



Research Brief

Interdisciplinary Teaming at the High School Level

Question: How can I make Interdisciplinary Teams work at the high school level?

Summary of Findings:

An approach used to increase collaboration among teachers is team teaching. According to Golner & Powell (1992), team teaching is commonly used and has been for several years at the middle school level and interdisciplinary teaching is common at the elementary school level. It is rarely used at the secondary level, perhaps because of the traditional emphasis on individualized subject departments. Although, there has been increasing interest at the high school level. Interdisciplinary teaming can vary from two subject area teachers to teams consisting of six teachers from different subject areas who develop teaching methods and assessments cooperatively. Each form of team teaching results in varying amounts of collaboration between teachers. The central definition of team teaching is basically “joint planning, instruction, and evaluation.” The goal of interdisciplinary teaming has been to interact and involve with students and the focus is on building strong relationships.

Major Findings and Conclusions:

In the current high school reform movement, it is sometimes known as “smaller learning communities.” When team teaching involving interdisciplinary subjects, each teacher can gain enlightenment about lesser-known fields, and therefore grow intellectually. Team-teaching across disciplines provides teachers an opportunity to examine their prejudices regarding scholars in other fields. Teachers may face resistance at first at the high school level, because they are trained as disciplinary specialists. They are accustomed to thinking about their disciplines first.

Benefits:

When implemented well, it

- can enhance and enrich what students learn, improving students’ retention
- can strengthen teachers’ work by breaking down isolation and encouraging collaboration
- can create relations among teachers that encourage a shared understanding of pedagogy and collective responsibility for student achievement
- can enable teachers to reach consensus on significant issues of teaching and learning
- can make the curriculum more relevant and contemporary, by breaking down discipline boundaries
- gives an opportunity for students to apply knowledge
- can help students to relate knowledge from different academic disciplines and see connections among subject matter
- allow team teachers to discuss issues relating to students, such as behavioral expectations, student motivation and teaching policies, and ending up with improved solutions
- successful team teaching has shown to increase professionalism and morale among teachers

Weaknesses:

- control among teachers can occur



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- teachers from different subject areas may have differing points of view, so they don't agree
- can lead to serious power struggles
- one discipline may overshadow another
- often fail to focus on powerful ideas or organizing concepts from the disciplines

How can it work effectively and successfully?

- by paying explicit attention to standards and outcomes when curriculum planning
- by creating clearly defined performance expectations
- by creating teams of compatible teachers
- by involving teachers who have a keen interest in connecting the content or curriculum to real life
- by having the program goals and philosophies, as well as roles of the teachers and administration well-defined
- flexibility with regard to both logistical and scholarly matters
- takes time to work through different perspectives and to establish trust among teachers
- successful if implemented for the long-term

Example of a school that implements interdisciplinary teaming:

Southridge High School in Beaverton, Oregon is an example of a school that places an emphasis on interdisciplinary team teaching. The school was based on the foundation that it would promote learning, build a sense of community, and making decisions shared among colleagues and the community. In an attempt to meet these goals, the principal, Sarah Boly, believed it was important to place the basis of the school's foundation on relationships. In team teaching, the teachers are responsible for creating the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Only at the 9th and 10th grade level, do teachers have a common planning period. The goal of the school to establish team teaching was to make sure that all the teachers knew their students very well and could understand where their specific needs were. Therefore, allowing students to increase their depth of learning and standards of it.

Online Resources:

Nathan Hale High School, Seattle, Washington

Nathan Hale High School is an urban, public high school that was founded in 1963. It is an example of a school that incorporates interdisciplinary learning.

<http://hale.seattleschools.org/>

Middle College High School

This report examines the findings of "Middle College High Schools," which are alternative high schools located on college campuses that aim to help at-risk students complete high school and encourage them to attend college. These schools offer a project-centered, interdisciplinary curriculum, with an emphasis on team teaching.

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/37/06/ee.pdf



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Interdisciplinary Learning in your Classroom: Explanation

This website provides information on the background of interdisciplinary teaching, the evolution of it over time, and the effects of it on students and teachers.

http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/interdisciplinary/index_sub1.html

Interdisciplinary Studies in General Education Guidelines

This report contains information relevant to the task force involved on interdisciplinary teaching at the general education level.

<http://www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/pubs/genedaccred.html>

Interdisciplinary Research for Teaching and Learning Mathematics in Rural Schools: Considerations for Creating a Mathematics and Vocational Education Research Agenda

This paper provides a foundation for researchers in mathematics education and vocational education (now commonly called career and technical education) to begin exploring an interdisciplinary research agenda that will create new knowledge and innovations for living and working in rural areas in the 21st century. The need for interdisciplinary research is discussed,

http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/28/04/57.pdf

Interdisciplinary Teaming

This webpage provides several links to papers and websites on making interdisciplinary teams effective as well as the impacts of teaming.

<http://www.mllc.org/index.php?page=9>

Ten Guidelines for Effective Interdisciplinary Teams

This article which was created by the National Association of Secondary School Principals focuses on a one particular high school, Roosevelt Roads High school that implements the interdisciplinary teaching approach.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3696/is_200012/ai_n8912029

From Shop to Shakespeare: Interdisciplinary Instruction at Auburn High School

This paper provides an overview of the interdisciplinary program at a small high school in Riner, Virginia. In order to develop interdisciplinary units, the teachers began by brainstorming ideas, looking for overlapping content.

<http://www.edrs.com/Members/EricIR.cfm?ednumber=ED441648>

Planning for Interdisciplinary Instruction: A Literature Review

This paper examines the current educational literature relevant to interdisciplinary instruction. It provides educators with information to facilitate planning for effective interdisciplinary instruction, particularly at the secondary level.

<http://www.edrs.com/Members/EricIR.cfm?ednumber=ED385515>



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International High School

International High School (HIS), established in 1985, is an example of a high school in New York City that has implemented the interdisciplinary approach to meet the needs of limited English speaking students.

<http://www.ed.gov/inits/teachers/97-98/4.html>

Power, Conflict & Community

This article discusses the benefits and methods to incorporating interdisciplinary teams at a high school level. Two researchers discuss their experiments and draw conclusions from it.

<http://209.85.165.104/search?q=cache:Pdih7xAvmP8J:www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/highlights/v15n3.pdf+Interdisciplinary+Teaming+high+school&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=5&gl=us&client=firefox-a>

Global Issues Forum

This webpage discusses the findings and conclusions of 30 high schools in the Los Angeles area that implemented interdisciplinary teaching with “global connect” as the theme.

<http://www.socsci.uci.edu/newsdetails.php?nid=1324>

Submitted: May 14, 2007

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