

learning aJeNcy RESOURCE

Productive teaching uses integrated curriculum approaches where appropriate.

Integrated or 'purposefully connected' curriculum

The goal: Successful learners, confident & creative individuals and active & informed citizens

(Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, MCEETYA, 2008)

What is it?

Purposefully connected curriculum involves planning for teaching and learning that draws on two or three subjects within a learning area, or two or three learning areas or subjects.... It is hoped that teachers and other curriculum leaders might consider purposefully connected curriculum as a planning option alongside the single curriculum approach. The latter approach refers to planning a teaching/learning unit which draws on one learning area or subject.

*...Two conditions are essential for purposefully connected curriculum. First, a **clear conceptual link (or links)** needs to exist among the curricular area content descriptions connected in planning for teaching and learning. Second, the **integrity of the curricular areas** must be maintained. This refers to ensuring that the key purpose of the curricular area is not 'watered down' or lost as teaching and learning draws on more than one curricular area. Associated with maintaining the integrity of the curricular areas is the requirement that schools gather assessment data that indicates what students know and can do in specific curricular areas. (Nayler, 2014, emphasis added)¹*

How can we practise it?

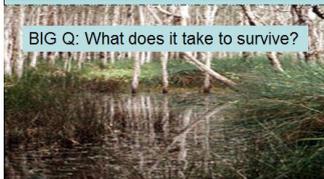
We can build on conceptual links

...where **overlapping** or **common** concepts exist...

Processes

1. Become familiar with key concepts of the curricular areas...
2. Consider school and community context & demographics...
3. Identify **common or overlapping concepts** or big ideas from two or three curricular areas.
4. Develop a **conceptual link**...
5. Develop an overarching or '**BIG question**'... + sub- or focus questions...
6. Identify other content descriptions to support deep learning...
7. Complete unit planning...

Yr 5: science concept— living things have structural features and adaptations for survival	Yr 5 geography concept— people influence their environments
Conceptual link People, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, have adapted to their environments.	
BIG Q: What does it take to survive?	



...where concepts are **complementary** in a particular learning context

Year 5 science concept— effect of geological changes on Earth's surface	Year 5 English concept— differences and similarities in various texts related to drought
*Sub-Q: What can the scientist tell us about the impacts of drought in Australia?	*Sub-Q: What can we learn from literature about the impact of drought in Australia?
Conceptual link Drought is a phenomenon that impacts on people and other living things in various places.	
What is the impact of drought?	
'BIG question' ...it's conceptual & connected**	*Sub-Qs scaffold the inquiry with focus on fulfilling required curriculum



**Nayler (2014) Productive teaching/Powerful learning, Professional learning materials.

FAQs

1. *Why connect two or three learning areas/subjects in one unit of work?*
There are philosophical reasons (e.g. knowledge is connected and dynamic). There are also pragmatic reasons given there are many learning areas/subjects that constitute the Australian Curriculum. As a result, connecting curricular areas makes sense for real-world learning and for logistical reasons.
2. *Given that the Australian Curriculum is written in learning areas and subjects, does that mean we have to enact or implement it in units with strict curriculum boundaries?*
No! The QSA [QCAA] paper shows how content descriptions from up to three learning areas or subjects can contribute to a conceptual link/s that can form the basis of a unit of work. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) invites schools to '...[draw] on integrated approaches where appropriate...'²
3. *Given that schools must assess and report student achievement in relation to specific learning areas and subjects, does that mean that schools must utilise only single-curricular area assessment tasks?*
No, see [Nayler, 2014](#) for details around authentic assessment tasks in which teachers gather specific assessment data on up to three learning areas or subjects. Also see [Nayler \(2014\)](#) for an outline of a possible assessment task related to the Year 6 example.

¹ Nayler (2014), [Enacting Australian Curriculum: Making connections for quality learning](#). Issues paper. Queensland Studies Authority.

² *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum* (2012), p. 13.

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How does it align with quality curriculum?

QSA (2011a) Principles for effective planning including:	Design principles related to purposefully connected curriculum:
1. high expectations for all students (with extracts from the QSA Equity Statement (2006) included in italics below) <i>—identifying and minimising structural barriers to access and participation</i> <i>—acknowledging the diversity of students and each individual's life circumstances, and the need for particular strategies which can enhance engagement and equitable outcomes among all students</i> <i>—acknowledging the relationship between the valued knowledge and the participation of students in society</i>	1. sound educational philosophy such as: —teaching and learning for deep knowledge and understandings —building connectedness to students' lives and the world through engaging and meaningful learning contexts (applicable also to Principle for effective planning #4)
2. alignment of teaching and learning, and assessment and reporting	2. alignment of teaching and learning across two or three learning areas with assessment tasks, as well as practice that enables reporting of student achievement along learning area/subject lines
3. standards- and school-based assessment for learning	3. maintaining the integrity of each learning area and subject connected in teaching/learning unit
4. balance of informed prescription and teacher professional judgment.	4. practical solutions to the programming of the range of learning areas and subjects that comprise the Australian Curriculum.

Examples of BIG questions to drive purposefully connected curriculum

Who owns Australia?	History	English
How can we convince people to take action on the environmental issue of ... ?	Science	English
How can we represent our community's history through art?	History	Visual Arts
Was family life great during the Industrial Revolution?	History	HPE
Does it matter where my lamb comes from?	Science	Geography

Are you interested in using any of these questions? Do they align with the understandings and skills in the Australian Curriculum learning areas/subjects at your year level? When designing BIG questions start with the content descriptions—see Nayler (2014).

How do we know if we're successfully connecting learning areas/subjects?

Planning in a connected curriculum approach is successful when students:

- have opportunities to learn the knowledge, understanding and skills of the range of Australian Curriculum learning areas and subjects to which they are entitled
- have the opportunities to explore issues, problems or phenomena in ways that are meaningful and related to the real-world, with such opportunities drawn from the content descriptions of the contributing learning areas and subjects
- develop understandings, skills and important concepts in units driven by overarching questions that contextualise the relevant content descriptions and achievement standards
- have opportunities to negotiate aspects of curriculum (e.g. specific topic or context) and assessment (e.g. mode to demonstrate understandings and skills) with levels and nature of negotiation varying according to their developmental or contextual needs.

Planning in a connected curriculum approach is successful when teachers:

- identify conceptual links across learning areas and subjects, and use these to create a powerful overall question to drive the learning/teaching unit
- are confident that a sound basis exists for the inclusion in one teaching/learning unit of content descriptions and portions of achievement standards from the contributing learning areas and subjects without the inclusion of what might be described as trivial integration
- plan to gather assessment as and assessment of learning data related to the valued features of the contributing learning areas and subjects and to report such learning along learning area/subject lines
- can be confident that the integrity of the contributing learning areas and subjects is retained with students prepared for learning area/subject specific understandings and skills required in subsequent years.

See [learning aJeNcy resource: Design, enact and review: 3 key Qs](#), for information re planning processes.

Also see Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority website at: <https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/29920.html> for PowerPoint and video clip from QSA 2014 conference presentation, *Making connections across the Australian Curriculum* (Nayler).

Enhancing your professional practice...

For more examples of purposefully connected curriculum and support for planning at your school contact Jenny Nayler – learning aJeNcy.

Professional learning and planning sessions designed and facilitated by **Jenny Nayler – learning aJeNcy** develop professional practice described here. All sessions align with the [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) (AITSL).

Jenny Nayler – learning aJeNcy
Email: jenny@learningajency.com.au; Mobile: 041819710

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