

Multidisciplinary learning

Multidisciplinary refers to the placing side by side of insights from two or more disciplines. Here different disciplines help to develop a detailed understanding of the topic being studied. These disciplines however make separate contributions unlike interdisciplinary learning where an interdependent relationship is emphasized. No integration between these disciplines is expected in a multidisciplinary approach.

A multidisciplinary approach in learning involves drawing appropriately from multiple disciplines to redefine problems outside of normal boundaries and reach solutions based on a new understanding of complex situations.

According to Lange and Yost, multidisciplinary instruction is an approach that thoughtfully incorporates and connects key concepts and skills from many disciplines into the presentation of a single unit.

According to Garner (1995), the term multidisciplinary refers to a combination of various disciplines as independent and separate components of learning, which allows students to work within discipline specific parameters and attain discipline specific goals. Multidisciplinary learning refers to the involvement of several different professional areas, though not necessarily in an integrated manner.

Characteristics of Multidisciplinary learning:

Most characteristics of interdisciplinary learning will be found in multidisciplinary learning as well.

1. Multidisciplinary learning gives the learner varied perspectives of the topic. Different disciplines contribute towards enriched learning. For example if the topic being learned is Water, the learner gets an idea about the chemical composition and properties of water from Science, whereas Geography will throw light on distribution of water over the Earth, sources of water.
2. Content matter gathered from different disciplines may retain their distinct identities but will help the learner get a more comprehensive view of the topic of study.
3. Multidisciplinary learning may not be integrative in its approach. Each discipline retains its own uniqueness in multidisciplinary learning. While the topic is examined through the lens of different subjects, there is no conscious effort to merge these perspectives or integrate these views.

Significance of Interdisciplinary learning and Multidisciplinary learning:

É Interdisciplinary learning and multidisciplinary learning share several common features. The significance of these approaches to learning is profound.

É Interdisciplinary learning and multidisciplinary learning promote a broadened outlook with the learner becoming aware of the perspectives offered by more than one discipline. Interdisciplinary studies courses provide students with opportunities to understand the diverse perspectives of and the links among discrete subjects/disciplines and to develop their knowledge and skills beyond the scope of individual disciplines to solve problems, make decisions and present new findings.

É Narrow allegiance to one discipline is prevented. Considering only one discipline to understand a complex issue can lead to incomplete learning. An interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary bent of mind forces one to look at the issue through the lens of other disciplines

É It encourages a more comprehensive way of looking at real life problems. Real life problems are not confined to one discipline. One may need to examine the problem from different disciplines to identify the most effective solution.

É Objectivity in learning is encouraged. Holding on to only one discipline is likely to produce biased views. Neutral decisions can be taken when an issue is examined by referring to more than one discipline.

É Interdisciplinary learning and multidisciplinary learning bring an appreciation of other disciplines. The more we know about other disciplines, the more we will appreciate the knowledge they contain. For example, suppose the issue being discussed is that of human progress. A person who is basically from the Science discipline can appreciate the contribution of Art to human progress. If the issue is only examined through the lens of science, a lopsided view of human progress is viewed.

É One can reflect how the real world works when one uses the interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach. This is useful to understand complex phenomena that affect our daily interactions. For example, when examining how international trade is carried out, one needs to consider the perspectives offered by Political Science, Economics, Geography and Business.



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É Sensitivity to ethical issues is fostered by such learning. Consider an issue like euthanasia or mercy killing. If a person is declared brain dead, should life support be discontinued? A question like this will need to look at implications from the point of view of Science, Law, Religion and Sociology. Ethical issues cannot be resolved by looking at just one discipline.

É Interdisciplinary learning and multidisciplinary learning enhance the ability to synthesize information. Information used is drawn from many disciplines and hence needs to be effectively analysed and synthesized.

É Unconventional and original thinking is enhanced. A single discipline may promote one way of thinking. Consideration of more than one discipline forces to consider different modes and thus promotes unconventional thinking.

É Interdisciplinary learning and multidisciplinary learning help students to develop a new awareness of the meaningful connections that exist among the disciplines. One realizes that the real world does not support fragmented knowledge. One appreciates true knowledge, the sources from where one gets knowledge and the means to garner knowledge. Thus, a zest for lifelong learning is developed through interdisciplinary learning.