

Towards Integrated Curricula

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Postmodern democratic aims should respect individual and group rights by seeking equity in both physical and cognitive access to educational opportunity. Our national educational philosophy, enshrined in the *White Paper*, asserts that every child can learn and is guaranteed an education regardless of religion, ethnicity, race, gender, or socio-economic status. I would also suggest that geographical location be included as an indicator of potential bias in access to schooling. Additionally, our subscription to both universal secondary education (USE) and mainstreaming sees our nation's classrooms differentiated among a broad range of pupil differences. This can situate multiple learning styles, cultures, educational expectations, languages, intelligences, physical abilities, and socio-economic challenges within the same classroom. Further complicating the situation is the backdrop of an increasingly technological, global society. Integrated curricula may be a possible strategy, not only to satisfy the needs of such varied classroom populations, but also to develop skills that allow students to navigate and improve eclectic modern societies.

As a philosophy, curriculum integration recognises that although curriculum planners can organise opportunities to assist learning, individual learners must themselves internally integrate learning objectives. Hence, curriculum integration, like postmodernism and constructivism, allows individual learners to formulate their own peculiar understandings of the world and its activities.

As a design feature, integration attempts to show relationships between bits and pieces of the curriculum, in order to enable learners to understand and appreciate knowledge as unified rather than fragmented. Integration also allows learners to develop deep understandings of the subject matter. The knowledge explosion, increasing specialisation in society, and the pace of technological development have intensified the need for the development of such competencies in learners.

In keeping with the demands of the Information Age, Professor Margaret Roblyer advocates the integration of technology within the curriculum to improve motivation and teacher productivity, to provide and support the unique instructional approaches needed to teach eclectic classrooms, and to provide students with the required skills for life in an information age.

Additionally, as an integral part of the teaching/learning cycle, Professor Menucha Birenbaum and her associates suggest that current assessment practices often fail to address the needs of today's learners and the modern, complex, globalised societies in which they reside. Teachers need to be supported in their decisions to embrace assessment models reflective of the problem-solving and creative thinking skills that students, as future citizens of the new millennium, will need. As such, integrated assessment systems (IASs) suggest a paradigm shift from models that solely utilise assessment **of** learning to models that also include assessment **for** learning. IASs consider the needs of both learners and facilitators—learners participate in an assessment process that is both contextual and responsive, while facilitators are better able to develop their teaching skills as part of their continuous professional development as they move away from standardised assessments. Individual learners and their instructors participate in an assessment methodology

that reviews process (formative assessment) as well as product (summative assessment). As such, an IAS provides information about learner and teacher progression as well as about areas needing improvement.

Robin Fogarty's ten proposed curriculum integration models fall within four categories and proceed on a continuum of integration from with-out to with-in the learner—integration within single disciplines, integration across several disciplines, integration within learners, and integration across networks. The final model sees the learner directing the integration process, since only he/she knows the particulars of the task and so can harness needed resources from within and across other areas of specialisations. For example, an architect may target resources (including knowledge) from interior design, physics, and computer science to accomplish the task of building construction.

Curriculum integration is not advanced here as a panacea. Jere Brophy and Janet Alleman suggest that integrated learning activities need to be carefully planned so that they promote educational goals and do not distort subject content—especially since integrated activities may be highly time-intensive. Practitioners must be wary of ill-conceived integration ideas that restrict student participation because the task is ambiguous or requires knowledge that has not been taught and is not likely to have been acquired elsewhere. Integrated activities should foster, rather than disrupt or nullify, accomplishment of major goals in **each** subject area, otherwise integration may lack educational value in the intended subject area while promoting significant goals in another discipline.

Well-structured integrated curricula can help to deal with what can be the overwhelming reality of an extremely diversified classroom, as well as provide future citizens with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to negotiate a rapidly changing society.

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