Curriculum for Excellence

Professional Development
Support Materials

Interdisciplinary Learning

Primary Schools
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Facilitator’s Guide

Introduction

This Guide supports the continuing professional development of staff in primary schools and education centres. It focuses on Interdisciplinary Learning – one of the underpinning principles of Curriculum for Excellence - and this Facilitator’s Guide offers a suggested format for delivering a two-hour CPD session.

The activities and approaches contained within the Guide are designed to support a whole school, stage or team approach to CPD. They provide opportunities for discussion, reflection and collaboration amongst colleagues.

Facilitators should be aware, however, that the following session may be customised easily to focus on particular aspects of interdisciplinary learning.

Audience

This programme is relevant for all who work within schools and education centres and the activities are designed to facilitate a whole school, departmental or team CPD session. This programme has particular relevance for members of staff with responsibility for leading Curriculum for Excellence developments and also for classroom practitioners.

Background reading and preparation

Facilitators should be familiar with the relevant sections from key publications including

- Building the Curriculum 3
- Principles and Practice (ie, general sections relating to the 8 curricular areas)
- Curriculum for Excellence website (Learning and Teaching Scotland)

Video materials

The Disk accompanying this Guide contains a range of video clips to support professional development in the area of Interdisciplinary Learning. These short films help to increase knowledge of key concepts, principles and practices associated with Curriculum for Excellence, and some videos illustrate how Scottish schools are putting these ideas into practice. It is recommended that facilitators be familiar with these video clips in advance of the CPD session.
Structure of CPD session

The structure of this CPD session assumes that participants will have access to the video clips described in each activity. The videos are an integral part of the session and facilitators can present them in two ways:

1. By playing the videos from the accompanying Disk;
2. By downloading the videos as MP4 files from Learning Curve’s *Curriculum for Excellence* web site and saving them on a computer, ready for playback.

www.curriculum-for-excellence.co.uk

PowerPoint Presentation

A specially prepared PowerPoint presentation is contained on this CD ROM. This presentation helps facilitators to:

- promote group discussion;
- present and summarise key points and issues;
- support self-evaluation and action planning.

The PowerPoint presentation can be easily customised to reflect, more specifically, the focus of the CPD session.

Acknowledgements

Learning Curve Education gratefully acknowledges the permission given by West Dunbartonshire Council to use the work of their schools as the basis for some of the illustrative case studies. We are also grateful to the wide range of educationists, writers, researchers, practitioners and young people who have contributed to this resource.
Interdisciplinary Learning - CPD Session

**Time:** 2-3 hours

**Resources**

- Video clips contained on the accompanying Disk
- PowerPoint presentation “Interdisciplinary Learning.ppt”
- Computer, speakers, data projector and screen
- Flipchart and pens

**Aims**

1. To recognise the nature of interdisciplinary learning and its key features.
2. To recognise potential benefits of interdisciplinary learning.
3. To consider how interdisciplinary learning might be developed in the school.
4. To agree action that would result in increased interdisciplinary learning.

**Time Allocation**

The following activities provide a suggested pathway through this CPD session. The time allocated to each activity may vary depending on the time available and the particular focus of the session, but the following suggested time allocations provides a framework for achieving the main aims of the session within 2 hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Group discussion</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Video and discussion</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Video and discussion</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Illustrative videos</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Self-reflection</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Action planning</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Plenary</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Activity 1  Welcome and introduction

Facilitators should share the aims of the session (these are also contained within the PowerPoint presentation). Please note the important reference about terminology below (Interdisciplinary or cross-curricular?)

1  To recognise the nature of interdisciplinary learning and its key features.
2  To recognise potential benefits of interdisciplinary learning.
3  To consider how interdisciplinary learning might be developed in the school.
4  To agree action that would result in increased interdisciplinary learning.

At this stage the facilitator might also wish to share the context for the CPD session – ie, that interdisciplinary learning is one of the key principles within Curriculum for Excellence. There is a clear expectation that children and young people will experience learning activities that draw from a range of experiences and outcomes, rather than from narrower subject or specialist areas.

Interdisciplinary or cross-curricular?

It is possible there may be some confusion about terminology – in particular, the distinction between terms interdisciplinary and cross-curricular.

In essence, there is no difference between the terms interdisciplinary and cross-curricular. In much of the Curriculum for Excellence literature and guidance, interdisciplinary learning refers to groupings of experiences and outcomes from within and across curriculum areas. In other words, a project, topic, or task is planned in a way that incorporates more than one curricular area. A project, for example, covering experiences and outcomes drawn from, say, science and also numeracy spans more than one curricular area (or discipline), and is therefore interdisciplinary. It should, however, also be considered cross-curricular for the same reason.

Although there is no pedagogical distinction between interdisciplinary and cross-curricular learning, interdisciplinary is often used when referring to the work of secondary schools, while cross-curricular is the term used to describe the work of primaries. This is because interdisciplinary projects in secondary require the collaboration of staff from different subject departments, whereas in primary schools the project or theme is often planned or delivered by one teacher.

For the purposes of this CPD session, however, we will use the term ‘interdisciplinary learning’ to cover groupings of experiences and outcomes from within and across curriculum areas.
Activity 2  Group discussion

Facilitators should invite participants to discuss the following questions (either with a partner or in a small group. (See also PowerPoint slides)

1  What do you understand by the term ‘interdisciplinary learning’?

(At this point of the CPD session facilitators might wish to address terminology, ie, interdisciplinary or cross-curricular?)

2  Is there a project you have been involved in that illustrates effective interdisciplinary or cross-curricular learning? What areas of the curriculum were involved? How was it planned? What were the outcomes for pupils?

Participants should be allowed some time to reflect upon and discuss these questions. Responses can then be shared with the group.
Activity 3  Play video clip – ‘The Case for Interdisciplinary Learning’

This short film presents a range of views about interdisciplinary learning. Various contributors including teachers, educationalists, school managers and young people, explore the meaning of interdisciplinary learning within schools. Facilitators should invite the group to discuss this video and clarify any points arising. (See also PowerPoint slides)

Possible Questions:

1 What are the main arguments for interdisciplinary learning as presented in this film?

2 To what extent do you agree or disagree with these views?

Summary of Key Points Arising

- Traditionally, the Scottish education system has been built around discrete subject areas or specialisms. Historically, the opportunities to integrate knowledge, skills and understanding have been very limited.

- 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. Our current education system does not foster these skills in young people well.

- Interdisciplinary learning enables children to transfer knowledge and skills across different subject areas. It encourages learners to apply knowledge gained in one department to a different subject area.

- Interdisciplinary approaches joins up the learning for young people and broadens their understanding of the world. It often helps them apply their knowledge and understanding within real-life contexts.

- Major topics or issues such as environmental education or citizenship are better experienced through interdisciplinary learning, rather than in separate subject departments.

- Children and young people generally find interdisciplinary learning contexts more motivating, engaging and meaningful.
Activity 4  Video – ‘Interdisciplinary Learning in Primary Schools’

This short film presents views about interdisciplinary learning in primary schools. School leaders and classroom practitioners reflect on the impact of cross-curricular planning and teaching. Facilitators should invite the group to discuss this video and clarify any points arising (see also PowerPoint Slides).

Possible Questions:

1  What are the main messages about interdisciplinary learning arising from this film?

2  It is sometimes said that under the 5-14 arrangements, teachers increasingly confined planning to narrow or discrete curricular areas, as opposed to exploring options for cross-curricular learning. To what extent has teaching and learning become less interdisciplinary in nature over the years? Do you agree that teaching and learning in primary schools has generally become more subject specific and less interdisciplinary?

3  Do you agree with the view that interdisciplinary learning provides teachers with greater scope and creativity? How has Curriculum for Excellence changed things?

Summary of Key Points Arising

• Under previous 5-14 arrangements, teachers increasingly confined planning to narrow or discrete curricular areas, as opposed to cross-curricular learning.

• 5-14 arrangements often required teachers to plan and deliver discrete timetabled sessions, particularly in respect of language and mathematics.

• Curriculum for Excellence provides more opportunity for teachers to plan in a cross-curricular way. There is more linkage across and within the curriculum.

• Interdisciplinary learning is a better way of exposing children to real problems, real solutions and relevant contexts.

• Revisiting a concept or skill from different perspectives deepens understanding and can also make the curriculum more coherent and meaningful for the learner.

• Interdisciplinary learning provides greater opportunities for joint or stage planning in primary schools.

• Some schools now favour broad, overarching themes, rather than narrower topics linked to outcomes.
Activity 5  Play illustrative videos

The group should be able to view one or more ‘illustrative videos’. These videos explore ways in which Scottish schools are embedding some of the principles and practices covered within this CPD session – ie, putting theory into practice.

Because time is limited, it may not be advisable to show more than one or two at this stage of the session, so the facilitator should pre-select relevant videos in advance of the CPD session. More illustrative videos may be shown during the plenary session if time allows.

Facilitators should invite the group to discuss the illustrative video/s and clarify any points arising. It might be helpful to ask the following questions after playing an illustrative video.

1. What was the context for interdisciplinary learning in this school or project?

2. How did the teacher or school implement this particular project or topic? Which curricular areas were chosen or covered? How was it organised?

3. What were the outcomes of the project?

4. What might our school learn from this example of interdisciplinary learning?

Kilbowie Primary – Joining the Learning

The Very Important Bear topic illustrates how this primary school has used cross-curricular planning as part of the school’s emerging Curriculum for Excellence. Teachers, children and school leaders discuss the experiences and outcomes of this motivating theme.

St Kessog’s Primary – A Whole School Theme

Sports provides the context for cross-curricular planning and interdisciplinary learning within this primary school’s emerging Curriculum for Excellence. In this illustrative film, school staff discuss how a sporting theme can cover a broad range experiences and outcomes.

Kilbowie Primary – Cross-curricular Planning

Cross-curricular planning is a key aspect of Curriculum for Excellence. This primary school’s international education programme provides the context for cross-curricular planning, and staff discuss this theme’s contribution to the school’s emerging Curriculum for Excellence.
Activity 6  Key Questions – Self reflection

Participants should be presented with key questions to help them reflect on their own (or school) practices and to identify future actions.

This can be done as a whole group or participants can form smaller groups to promote wider discussion and reflection. (These questions are displayed on the PowerPoint Slides).

These questions are also displayed on a single page of A4 with space for comments and observations (Page 14). This proforma may be printed and distributed to participants during the session or workshop discussions.

These questions allow staff to reflect on how, and to what extent, the school, department or individuals already demonstrate these features of *interdisciplinary learning*, and what can be done to foster and sustain this aspect of Curriculum for Excellence. The key questions are as follows:

1. To what extent is *interdisciplinary learning* actively promoted and encouraged within our school?

2. To what extent do my/our pupils experience *interdisciplinary learning* as part of normal day-to-day classroom activity?

3. To what extent is interdisciplinary learning evident across different stages in our school? (ie, is it more prevalent at some ages or stages than at others?)

4. To what extent do our current timetable arrangements enable (or restrict) flexibility in planning cross-curricular experiences?

5. To what extent do we promote whole-school themes, eg, citizenship, sport, global warming?

6. To what extent do we base topics or programmes of work on real-life problems and contexts that are relevant to young people?

7. To what extent do we plan collaboratively with colleagues?
Activity 7  Identify opportunities for interdisciplinary learning

Participants should identify opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller group discussions. The aim is to get participants thinking about ways of increasing interdisciplinary learning experiences for pupils.

**Task 1**

The first task is to identify and explore possible contexts for interdisciplinary working. This might mean, for example, identifying:

(a) a current topic or theme that might be developed to incorporate a broader range of experiences and outcomes than it does at present;

(b) new topics or themes that might be good candidates for interdisciplinary (cross-curricular) teaching and learning;

(c) topics or projects that might be good as a whole-school theme (i.e., experienced by learners at all stages);

(d) topics or themes that might be particularly effective at times of transition;

(e) topics or themes that might benefit from collaborative or joint planning.

**Task 2**

Select one of these topics or themes from Task 1 and consider the following questions.

1. Describe briefly the nature of this topic or curricular experience.

2. If it is an existing topic, in what ways might it be adapted or changed to draw from a wider range of curricular experiences and outcomes?

3. If it is a new topic or theme, which broad curricular areas might be included? (e.g., Language, Numeracy, Art and Design, Science)

4. Is this a stage-specific topic, or could it be a whole-school theme?

5. How might this project offer more rich or varied learning experiences (e.g., active learning, experiential learning, collaborative learning, use of technology)?

6. What changes to planning and classroom organisation might be required?

7. Is there flexibility in the way that this project might be delivered (e.g., specific input by different teachers?)
Activity 8  Action planning

Participants should identify future actions that the school (or primary stage) should consider in order to promote interdisciplinary learning. This can be done as a whole staff exercise or in smaller group sessions.

Step 1

The first task is to identify up to 5 priorities for developing interdisciplinary learning within the school. A proforma for identifying and listing priorities is provided on page 16 of this Guide.

Note: The priorities might extend from themes identified in the previous activity.

Step 2

The second task is to take one of these priorities and produce an action plan for developing this aspect of Curriculum for Excellence. This would include, for example:

• The aim associated with this priority  
• The planned or desired outcomes  
• Key tasks, processes and resources  
• The personnel involved  
• The timescale for each outcome

A proforma to record planning for implementation follows on page 17 (also available as an MS Word file Improvement proforma.doc contained on accompanying CD.)

The facilitator might wish to collate and present these responses as part of a plenary session.
Activity 9  Plenary

The aims of the plenary session are:

(a) to summarise key points and actions arising from the CPD session. Participants can be encouraged to ask questions, clarify their understanding and make additional observations and comments;

(b) to prioritise key areas for development as part of the school’s future improvement planning process;

(c) to view additional video materials (if time allows)

Follow up activities

As part of follow up work, participants should consider CPD sessions on the following related Curriculum for Excellence themes in this series.

(a) RICH TASKS

(b) PLANNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

It should be agreed that such follow up activities form part of the school’s collegiate time.
### Interdisciplinary Learning

#### Some Key Questions

Use this proforma to record your responses.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>To what extent do our current timetable arrangements enable (or restrict) flexibility in planning cross-curricular topics or activities?</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>To what extent do we enable our pupils to experience whole school themes, eg, citizenship, sport, global warming?</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>To what extent do we base topics or programmes of work on real-life problems and contexts that are relevant to young people?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To what extent do we plan collaboratively with colleagues?</td>
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Interdisciplinary Learning

Key priorities or areas for development

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# Curriculum for Excellence: Planning

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Intended outcomes</th>
<th>Key Tasks/Processes/Resources</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Time-scale</th>
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