

Cross-curricular approaches to teaching

Thematic cross-curricular teaching

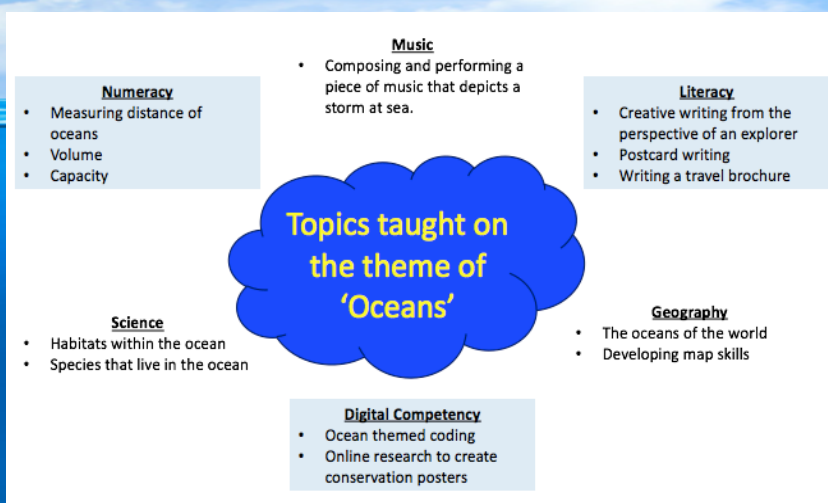
Barnes (2015, p69) defines a theme-based cross-curricular approach to teaching as being able to “use a theme to generate exploration through the eyes of several different subjects.” A theme or an object may be used as a stimulus for a week, a term or an entire year.

Benefits

- Learners are able to make connections between different subject areas through the use of the theme. It creates a continuum of learning across the theme and reduces the segregation of separate subject areas as it is possible to make links between subjects that are dissimilar.
- The teacher may be able to disguise less favourable subject areas within a different topic or subject by using the theme. An example of this is a child who does not enjoy mathematics, who may be more willing to complete a measuring task that appears to be a geography task.
- This approach provides opportunities for children to gain experience in areas that are relevant to the world around them. For example, a teacher may decide that the theme for the term is on the environment, in a time where there are a lot of issues surrounding the environment in the news. Therefore, the learning taking place is meaningful (Hammond, date unknown).
- Learners will become more well-rounded learners as they are exposed to many different ways of learning. Children can gain an understanding of how the skills that they possess can be applied in another subject area

Limitations

- Not all learners will enjoy the chosen theme for the unit of work. Those that do not enjoy the chosen theme will not be engaged in the learning and this may impact their attainment and motivation.
- It may be difficult for a teacher to decide on a theme that will be relevant to all children. For example, there may be cultural differences between learners within the classroom and a theme needs to be accessible to all learners.
- The child’s ability to establish connections in their learning as a result of a thematic approach relies heavily upon their interest and attendance as they may miss vital information if they do not concentrate or attend sessions.
- The theme-based approach may be particularly time consuming for the teacher with regards to planning as links between the skills being taught and theme must be meaningful, in order to ensure that they are not tokenistic (Barnes, 2015).



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A table to demonstrate the specific skills from the Welsh Government frameworks that can be developed using the theme of 'Oceans' within a Year 5 class.

Subject Area	Specific skills being developed
Literacy	- write with a clear purpose, showing consideration for the reader, e.g. <i>by choosing appropriate vocabulary and presentational devices</i> - use techniques in planning writing, e.g. <i>mindmapping, sequencing, placemat activities</i> - use features which show the structure of the writing, e.g. <i>sub-headings, captions</i> - use appropriate vocabulary, including subject-specific words and phrases (Welsh Government, 2014)
Numeracy	- select and use suitable instruments and units of measurement - estimate and visualise size when measuring and use the correct units. - use measuring instruments with 10 equal divisions between each major unit, and record using decimal notation, e.g. <i>4.2cm, 1.3kg</i> - make use of conversions, e.g. <i>¼ of a km = 250m</i>. - find volumes by counting and other practical methods - use coordinates to specify location. (Welsh Government, 2014)
Digital Competency	- adjust keywords and search techniques to find relevant information; begin to reference sources used in their work; consider if the content is reliable, e.g. <i>find information using accurate terms, use a range of sources to check validity and understand the impact of incorrect information.</i> - combine a range of multimedia components to produce an appropriate outcome - create, collect and combine a range of text, image, sound, animation and video for selected purposes - design simple sequences of instructions (algorithms) including the use of Boolean values (i.e. yes/no/true/false), e.g. <i>within the algorithm, demonstrate the correct use of Boolean values giving an either/or response.</i> - explain reasons for layout and content of own work, e.g. <i>evaluate the presentation for audience and appropriateness</i> (Welsh Government, 2016)

Opportunistic cross-curricular teaching

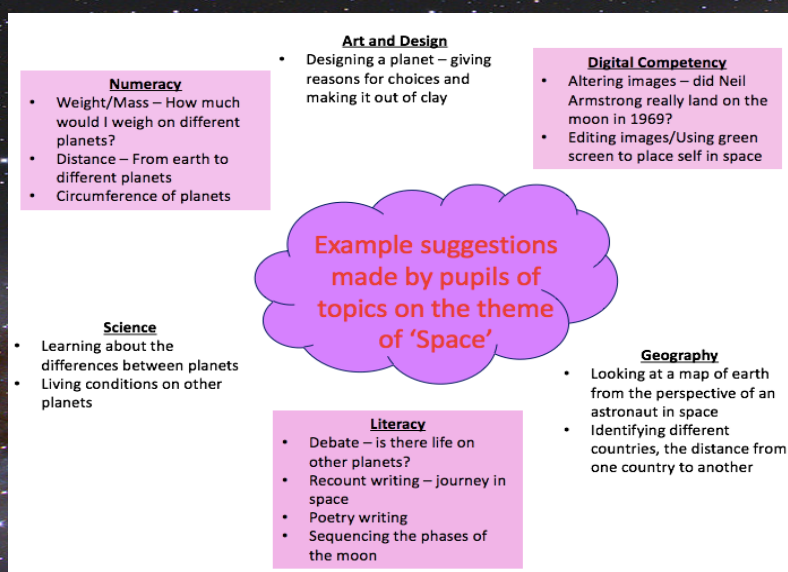
Barnes explains that the opportunistic approach to cross-curricular teaching “allows children to dictate the depth and direction of learning in subject categories arising from a shared theme or experience” (2015, p75). This approach encourages the children to take ownership of their learning.

Benefits

- This approach adheres to UNICEFs *Conventions on the Rights of the Child* (1990) as pupils are provided with the opportunity to have their voice heard on what they want to learn. This is beneficial to a child’s well-being.
- Levels of motivation and engagement may increase as the children are learning about topics that interest them. This may then have a positive impact on attainment.
- Opportunistic cross-curricular teaching creates a more relaxed classroom environment, as children feel in control of their own learning and ‘bridge the gap’ between teachers and learners.
- Allowing children to take control of their own learning supports Donaldson’s (2015, p31) purpose of the curriculum where children should be “ambitious, capable learners.”
- This approach reduces the workload on the teachers as there is less planning for them to complete as it takes place in the classroom with the children.

Limitations

- “In the absence of high standards, a progressive programme can rapidly become an excuse for laziness, laissez-faire procedures, and even anarchy” (Gardner, 1993,p195). Therefore, teachers must monitor this approach closely, as this can deduct from the intended child-led focus.
- The teachers own subject knowledge may hinder the effectiveness of this approach as the children may direct the learning to an area that the teacher is unfamiliar with.
- It may be difficult for the teacher to assess the children in some areas that they wish to learn about as very few relevant skills are being developed. Therefore, the teacher must take control in order to ensure that meaningful learning is taking place. This may then have an impact on the level of how child-led the approach is.
- The teacher must acknowledge every child’s voice, as some pupil’s may feel undervalued if their suggestions go unnoticed when a discussion takes place on what topics will be explored.



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A table to demonstrate the specific skills from the Welsh Government frameworks that can be developed using the theme of 'Space' within a Year 5 class.

Subject Area	Specific skills being developed
Literacy	- use appropriate vocabulary, including subject-specific words and phrases - explain information and ideas, exploring and using ways to be convincing, e.g. use of vocabulary, gesture, visual aids - listen to others, asking questions and responding to both the content and the speakers' viewpoints. - contribute to group discussion, taking some responsibility for completing the task well, e.g. <i>introducing relevant ideas, summing up</i> - write with a clear purpose, showing consideration for the reader, e.g. <i>by choosing appropriate vocabulary and presentational devices</i> (Welsh Government, 2014)
Numeracy	- select and use suitable instruments and units of measurement - estimate and visualise size when measuring and use the correct units. - use coordinates to specify location. - measure and calculate perimeters (Welsh Government, 2014)
Digital Competency	- understand the advantages, disadvantages, permissions and purposes of altering an image digitally and the reasons for this. - create, collect and combine a range of text, image, sound, animation and video for selected purposes. - understand that photographs can be edited digitally and the rights and permissions associated with this. (Welsh Government, 2016)