Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation

Foreword

Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation demystifies curriculum integration. The authors describe a variety of curriculum integration options ranging from concurrent teaching of related subjects to fusion of curriculum focus to residential study focusing on daily living; from two-week units to year-long courses. They offer suggestions for choosing proper criteria for successful curriculum integration, dealing with the attitudes of key individuals and groups, and establishing validity. And they present a step-by-step approach to integration, proceeding from selection of an organizing center to a scope and sequence of guiding questions to a matrix of activities for developing integrated units of study. In addition, the authors make a useful distinction between curriculum—content—and metacurriculum—those learning skills helpful in acquiring the curriculum content being taught and in developing the capacity to think and learn independently.

The book acknowledges that curriculum integration is not a panacea; many integration decisions entail tradeoffs. It also illuminates the value of higher-order thinking and learning skills and provides a vehicle for their integration into curriculum. Indeed, by their practical approach, the authors provide a valuable resource to help teachers avoid the pitfalls of earlier integration efforts.

Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation makes a significant contribution to accomplishing ASCD's mission of developing leadership for quality in education for all students.

PATRICIA C. CONRAN
President, 1989-90

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The Growing Need for Interdisciplinary Curriculum Content

Heidi Hayes Jacobs

MIKE, A 2ND GRADER, DEFINES MATHEMATICS AS "SOMETHING YOU DO IN THE morning." Unfortunately, his statement reflects an internalization of mathematics as an experience to be absorbed from 9:45-10:30 a.m., and certainly before recess. We rarely explain to students why the school day is designed as it is. It should be no surprise then that students look at the arbitrary divisions for reading, math, social studies, science, art, music, and physical education and begin to define the subject areas as separate bodies of knowledge with little relationship to one another.

As Mike moves into junior and senior high, the subject matter delineations will become even more entrenched as the academic areas are forced into 50-minute time blocks taught by individual specialists. It is no wonder that many secondary school students complain that school is irrelevant to the larger world. In the real world, we do not wake up in the morning and do social studies for 50 minutes. The adolescent begins to realize that in real life we encounter problems and situations, gather data from all of our resources, and generate solutions. The fragmented school day does not reflect this reality.

The British philosopher Lionel Elvin (1977) uses an analogy to describe the problem of the false time constraints of the school day: