

INTERED

Report Prepared by



UNIVERSITY *of* NICOSIA

How did the selected case study implement interdisciplinary approaches?

The paper examines the operational perspectives and practices of teachers with direct experience implementing interdisciplinary units in five small schools. These are 4 schools in Norway and 1 in Denmark, which implement English-medium Middle Years Programme (MYP) *friskoler*. In these schools, teachers develop ‘unique school-based interdisciplinary units.’ Quantitative survey data were collected by 36 teachers and qualitative data were collected from 9 of those teachers, who represented 3 Norwegian schools.

Why did they begin to implement this methodology in education?

As explained in Section 1.1 of the paper, the middle schooling tradition has long advocated the advantages of interdisciplinary approaches.

What challenges did they face?

As shown in the Results below as well, one challenge was teachers’ workload in developing the interdisciplinary units. On average, teachers spent over 17 hours ‘to design and evaluate and interdisciplinary unit’ and a further 7 hours were required ‘to assess and moderate student reflections.’ This was in contrast to the 3 hours allocated by the schools for collaborative task planning. These administrative demands of implementing interdisciplinary education were not recognized by schools, as teachers had to find time themselves for the meetings.

Lessons Learned?

- Smaller schools ‘are uniquely enabled to offset some of the complexities of interdisciplinary practices that frustrate larger schools’
- Small school should allocate adequate collaborative planning time and organise teaching schedules interdisciplinary subject linkages, pair teachers in shared workspaces and offer teachers greater flexibility to attend staff meetings.

Results (copied from Table 3, pages 8-9)

Findings related to *collegiality*:

- Teachers were overwhelmingly positive designing meaningful units of interdisciplinary work.
- Small schools are advantaged in the opportunities they provide for spontaneous communication between specialist teachers.
- Effective collaboration required more time than schools provided.

Findings related to *implementation*:

- Adjustments were necessary for each student cohort, new colleagues, and throughout implementation. Adjustments required constant dialogue and collaboration.
- Interdisciplinary and disciplinary assessment is qualitatively different. Marking of interdisciplinary products involves both (all) teachers involved in the IDU.
- Keeping detailed documentation was viewed as necessary, bureaucratic and time consuming.

Findings related to *approaches to learning*:

- Learning to identify connections and synergies between disciplines prepared students for their MYP Personal Project (completed in MYP 5), the Diploma Programme, and future, innovative careers.
- Bridging disciplinary content using conceptual connections helped students develop abstract thinking.

- Although reflection supported interdisciplinary learning, it was time consuming, and for younger students, overly bureaucratic.

Findings related to *challenges* faced:

- Supporting younger students' reflective writing "without spelling it out for them". A teacher-directed "Interdisciplinary Week" enabled one school to realise its IB interdisciplinary assessment requirements. Separate, longer, open ended, complex projects enabled students to develop motivational, team management and "life-skills".

Findings related to *student responses* (as reported by teachers):

- Students were more open to learning during formative stages of projects. Freedom of expression was controlled within parameters of narrow frameworks or firm boundaries.

Findings related to *operations*:

- Shared physical space and online platforms provided opportunities for informal and formal meetings. Assessment and moderation were best completed together.
- Release teachers participating in interdisciplinary units from formal meetings during peak implementation times (e.g., moderation of student work).
- In each year cohort, common non-teaching periods needed to be prioritised for teachers implementing interdisciplinary units in small schools.

Findings related to *empathy*:

- Understanding the unique demands of interdisciplinary work needed personal experience. If collaborative time was perceived to be used effectively, this merited investigation.

www.inter-education.com



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Project Number: 2023-1-ITO2-KA220-SCH-000151634

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



[This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)