

SCOPE

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NETWORK

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*Sharing Curricular Options that
Promote Excellence*



From the Division Chair

Welcome to the summer 2008 edition of SCOPE, with the focus of making connections with students and content through interdisciplinary teaching and learning. This edition includes two stories of how teachers used connections to help build bridges between students and essential content goals.

The first story focuses on the use of drama to provide opportunities for English language learners to apply English acquisition in the learning of content. The story illustrates how drama can allow students to interact with English in a way that is more than memorizing terms but requires thinking critically about information and using it – making it part of their world.

The second article describes how one teacher used the Parallel Curriculum Model to develop interdisciplinary learning opportunities for her students – connecting literature and physics. The use of learning outcomes and essential questions drive the tasks and give students the “thinking freedom” to make long lasting connections – concepts and skills that will stay with the students long after the unit assessment is completed. It is this type of learning that creates

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NAGC Curriculum Network

2008

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Current Chair: Christine Briggs

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Curriculum Awards: Carol Ann Williams & Eric Mann! !

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meaning for students, allows them to see how school tasks fit in their world and Continued on page 2 provides opportunities for students to build identity with the content goals.

In addition to these articles, you will find several websites to support the development of interdisciplinary connections. I hope you enjoy this issue and can use some of these ideas with the students you serve.

--Christine Briggs, Division Chair

	For Students	For Teachers
<p>Bookmarks Know a great article, website, or book that pertains to Curriculum for Gifted Learners? Send us the reference or web address with a brief description, and we'll include it in Bookmarks.</p> <p>Jennifer Beasley jgbót@virginia.edu</p> <p>Leighann Pennington leighann.pennington@gmail.com</p> <p>FOCUS ON INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES</p>	<p>Project LOGgED ON Go to this website for a sample case (which is like a story) with a scientific problem for you to solve and think about. You can learn about science in a real world context, such as environmental science cases, which often combine biology, physics, economics, and political science. Try the case below first, about scientific inquiry:</p> <p>http://www.scrolldown.com/loggedon/curriculum/sample_case_inquiry/instructors.htm</p> <p>Geography Links for Kids http://www.dstarkey.freemove.co.uk/geography.htm</p> <p>The winner of the National Geographic Bee was recently announced. Geography combines the study of culture, land, and the way people interact with the places they live, often bringing together geology, ecology, anthropology, history and more.</p> <p>"</p> <p>National Geographic for Kids http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/</p> <p>Check out this website for great information or take the Geography Bee quiz and see if you would win!</p> <p>http://www.nationalgeographic.com/geobee/</p>	<p>ThinkQuest http://www.thinkquest.org</p> <p>When creating interdisciplinary units, it is sometimes necessary to find unique resources to enrich your unit. This website contains web pages that were created by students on a wide variety of topics. All websites are checked for accuracy and are designed to be interactive. This may be just the resource you need!</p> <p>The New York Public Library "Amazing Books"</p> <p>The New York Public Library wrote a series of books that are written to inform and amaze not only you, but your students as well. The books can be found on a variety of topics ranging from African American History to World Geography. These books would be a wonderful addition to any classroom.</p> <p><i>The New York Public Library Amazing African American History: A Book of Answers for Kids</i> by The New York Public Library and Diane Patrick</p> <p><i>The New York Public Library Amazing World Geography: A Book of Answers for Kids</i> by The New York Public Library and Andrea Sutcliffe</p>



Transformative Teaching: Applying Drama Across the Disciplines

Jeremy Cohan
Middle School Teacher
Bronx, New York

When I say drama, several images might come to mind: a skull, Shakespeare, school musicals, sword-fights, Nora walking out, the Jets and the Sharks. And drama is all these things. However—as so many twentieth century dramatists have discovered—it is also far more than these. Drama is where humans gather together to enact images of how things are in order to better understand their world. Drama is extending oneself, connecting the body with words, working with others, and imagining new possibilities. Drama is a kind of social hope. Which is precisely the reason it fits so well with education.

Background

I am a young teacher—this is only my second year, though I have been puttering about in the world of education for far longer than that. I came into full-time teaching through Teach for America, entering the South Bronx with righteous indignation at the disadvantages to which the children were being exposed and a work ethic that made me determined to give them all I possibly could. I am now in my second year and teach drama to ELL students. The course was my idea and I was excited about implementing it. Yet I was unsure whether I, one of the only people on staff to speak only English to some bilingual classes (and I know NO Spanish, unfortunately), not to mention someone privileged entering the world of poverty and injustice my students face on an everyday basis, could really reach my kids.

Even though I enter each day with the fear of not being able to fit in and my dissatisfaction with my performance as a teacher, the situation that I teach in is too dire to dwell on that. However, I can say that using drama techniques I have many times been able to tap my students' nascent skills and encourage them to work creatively in the English language. I have only done this by using drama as a way to involve every part

of the student—body, language, thought, and mind. I am convinced that the lessons I have learned using drama in its largest sense hold true for all of teaching. Drama is an essential way of bringing the whole student into the instructional process, as it involves the student in creative thought and activity.

Drama in My Classroom

The wonderful thing about drama is that it offers nearly endless resources for any subject. Let me start with my experience working with ELLs and then extrapolate to other areas. My goal was to use drama to help my ELL students gain greater access into the English language in reading, and, in those too-often neglected areas, speaking and writing.

Drama allows the experience of reading to enter into a whole new realm. The way I have seen my students, who can barely read, take ownership even of Shakespeare's characters, is incredible. That the students can say "that character is mine" adds a whole different dimension to what it means to read—the students invest more of themselves in characters that they are called to enact.

Furthermore, drama can use play with texts on the page and in performance. In the traditional play, you have more extensive and then smaller parts, perfect

for helping meet individual students at their different levels of comfort with reading. Yet drama can also expand to performance poetry that involves choral reading, repetition, rhythm, and more. Jean Carlos is incredibly, painfully shy about his English. But you give him a beat to read with and he is suddenly reading without fear. Again, the dramatic text offers him a "way in." My entire class made pieces out of "I am From" poems that detailed things that marked them as individuals from their secret hiding place to their favorite candy; from their most beloved song to a food they would eat on special occasions. The students combined these, in small groups, into a group poem they performed for the class. They danced and rapped; they sang and spoke in unison. Some of these students have been here in the United States for less than a year,

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I Am From...
by Ibrahima
South Bronx Middle School

I am from Guinea where my grandad is from.
I am from POP BOTTLES my favorite song.
I am from rice my Mom makes it sometimes.
I am from PSP my favorite game as a kid.
I am from Africa the continent I used to be
before I came to America.
I am from Basket ball my favorite sport.
I am from Soccer my other favorite sport.
I am from standing up to my Mom.
I am from being good at school.
I am from not saying bad words in school.
I am from not being racist to white people.

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and they got to live in words they were creating in the English language.

This is why I assert that any thinking about drama and its importance for children cannot merely focus on digesting pre-written work, but must also include helping students find their own voices. This ranges from the creative reinterpretation of material (having students write monologues for characters in something they read or write missing dialogues and secret meetings) to writing complete plays of their own generated from conflicts in their lives (one of my students wrote a piece about feeling pressured to sleep with her boyfriend, another on how it felt to be in an English-speaking country and being unable to access the language fluently, another on his deep desire to have a house after he moved into a shelter with his mother). These do not have to be Shakespeare—but by allowing the students to gain a familiarity with the structure drama can bring to conflict, it can help them put their ideas and concerns into words and action.

In this vein, there is finally perhaps the most powerful way that students can interact through drama—they can use it to re-imagine what seems like a closed and final situation. Anyone unfamiliar with Augusto Boal's technique of Forum Theater, as described in his *Theater of the Oppressed* (based on the pioneering theories in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) should pick it up now. Because Boal's techniques are perfect for teaching students to think of themselves as possible agents of change—rather than passive receptacles of pre-given material. In Forum Theater, one group of students put together a scene where the protagonist fails to get what she wants for some reason (the scene where Romeo fails to resolve the conflict between Mercutio and Tybalt and ends up himself killing Tybalt is an example I used with my students). The students then may "step in" for the protagonist and try to change the course of events through alternate choices (what could Romeo have done to prevent the fight? Try it for him!) **This is a powerful way for students to start analyzing how things *might* be, the essence of critical thinking.**

What can Drama Look Like in My Classroom?

As I have illustrated, drama offers a myriad of opportunities for students to enter into texts, to overcome shyness and lack of self-confidence, to use language creatively, to write, to analyze, and to think about possibility. I have used these techniques for engaging students in creative reading and writing, but their scope is

nearly endless. What if Euclidean and non-Euclidean shapes met—how would they interact? How might Trotsky have acted differently to prevent Stalin from taking power? What might a rainforest say if given the chance to speak about deforestation? The limits to using drama are essentially the limits of our imagination as teachers. What I can definitely say, though, is that using drama allows the student to thrive as an active creator, rather than a receiver. The student brings her mind, past, ideas, body, sense of play, and life to the work. This, to me, is what education is all about.



Join thousands of your colleagues at the not-to-be-missed gifted event of the year, *October!30 to November 2, 2008* in Tampa, Florida. The NAGC 55th Annual Convention & Exhibition is *the* event for gifted education to learn new strategies, discover innovative solutions, and share best practices.

- Learn alongside colleagues dedicated to advancing the field.
- Choose from more than 260 cutting-edge sessions" to help you gain the most knowledge: panels, keynotes, lectures, and group discussions.
- Network with your colleagues - take advantage of an opportunity to really get to know others in the industry and advance your career.

The world of gifted education will gather to listen, learn, relax, and revive, surrounded by colleagues who are all striving to ensure that the unique educational needs of gifted children are met.

Register today at www.nagc.org.

Intergrating Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Our Place in the Universe

Leighann Pennington
Sixth Grade Teacher
Orange County, California

Introduction

Interdisciplinary curriculum is a way for teachers to unite disciplines and invite students to learn through multiple doorways. Interdisciplinary curriculum is especially appropriate for gifted students and middle school students. I will describe how interdisciplinary curriculum can meet the needs of students in your classroom and the process of creating an interdisciplinary unit across two disciplines: creative writing and physics. When planning and revising this unit, I used the Parallel Curriculum Model's Curriculum of Connections as a guide. I will include an overview of the unit to show how creativity, language arts, and physics were combined during the study of the science-fiction novel *A Wrinkle In Time* by Madeline L'Engle.

Student Learning Goals

The seed for any piece of good curriculum is sitting down and asking yourself, what do I want students to learn? In other words, what do I want students to Know, Understand, and Do (KUDs)?

I know that I want students to make connections between:

1. Their lives and the content
2. Ideas: seeing and formulating the relationships between ideas
3. Their lives and the larger world (and in the case of this unit, the universe)

I also want students to engage in creative acts and grow in creative, critical, and independent thinking skills. Creativity is about making connections and the process of seeking out ideas in order to connect them in a fresh way. One definition of creativity is: the putting together of disparate pieces in a novel way.

These are ambitious learning goals, especially when you have a million other things to do as a teacher. What is a helpful vehicle to meet these goals? My answer: consider

interdisciplinary curriculum, and more specifically, the Curriculum of Connections in PCM.

Why Do Interdisciplinary Curriculum?

When properly executed, interdisciplinary curriculum can provide in-depth and memorable learning experiences that are more authentic because the world is not truly separated into disciplines—we do this merely for the ease of human understanding and organization.

Interdisciplinary Curriculum is:

- in-depth
- authentic
- developmentally appropriate for middle school students (cite)

Middle school students are interested in relationships between

1. self and others
2. self and the world
3. self and ideas
4. interaction between people and ideas

" Our truest responsibility to the irrationality of the world is to paint or sing or write, for only in such response do we find the truth."

—Madeleine L'Engle

Use the social dynamics and interests of students as fuel for engagement and learning. Gifted students tend to look inward on a deeper level and outward on a broader scale at a younger age, interdisciplinary curriculum may also be appropriate for gifted elementary school students.

Interdisciplinary curriculum can help you become a better teacher or be more efficient. More importantly, you can understand what a student's learning experience in your classroom is potentially like, such as learning in a discipline that may be uncomfortable for them. When you venture out of your comfort zone as a teacher, you will learn more and empathize with a student's experience.

Collaboration

!Through collaborating with a teacher in another discipline, you will need to verbalize and further crystallize your ideas in order to explain clearly and concisely the guiding questions for your discipline and specific unit.

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Through this process, you will more thoroughly understand your discipline, while expanding your knowledge in another discipline.

Multiple Entry Points

An interdisciplinary unit provides more than one entry point for students, provides a wealth of options for differentiation, and appeals to various learning styles.

For example, in my unit on *A Wrinkle in Time*, some students connected to the novel through simply loving reading or relating to the characters and their conflicts. Other students connected to the novel and proclaimed it their favorite book (later asking to read the entire series) through an emphasis on entering the novel through science. The entry point moved from being creative writing alone, to a wider doorway or entry point that also included science.

The Seeds for an Interdisciplinary Unit

Many questions began to arise as we read the novel *A Wrinkle in Time*:

- What is a tesseract?
- Is tessering possible?
- What are the 4th and 5th dimensions?
- What is ESP and is it possible?
- Could we travel to other planets and meet beings there?

Now, if we were to teach this science fiction book in only language arts (disciplines of creative writing and literature), we certainly would not find satisfying answers to these questions. We might even erroneously assume that these questions have no answers.

This is when the opportunity to teach an interdisciplinary unit arises quite organically. Student curiosity and specific questions are the driving force, and those questions are currently being examined in the context of another discipline—in this case, physics. In this way, connections can be made that are not forced or on the surface level, but fundamental or deep within each discipline.

The Essential Questions

To work in the Parallel Curriculum Model's Curriculum of Connections, you must understand first of all the core curriculum for each discipline and build on that. Use essential questions that pinpoint the true nature of the discipline, which is simply the way a disciplinarian views the

world. The Essential Questions connect conceptually across disciplines. Good curriculum and especially interdisciplinary curriculum must include such meaningful and enriching questions. For this unit, the essential questions include:

- What is my place in the universe?
- How can I find it and fit in there?

These questions can be answered literally in the realm of physics, and figuratively through creative writing, self-reflection, and physics.

Creative Writing: These questions are essential to creative writing because in a way, these are the most fundamental and abstract questions characters in literature over time ask. Writers ask this question when they write to discover; readers read to find the answer and ask themselves this question in different ways. The

act of reading is an attempt to answer or merely conceive of this question. The act of writing great literature sets an ambitious goal to answer these essential questions in the way only each individual author could uniquely answer it.

Physics: Why did the earliest human beings and later scientists examine our universe? They were attempting to understand our place in the universe. Today, using photos of space we can “see” our planet floating out in space—we can see photos of our galaxy, and in that way, we can literally study the location of our “place” in the universe. Like writers, physicists also

use the information they gather to consider deeper philosophical questions about our place in the universe, why we are here, and where human beings fit into the bigger picture of the universe and its origins.

The Essential Questions could fly over our heads like a comet. But today it is possible for eleven and twelve year olds, like the 6th graders in my class, to glimpse our universe and be truly awed as they begin to grasp visually and then on a deeper level “our place in the universe.”

Integrating Technology for a Purpose:

In the unit, Google Earth and Powerpoint were used to structure this encounter for students as well as telescopic photos of space. The journey began with an aerial view of our school, our town, our state, our country and the

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coastline (pointing out familiar sights along the way), our earth from space, our solar system, and more. For many students it was their first encounter with thinking this big. For middle school students who sometimes feel like the world revolves on them, this presentation gave them perspective. It also helped them to understand the distances for time travel discussed in the novel *A Wrinkle in Time*.

What does the essence of Creative Writing and Physics have in common?

Writers and physicists are both concerned with, as I said before, understanding our place in the universe. These two disciplines formulate answers to the enigmatic questions and research those answers in different ways which both separates and complements. Writers and physicists have several basic things in common:

- Pay close attention
- Detailed observations
- Reserve judgment for final results of experiment or finished draft of creative project

These ideas must be brought down to earth for students through individual lessons and varied, engaging instructional methods. Here is a simplified overview of the unit:

Lesson Sequence

1. Four Corners
2. Vocabulary and Journaling about Conformity and Non-Conformity
3. Perceptions of Giftedness Bibliotherapy Lesson and Discussion
4. The Science Behind A Wrinkle in Time Non-Fiction and Essay Analysis
5. Interactive Physics Lesson and Hands-on Tesseract Demonstration
6. Movie/Book Compare and Contrast Discussion
7. Write a Science Fiction Story

Teaching Strategies: Four corners, bibliotherapy, inductive teaching, graphic organizers, interactive lectures, direct instruction (vocabulary), demonstration, cooperative learning/discussion, independent study, one-on-one writer's conference, peer editing.

Now you have some ideas about how to conceptualize an interdisciplinary unit and why you should try this teaching tool. What are you waiting for?

For sample journal entries and more in-depth information on the lessons, please feel free to email the author:
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Movies That Make You Think



If Jeremy Cohan's article made you think about how drama can transform the classroom, then we heartedly recommend watching the movie **The Hobart Shakespeareans**. This is a documentary about a fifth grade classroom led by a phenomenal teacher, Rafe Esquith. He uses drama to engage and empower his students. You will love being a part of this powerful community of learners.



Are you wanting to challenge your ideas about giftedness and creativity? We recently found this gem of a documentary that will make you consider how we define creativity in the art world. **My Kid Could Paint That** follows the story of a 4 year old girl, Marla, who became the darling of the art world with her abstract paintings.



Have a movie that makes you think in a new way about curriculum and/or gifted learners? Let us know!

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Imagination is more important than knowledge. For while knowledge defines all we currently know and understand, imagination points to all we might yet discover and create.

– Albert Einstein

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