

How Good is Your School's Interdisciplinary Learning?



A guide for school leaders on
promoting interdisciplinary learning

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Coherence in Learning

Traditionally, the Scottish education system has been built around discrete subject areas or specialisms, and opportunities to integrate knowledge, skills and understanding have been limited. However, the world that young people will enter on leaving school is, interdisciplinary. They need to be able to make connections and synthesise knowledge and understanding.

One of the key aims of Curriculum for Excellence is to enable learners to transfer knowledge and skills across different subject areas. The CfE design principle of *Coherence* aims to help learners understand how knowledge and skills link across different curriculum areas, and interdisciplinary learning activities help learners make connections and transfer knowledge and skills.

Making Connections

Education Scotland's CfE Briefing Paper 4 states the following:

“The curriculum should include space for learning beyond subject boundaries, so that children and young people can make connections between different areas of learning. Interdisciplinary studies, based upon groupings of experiences and outcomes from within and across curriculum areas, can provide relevant, challenging and enjoyable learning experiences and stimulating contexts to meet the varied needs of children and young people”.



Interdisciplinary Learning

Interdisciplinary learning can be viewed as:

- learning based upon experiences and outcomes drawn from different curriculum areas or subjects within them.
- learning that develops awareness and understanding of the connections and differences across subjects or curriculum areas.

Some schools plan IDL around individual one-off projects or longer courses of study, often used to explore a theme or an issue, meet a challenge, solve a problem or complete a final project. Alternatively, teachers can promote IDL by integrating outcomes, experiences and skills, for example literacy, numeracy or digital learning.

Benefits of Interdisciplinary Learning

- IDL deepens understanding and helps make the curriculum more coherent and meaningful for learners.
- IDL enables learners to see the relevance of subject specific knowledge within a wider context.
- IDL promotes better progression in skills and in knowledge and understanding.
- IDL can provide opportunities for mixed stage learning.
- Topics or issues such as environmental education or citizenship are often better experienced through IDL approaches, rather than in separate subject departments.
- IDL helps to reduce overlap or duplication within the school's curriculum.
- IDL can promote collaboration between teachers and departments and help to share effective practice.
- IDL can help to develop core skills in young people such as literacy and numeracy.

How Good is your Interdisciplinary Learning?

There is no discrete quality Indicator from How Good is our School 4 which evaluates Interdisciplinary Learning. However, QI 2.2 *Curriculum* and QI 2.3 *Learning, Teaching and Assessment* both explore the extent to which the school promotes connected learning.

See our full online audit at www.hashtag-learning.co.uk

Coherence	
Learners understand how knowledge and skills link across different curriculum areas.	
Planned interdisciplinary learning activities help learners make connections and transfer knowledge and skills.	
There is consistency in the delivery of literacy and numeracy across the stages and curriculum areas.	
Learners are supported to choose well-balanced and coherent programmes throughout the senior phase.	
Connected learning	
Teacher planning combines experiences and outcomes from different curricular areas.	
Pupils are provided with interdisciplinary learning experiences.	
Pupils have regular opportunities to join up their learning within cross-curricular themes or activities.	
Pupils have regular opportunities to apply their skills and knowledge to different areas or contexts for learning.	
Pupils understand how their learning applies to skills for life and work.	

Some Key Questions

When reviewing the quality of Interdisciplinary learning in your school, here are some key questions to help promote professional dialogue and focused evaluation.

1. To what extent is interdisciplinary learning actively promoted and encouraged within our school? Do we have a clear whole-school framework for interdisciplinary learning?
2. To what extent do we encourage and enable our students to apply subject knowledge and skills to wider contexts?
3. How clear are we about the purposes and benefits of interdisciplinary learning approaches?
4. How well does interdisciplinary learning help learners to make connections and transfer knowledge and skills?
5. How effectively does interdisciplinary learning explore a theme or an issue, meet a challenge or ensure a final product?
6. How can we evidence that the interdisciplinary learning has progressed learners' knowledge, attributes, capabilities and skills?
7. How well do we assess interdisciplinary learning activities?
8. How clearly are interdisciplinary learning outcomes identified and shared with children and young people?
9. How does interdisciplinary learning develop core skills such as literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing?