



Cross-Curricular Instruction

by Kiera Strecker

Teachers and students alike experience their day in a schedule of time based on various academic subjects. Your morning may consist of a block of English Language Arts, followed by science, social studies, and fine arts classes, and the day might end with Math. We spend a great deal of time learning these schedules and routines, perfecting them to make sure adequate instructional minutes are met. Breaking up the school day based on subjects does seem to be a very manageable way of ensuring all students are spending equal amounts of time learning each disciplinary area.



Perhaps just as important as making sure students are immersed in all subjects equally, is the importance of creating an authentic learning environment where students are able to apply the skills they learn throughout their scheduled-subject day. Another factor of importance is to deliver instruction in a way that allows students to connect their learning to real-world experiences. As adults, we find ourselves applying the skills and knowledge we learned throughout our educational experiences to navigate and survive in the real world. As we travel to the grocery store, we might use a map to get there (geography), need to assess our needs and wants as we navigate the aisles (economics), and calculate the amount of money we need to give to the cashier (math). All of these academic disciplines come into play together in one real-world experience. Using this example, we can already see the first of many benefits of cross-curricular instruction.

What is Cross-Curricular Instruction?

Cross-curricular instruction is an instructional strategy that offers a way for teachers to plan lessons that incorporate more than one disciplinary area. This allows students to broaden their lens of understanding and apply skills and strategies they learn in lessons to deepen their overall

understanding and make authentic, real-world connections. Cross-curricular instruction also allows students the opportunity to learn skills in different contexts. For example, if a student has a passion for science, they may be more engaged and willing to take risks by applying concepts they have learned in math. If a student is apprehensive about writing, but passionate about history, incorporating writing into social studies lessons allows them to have a positive mindset and increases their engagement with the skill they are practicing. Cross-curricular instruction also lends itself to project-based learning. This authentic learning experience and strategy allows students to further put into practice the skills they have learned in their studies. Students are able to make meaningful connections to each curricular area, but also see the learning experience as a whole.

Planning for and implementing cross-curricular instruction may seem like a daunting task. Although we want to create meaningful learning experiences for our students, we are still tied to state standards and maintaining the fidelity of our curricula. To get started using cross-curricular instruction, consider using the following tips:

Have a Plan One of the key steps to ensuring success with cross-curricular instruction is clear, long-term planning. Mapping out priority learning targets for each curricular area will help those involved in the planning process have a clear vision.

Clear, Natural Connections Another important strategy is looking for authentic links between subjects. The connections between disciplines should be natural, not forced. Choose areas where the connections occur naturally and make sure that these connections are concrete enough for the students to understand.

Plan Thematic Units Thematic units are a great way to get started with cross-curricular planning. You can take one idea or theme and tie it into many different subject areas. This strategy will allow those connections among subjects to occur more naturally. Once a theme is established, you can choose a key concept to guide instruction, and then lessons within that key concept from different subjects.

Reflect As with any new initiative or strategy, reflection is by far the most important component throughout the process. The willingness to be flexible in your planning, to go back and reflect on different strategies and the effectiveness of lessons is what will bring your cross-curricular experience to the next level.

Using these strategies will help with planning and implementing opportunities for cross-curricular instruction. Finding a link across subject areas will allow your students to experience a truly authentic, engaging learning experience where they can apply new skills in a multitude of ways.