

Integrated Curriculum in Historical Perspective

All-school themes, interdisciplinary teams, and block time are three alternative ways to effectively deliver a core curriculum, a concept with a long history.

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Educators once more are seeking ways to help students make sense out of the multitude of life's experiences and the bits and pieces of knowledge being taught in the typical splintered, over-departmentalized school curriculum. To lessen some of the fragmentation, various types of integrative or holistic curriculums are being proposed, including the distinct form of "core curriculum," which focuses directly on the problems, issues, and concerns of students.

Organizing a school staff to deliver a core curriculum takes essentially three different forms (Vars 1969, 1986, 1987). In the total staff approach, all or most of the school's staff agrees to deal with some aspect of an all-school theme or topic for a brief period of time. For example, in the Martin Luther King Laboratory School of Evanston, Illinois, students in grades K-8 spent several weeks during one year studying life in the United States during the Roaring Twenties. Each year, the staff may select a new theme.

In the interdisciplinary team approach, teachers of several different subjects are assigned one group of students and encouraged to correlate at least some of their teaching. At Horizon High School in Brighton, Colorado, teachers of 10th grade English, social studies, and science organize instruction around a series of themes, such as *Change, Interdependence, or Patterns*.

The third option makes use of block-

time and self-contained classes, giving one teacher responsibility for instruction in several subjects during an extended segment of time. For example, teachers of 7th and 8th grade Common Learnings at South Junior High School in Lawrence, Kansas, teach students both language arts and social studies during a two-hour block of time. The degree to which the two subjects are integrated varies from teacher to teacher.

Designs for an Integrative Curriculum

Each of these staffing arrangements can be used with a variety of integrative curriculum designs (Vars 1987). In the simplest approach—correlation—teachers of different subjects all deal with aspects of one topic at the same time, like the Roaring Twenties theme mentioned earlier. Fusion takes integration a step further by combining the content of two or more subjects into a new course with a new name, such as *Common Learnings or American Studies*.

The concept of core curriculum is a full and important step beyond either correlation or fusion. In core, the curriculum design begins with the students and the society in which they live. Needs, problems, and concerns of a particular group of students are identified, and skills and subject matter from any pertinent subject are brought in to help students deal with those matters. Staff members may identify a cluster of

student concerns or needs that are typical of the age group and design units of study that promise to be relevant to students. Even in this "structured core" approach, however, teachers adapt the unit to the particular students they have in each class.

The ultimate in student-centered integrative curriculum is "unstructured core," in which teacher and students together develop units of study. The only restrictions are that the study must be worthwhile, doable, and appropriate for the students' level of maturity. The basic technique for developing one of these units or for adapting a pre-planned unit to a particular class is teacher-student planning (Parrish and Waskin 1967). The teacher and students jointly decide on specific questions for study, how the unit will be carried out, and how student progress will be evaluated.

The Evolving Concept of Core

Efforts to integrate the curriculum have a long history. Stack (1961) traced the philosophical and psychological antecedents of the core curriculum as far back as the writing of Herbert Spencer in the 1800s. Harville (1954) cited early 20th century trends in education, psychology, and anthropology. Fraley (1978) described the work of Hollis Caswell and Harold Albery on behalf of an integrated core curriculum. In their major work on core curriculum, Faunce and Bossing (1958) described a variety of state and national curriculum reform efforts of the 1930s and 1940s. The most important of these, the progressive education movement, included a strong emphasis on student-centered, integrative approaches to education, usually under the name of core curriculum (Vars 1972).

The evolving concept of core curricu-

lum was tested in the famous Eight-Year Study of the Progressive Education Association (Aiken 1942). Since then, more than 80 normative or comparative studies have been carried out on the effectiveness of integrative programs (National Association for Core Curriculum 1984). In nearly every instance, students in various types of integrative/interdisciplinary programs have performed as well or better on standardized achievement tests than students enrolled in the usual separate subjects.

The Continuing Challenge

Despite solid research support, the popularity of core-type integrative programs waxes and wanes from year to year, as education shifts primary attention from student concerns to subject-matter acquisition to social problems and back again. The continuing challenge is to design curriculums that simultaneously take into account solid subject matter, the needs of the learner, and society's problems. □

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