

We have designed each "White Paper" to explore a fundamental educational principle and key issues engaging the education community we serve. It is our goal to partner with our readers as they meet the challenges they face.



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Interdisciplinary Curriculum & Castle Learning Online

Consider the traditional scenario of a school day for our students. Attend Algebra class at 8 a.m., followed by Biology, later English Literature and then US History, of course pock-marked by a PE class, Music or Art, and hopefully a healthy lunch. The student goes home and decides which subject area homework to do first, probably selecting the subject in which they do the best. The whole day of classes and the evening homework assignments have been taught and learned in isolation from each other. Connections between the curriculum areas have not been provided, often leaving students without the skills to integrate the information they've learned or to understand how the subject areas relate to each other and to real life. Enter the world of **interdisciplinary curriculum**, also known as **integrated learning**, where a group of teachers consciously apply the methodology and language from more than one discipline to examine a central theme, issue, problem, topic, or experience. Such an experience for the student asks them to see connections and to transfer knowledge from one content area to another.

A primary example of an **interdisciplinary curriculum** experience is the writing skills we expect students to gain. Testing to fulfill the expectations of **No Child Left Behind** (NCLB), we could ask students to read a passage about an explorer, but write a letter that simulates what Columbus might have written to the Queen in Spain. In this writing, the student has to detail the rate of speed of his ships, the effect of force winds either blowing with or against the sails, the nature of food sources on the sea while traveling and maybe something about the illnesses that his sailors had to endure. Of course, knowing the history of Spain in the 1490s would be beneficial for this Italian explorer. As a result, the interdisciplinary focus can be pursued by individual teachers working on a particular unit or among teachers planning together across a grade level. This method can help bring students to a new awareness of the meaningful connections that exist among the disciplines.

For the innovative teacher, *Castle Learning Online* has become an important tool in the arsenal of **interdisciplinary curriculum**. Teachers have access and create assignments using ALL courses and ALL grade levels. They can ALSO write their own questions using the PCS (Personal Content Set) tool and incorporate anything that fits the varied disciplines. Teachers have learned how to satisfy the goals of two or more different courses. In addition, assessment instruments that are designed to check the knowledge of students across the curriculum are finding *Castle Learning* to be an ideal resource for **interdisciplinary curriculum**.

In a recent visit to schools that are using *Castle Learning Online*, some teachers have spoken this way –

- Speaking for his wife and himself, an elementary teacher said “My wife and I both teach 5th grade and we absolutely depend on *Castle Learning Online* to prepare the students for all the state tests, the DBQ, the ELA and the Math. We also use the program to reinforce Math and ELA skills; it’s an excellent program.”
- A 4th grade teacher focused on specific skills in various subjects she teaches, saying that “their Math has improved in the problem solving areas and the result was that their awareness of social studies and science 'concepts' seems stronger.”

Teaching is exciting when it mirrors the real world of **interdisciplinary learning**. Nothing we do is in isolation. *Castle Learning Online* gives the teacher a way to make the curricular connections that benefit students across the disciplines.