and South America). One of the main objectives of the school is to promote the participation of families, not only in the daily activities in the classroom, but also to ensure that this multiculturalism is present in the different school management bodies: school council, parents' association, classroom representatives and so on.

According to ISEI-IVEI, the socio-economic level of the families is low-middle.

This school year they are developing several Projects such as Bidelaguna, Agenda 30 and STEAM. Taking into account the profile of the families, Coexistence, Coeducation and Intercultural plans are of great value in the daily life of the school.

The school has recently created a Digital plan. This document makes a special emphasis on the use of technology to enhance the teaching and learning process and develop the digital competence.

The school methodology promotes interdisciplinary study among subjects. During the first term, 5th grade students have proposed the topic **COOKING**.

This 5th grade group has very diverse students and, in many cases, with very extreme characteristics or responses.

On the one hand, we can mention a child who arrived from Morocco two years ago. He couldn´t speak Spanish or Basque. He didn´t have any English knowledge. He has received the linguistic reinforcement (HIPI) for two years and repeated fourth grade. His linguistic competence is very low. However, he shows a very positive attitude towards languages and makes an effort to learn.

On the other hand, there is also a girl diagnosed with AD/HD. She often presents a disruptive attitude in the classroom.

Finally, we should mention the case of a gifted boy, who is always fast-finisher.

A- Define the legal framework and the school documents your school should deal with in order to create the most adequate plan.

B- Considering the school projects mentioned above, describe the methodological strategies and the activities to be carried out in 6 – 8 sessions.

C - Specify the educational response and attention to diversity, taking into account the characteristics of the mentioned students.

D- Explain the coordination to be carried out with the teaching team in different areas in relation to the subject chosen by the students.

E- How would you get families involved in your sessions?

F- Describe briefly the assessment process you have planned to check if the students are reaching the planned goals or not. What kinds of evidences would you gather? Which tools would you use?