

## **The Definition of Curriculum Integration**

An integration is a philosophy of teaching in which content is drawn from several subject areas to focus on a particular topic or theme. Rather than studying math or social studies in isolation, for example, a class might study a unit called *The Sea*, using math to calculate pressure at certain depths and social studies to understand why coastal and inland populations have different livelihoods.

Effective interdisciplinary studies include the following elements:

- A topic that lends itself to study from several points of view.
- Two to five valuable themes (or essential questions) the teacher wants the students to explore.
- An approach and activities to further students' understanding more than is possible in a traditional, single-discipline unit.

Source: From *The Language of Learning: A Guide to Education Terms*, by J. L. McBrien & R. S. Brandt, p. 55, 1997, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

### ***Is curriculum integration the same thing as a multidisciplinary curriculum?***

**Narrator:** Interdisciplinary design is similar to multidisciplinary except that it connects all or most subjects, including the arts, music, and physical education in a single unit. So the theme or issue is viewed from the perspectives of a range of disciplines.

**Jacobs:** The first thing to notice, however, is in each of the examples—discipline, parallel discipline, multidiscipline, interdisciplinary—the root word is discipline. Each of those is predicated on your looking at your disciplines—what you believe are important—and reorganizing them, resequencing them, looking at interrelationships.

### ***Are schools doing a good job integrating their curricula?***

**Heidi Hayes Jacobs:** One of the great problems in American education that could be addressed quite readily, and is starting to be addressed, is the lack of good communication between grade levels, between buildings. It's rare to find a middle school that knows what the elementary curriculum is in any depth, or [for] the high school to have any understanding; so integration is the kids' experience integrated over time as well as during the course of any school year. It's a more dynamic definition than the old way.

### ***Why should teachers work to integrate curriculum?***

**Freda Norvell, director, curriculum and instruction:** Teachers have found that they want to develop ways to make their classroom more like the world outside. We don't live in isolation. When we go to the grocery store, we don't just do math. We have to read things that are on the packages. We have to decide about quantities. We have to look at nutrition. There are a lot of things that have to be done at one time.

### ***What do students think about curriculum integration?***

**Chad, high school student:** The combination helps a lot because it gives you a general overview of the time period, using English and social studies and the music and the art. It helps you understand completely what it was like to live in that time period, knowing all aspects of the culture instead of just one, such as English or social studies.

### ***What kind of schoolwide commitment is needed to successfully integrate the curriculum?***

**Bert Haller, principal:** To integrate the curriculum, the schedule changes were massive. We had to look at the entire school to find out how we could juggle art, music, P.E., library, computer—all academic areas—so that we could get as much dovetailing as we possibly could, to get as much back-to-back planning period or planning period/lunch period back-to-back, to enable teachers to spend some time planning during the school day. With "x" number of hours during the day, you really don't have a whole lot of flexibility—and then you do with scheduling. I mean, you have a set number of minutes you have per day, and you have to work within that. It takes understanding—great, massive understanding—on everyone's part.

