

Workshop 5

What Are Connecting Concepts?

This workshop session examines a key to planning strong integrated units—finding concepts that can connect learning in different disciplines. In the program, we see how teachers organize their instruction around common themes and concepts.

Learning Goals

The goals of this workshop are for you to:

- Identify and discuss themes and concepts that can connect curriculum and instruction
- Practice creating activities that support common concepts and help bridge different disciplines

Featured Classroom Examples

- Seventh-grade band students study and play military marches to explore the theme of World War II.
- An eighth-grade class explores the concept of conflict through social studies, visual art, and dance.
- Sixth-graders explore cultural universals by creating their own civilizations.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Get Ready

Think briefly about an area of your curriculum. (10 minutes)

On a sheet of paper, write the name of a curriculum unit you teach. Underneath, make short lists under each of the following headings:

Curriculum unit I teach:

Topics Involved

Themes Involved

Concepts Involved

Discuss as a group:

- What, if anything, distinguishes a topic, a theme, and a concept, as you understand these?
- Which would be most helpful to use as a common goal in integrating teaching across different disciplines? Why?

Watch the Workshop Program (60 minutes)

Consider the following questions as you watch the program—they will appear as discussion prompts on the screen. If you are part of a professional development group, consider stopping the video to discuss each question with your colleagues.

- What techniques can you use to connect to a theme through the arts?
- How can universal concepts help your students form ideas and opinions?
- How could a concept-based approach improve your curriculum?

Activities and Discussion

Activity: Finding Connecting Concepts

Set up. (5 minutes)

Divide workshop participants into pairs, preferably with each member from a different discipline. Give a copy of the handout “Possible Concepts for Integrated Instruction” (found at the end of this chapter) to each pair.

Workshop Session, cont'd.

Find and discuss two connecting concepts. (20 minutes)

Have each pair identify two concepts from the list of possible concepts that could be integrated and explored in the two content areas. They should then brainstorm instructional activities for each concept. Finally, have them decide which concept would be better to teach, based on the following criteria:

- Student interest and engagement
- Content addressed in each discipline
- Significance/connections to students lives

Discuss as a group. (15 minutes)

Have pairs report to the larger group which connecting concept they decided was best to organize teaching around, and why. As a group, discuss what makes some concepts worth teaching to, and what makes others less valuable.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Online Activity: Build a Bridge Between Disciplines

Before or after participating in this session, you may want to clarify what a connecting concept is, and how it can serve as a bridge between disciplines. Try the interactive exercise called “Build a Bridge Between Disciplines,” available on the Web site that accompanies *Connecting With the Arts: A Workshop for Middle Grades Teachers* (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/connectingwitharts). Choosing from a range of concepts and instructional activities, you’ll construct a curriculum “bridge” that can help students integrate arts and non-arts learning.

Additional Resources

Web Resources

Center for Concept-Based Education
<http://www.collaborative.org/ccbe/index.html>

A concept-based curriculum model for today’s classrooms

Print Resources

Beane, James. *Toward A Coherent Curriculum*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 1995. ASIN: 0-87120-311-1

Eighteen contributors—professors, administrators, and classroom teachers—discuss their experiences in answering the question of what it means to be an educated person.

Campbell, Dorothy, & Harris, Linda. *Collaborative Theme Building: How Teachers Write Integrated Curriculum*. New York: Allyn & Bacon, 2000. ISBN: 0-20532-354-5

This book was written to assist pre-service and in-service elementary school teachers, principals, and curriculum specialists in developing a thematic, interdisciplinary curriculum.

Erickson, Lynn H. *Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction: Teaching Beyond the Facts*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2002. ISBN: 0-76194-640-3

This book describes specific strategies that teach students the skills they need in order to think conceptually and solve problems in today’s complex world.

Erickson, Lynn H. *Stirring the Head, Heart, and Soul* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2000. ISBN: 0-80396-885-X

This is a thoughtful “how to” of curriculum design, where educators will find practical structures and specific classroom examples of effective curriculum strategies.

Hayes Jacobs, Heidi. *Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 1989. ISBN: 0-87120-165-8

This book provides advice for teachers on how best to present material in a manner that connects subject areas together and is relevant to life outside the classroom.

Possible Concepts for Integrated Instruction

Dance	Music	Theatre	Visual Art
balance contrast direction force/energy genre interpretation level movements pathway pattern point of view repetition rhythm shape space style time unity/variety variation	balance contrast duration dynamics form genre harmony interpretation melody pattern perception pitch point of view repetition rhythm scale style tempo texture timbre tone unity/variety variation	audience balance character conflict conflict/resolution contrast dialogue dramatic action genre interpretation mood plot/story point of view repetition rhythm setting style theatre conventions theme unity/variety variation	angle balance color contrast description form interpretation line pattern perception point of view proportion repetition rhythm scale shape space style symmetry texture unity/variety
Literature	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
beliefs/values cause/effect change character conflict/cooperation cycle form genre interactions motivation order patterns perceptions point of view space systems time	cause/effect field gradient interaction invariance model number order pattern probability proportion quantification ratio scale symmetry system theory	cause/effect change cycle energy/matter equilibrium evolution field force interaction model order organism population replication systems theory time/space	beliefs/values cause/effect change/continuity civilization conflict/cooperation culture cycle diversity evolution interaction interdependence migration/immigration order patterns point of view populations systems

Concepts derived from *Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction: Teaching Beyond the Facts* by H. Lynn Erickson, and from the staff of the Southeast Center for Education and the Arts

Notes
