

Interdisciplinary Strategies for English and Social Studies Classrooms: Toward Collaborative Middle and Secondary Teaching

Reviewed by

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When we are able to convince central office administrators to provide team planning time in addition to personal planning time for their middle school teachers, they certainly expect to see results for the additional expenditure. One of the expected results is improved curriculum, particularly curriculum that takes advantage of having a core group of content area teachers working with an intact team of students within a flexible block of time by integrating the subject areas to improve learning.

As a former teacher on such a middle school team, I can attest that team planning time, which theoretically was going to give teachers the opportunity to have substantive conversations about curriculum, is usually packed instead with day-to-day issues: discipline; meeting with parents, counselors, special educators, and administrators; planning team events; recording messages for the homework hot-line; rearranging schedules; and so forth.

Nowicki and Meehan recognize the challenge of planning interdisciplinary units which are meaningful and which fit in with the curricular goals of the individual content areas. One of the things they have done is to acknowledge, as the title of this book suggests, that interdisciplinary units need not incorporate all of the subject areas at the same time; it is far easier and reasonable to develop authentic cross-disciplinary units involving two of the core areas than it is to create full-blown units which are truly germane to all of the subjects at the same time. English and social studies have many clear-cut opportunities to integrate content, as the authors aptly demonstrate in their collection of short-term and unit-length themes which integrate these two

disciplines.

The book begins with a brief (39 pages) discussion of the whys and wherefores of integrating curriculum and then lays out over the next 150-plus pages dozens and dozens of suggestions for thematically-based units. Each offers an overview of the topic, suggested length of time needed to implement the unit, interdisciplinary objectives and linkages, and suggestions for materials, activities, and assessment alternatives. The consistent and easily-accessible format would be a boon for time-pressed teachers.

My only regret is that the authors have not provided specific suggestions for supplementary materials to go along with the units; titles of fiction and non-fiction books, videos, and other resources would have been helpful. Nevertheless, this book would make a fine addition to courses which deal with the development of interdisciplinary units and for teams of teachers seeking ideas for well-designed units.

Interdisciplinary Strategies for English and Social Studies Classrooms: Toward Collaborative Middle and Secondary Teaching.

By Joseph John Nowicki and Kerry F. Meehan.

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