

Practical Examples to Sustain the Integrated Approach in Environmental Studies

- The success of the Integrated Approach depends on the individuals concerned involved in the teaching of Environmental Studies. They have to believe that this approach will generate greater understanding.
- The next step is to establish the team spirit. Someone has to set the ball rolling by contacting the other teachers. At first these contacts can take place within the informal setting of the staff room. When enthusiasm builds up formal meetings can be organised. Getting organised from the very start of the scholastic year is ideal for more teachers are willing to participate in new initiatives at this time of the year.
- Even though Environmental Studies is related directly to what is taught during the last three years of secondary education students get the first impressions of the subject whilst in the lower forms. Therefore at our school we have decided to unite our efforts in order to welcome the Form I students by taking them on a tour round the premises. The students through direct observation get an idea of both the historical importance of the school, as it was built as a fortress by the English during the end of the 19th century, and the geographical site and layout. The students are further asked to give their comments on whether historical sites should be used or merely put on show. This often leads to the problem of vandalism. At the end of the tour the students are given a leaflet entitled 'The Verdala Story' which gives detailed information of how the site was utilised over the years.
- Throughout this course in Environmental Studies it is important to know the whole syllabus not just what pertains to our subject. During official meetings strategies can be planned so that related topics can be taught at the same time. As we have only one lesson per week common topics can be discussed solely by one teacher to avoid repetition and so gain precious time. Exchanging viewpoints on topics included in the syllabus means that topics can be tackled from a holistic approach. In this way we will avoid giving our students contradictory instructions. A case that comes in mind how we classify settlements in Malta whether this should be established on size of population or the variety of functions and services offered.

- The Environmental Studies Exam involves also the presentation of an investigative project on the part of the student. Instead of repeating the same explanation to different classes we the teachers involved organise each year a meeting for the Fourth and Fifth Formers. The main aim of this meeting is to encourage more students to sit for this exam and to get them to investigate original topics which refer to all three subjects. This idea is gaining more ground. Three projects really stand out from the rest. One student decided to focus on the statue of Manuel de Vilhena. Besides commenting on the actual statue he went on to investigate the projects which are mentioned at the base of the statue all initiated by Grandmaster de Vilhena. He then went on the site to investigate the actual state they are in besides giving their historical story.
- Another student decided to study the wall near our school. He investigated in detail both the historical connections of the Fortress wall and the actual state of the wall due to the effects of weathering and erosion.
- The third example refers to a study on the waste of dogs in our streets. This particular student drew up a map of a particular promenade and marked the location of the waste. Then he investigated the negative effects that this problem has on our health, especially that of toddlers and on tourism.
- In this type of integrated project is to become more popular with our students it is important that we reassure them that all teachers will willingly give them their assistance and that the mark presented to the MatSec Board is given after consultation with the teachers concerned.
- Another way how the integrated approach is emphasised is through Fieldwork. This can be directly related to a common topic being discussed in class. One example that has been very successful is the topic 'Water'. The field exercise following a set of lessons on the part of various subjects led us to the Reverse Osmosis at Pembroke and to the site of the Aqueduct at Mriehel. The students had to fill in a handout based on direct observation and the information given. At the end they checked the validity of the hypothesis that - 'most people would be against the pulling down of the Aqueduct in order to widen the road'.

- When preparing Field Handouts these should reflect the integrated approach by pooling the information and the exercises on the same sheet or sheets.
- Since the setup of Verdala Junior Lyceum, some fifteen years ago, we have managed to set up a yearly Exhibition for Prize Day. This Exhibition is involving more subjects every year. Over the years I have chosen certain topics on purpose because they integrate well with other subjects. To name a few - Let's talk rubbish!, Agriculture, capital Cities of the World, maps, Meteorology, physical features, Tunisia, Gardens and the Environment.
- Believing in the Integrated Approach means that one is ready to develop on certain situations that present themselves during the scholastic year. When there was a competition related to a field trip to Birzebbuga we came up with the idea of presenting a short play where a few students played the part of ghosts who wanted to destroy the historical sites for they were angry with the Maltese because they were not taking care of these treasures. They were persuaded not to do so when a couple of students came on the site to make a study of the temple. These students won the prize for the most imaginative project.
- Be ready also for comments made on the part of the students themselves whether in class or out on Fieldwork. During a visit to Valletta with the aim of studying the CBD and the Auberges one student commented on how two historical items in the yard of Auberge d'Italie were being affected by air coming out of the air-conditioning apparatus and the lifter being used to send up materials to the upper floors. At school we had just finished tackling the topics weathering and erosion. This comment led us to write up a letter in order to bring the matter to the attention of the authorities. Eventually we returned at a later date to take photos and decided to keep on writing till we received a positive reply and the items were removed to a safer place.
- Time is our greatest problem. At times we need to tackle a subject in more detail but the lessons available are running out. One way how more enthusiastic students are encouraged to understand more the diversity of our local environment is by organising the viewing of related documentaries during the break. This involves the recording of these programmes which are related to our subject. In most cases the local documentaries are very high standard and experts from different fields give a holistic approach to the topic under the eye of the camera.

- The Integrated Approach is not as easy as it seems for it involves the cooperation of all teachers cooperation of all teachers concerned. Above all it requires serious planning followed by evaluation at the end of each term and especially at the end of the scholastic year. In this way improvements can be planned for the next scholastic year.

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