

# Developing a Model for a Cross-Curricular Unit

## IMEA All-State Conference

Friday, January 29, 2009

3:30-4:45, CC 210/211

My “hidden curriculum”:

### I. What is a cross-curricular unit?

• MENC’s National Standards Eight and Nine (listed below) are clearly addressed in cross-curricular units. While all music educators try to address these concepts, there are only so many rehearsals spent preparing for a performance. If time allows, historical and cultural context are included offhandedly or at the very end of the rehearsal sequence. Cross-curricular units are an intentional way of including and prioritizing this information.

8. *Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.*

9. *Understanding music in relation to history and culture.*

### II. What are the benefits of a cross-curricular unit?

• **Advocacy:** *No Child Left Behind* has placed some music programs on the chopping block. More than ever, music educators are in a position of proving the worth of their content areas. While any member of IMEA can speak volumes about the impact music has had on their life, other faculty, administrators, and parents have not necessarily had those same kinds of experiences. Without a state-wide or national exam testing music students, music educators are forced to find other ways to prove students are learning more than songs. Collaborating with other academic teachers not only reinforces content area reading and higher level thinking, but also further proves the worth of music education. It shows that band/choir/orchestra are academic disciplines, not merely extra-curricular activities that meet during the day.

• **Retention:** If presented in an interesting way, students will jump right on board. Cross-curricular units create a ground-swell effect within a music program. By involving students in the direction the unit takes, they feel empowered. When a teacher entrusts students with their own education and invites input, students begin to act and behave like the young adults they are. Besides energizing the classroom environment, cross-curricular units draw upon the quintessential elements of the paired academic area. For example, an orchestra and math class could team up to discover Fibonacci sequences in one of Mozart’s symphonies. Not only would this contextualize the understanding of the math students, but it would also reinforce the orchestral students’ application and use of mathematic concepts. Surely, no principal would be against reinforcing math throughout the school day! In this way, every discipline, student, and faculty member involved in such a unit would benefit.

- **Recruitment:** A cross-curricular unit is a great way to promote your program and involve students outside of music. Ideas of this might include:
  - Asking the technology club to make a documentary chronicling the unit. Showing this to a school board would certainly make an impression.
  - Taking pictures while on a field trip or doing other activities and emailing them to the faculty.
  - Publishing a write-up in the local newspaper or a web posting could get your program some extra exposure in the community.

Whatever is done with these materials, people will be interested in seeing more than concerts coming from the Music Department.

- **Collegiality:** Working in a music department, one can easily feel isolated from the rest of the faculty. Faculty members outside of music may interpret this as elitist or standoffish. By approaching them and asking them to lend their knowledge and expertise, relationships can be established. Collaboration is becoming increasingly important in education. As mentioned above, the pressures of testing and NCLB de-emphasize music programs.

### III. Where do I start?

- Think about what you wrote down as your “hidden curriculum.” How can you tailor what to teach to these ideals? In other words, can you teach about life through music?
- After deciding a topic and determining an applicable content area with which to collaborate, find out what classes would match your topic and if any meet at the same time as the music class. After the other faculty are on board, make a formal proposal to the principal and other appropriate administrators. Most likely, administrative support will be very high.
- More than anything else, time is the most crucial component in developing a cross-curricular unit. By being fully prepared and informed, students will be able to pick up on your enthusiasm and get their questions answered quickly. On the other hand, it is unwise to decide to do a unit shortly before it is to begin. If this is the case, it would be best to postpone the unit or reduce its magnitude.
- Some resources to consider consulting:
  - *Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP)*- <http://www.wmea.com/CMP/index.html>
  - *Content Area Reading* by Richard T. And Jo Anne L. Vacca- Allyn & Bacon, Inc.
  - *Teaching Music Through Performance* series- GIA Publications, Inc.
  - You are your own best resource. You know your school, students, parents, administration, and curriculum better than anyone else. Take this knowledge and apply it, and you can achieve marvelous results.