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# Curriculum integration in the Irish context

## Putting Humpty Dumpty together again?

Jim Gleeson, EPS Department, UL  
Reimagining Learning Conference  
Limerick, May 2011

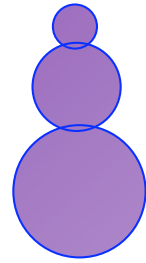
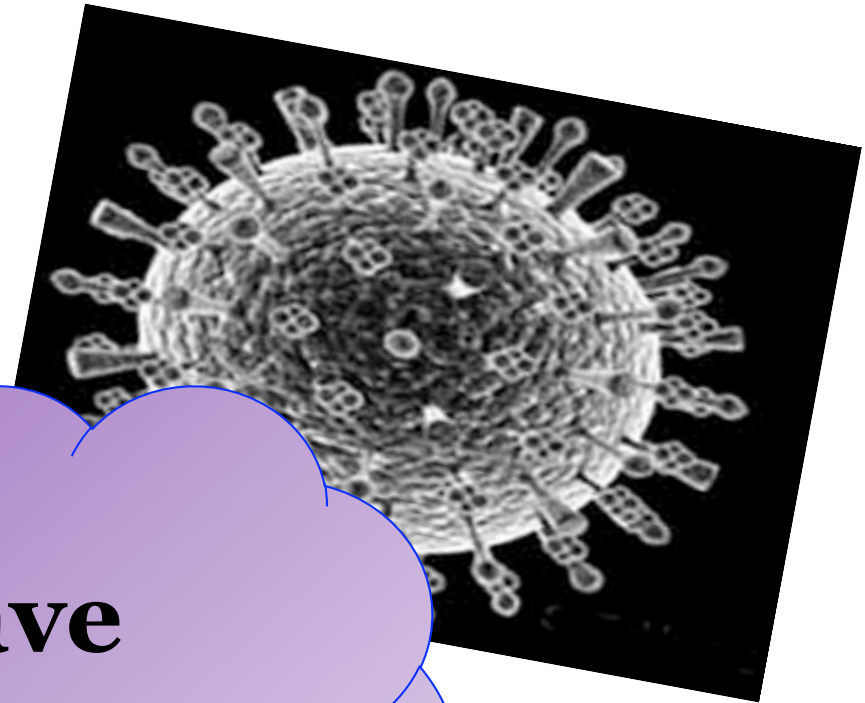
# Significance of context

- Curriculum as contextualised social process (Cornbleth, 1990)
- ‘Those who fail to understand the social and historical construction of the curriculum cannot understand that there is simply no truth that exists beyond culture’ (Cornbleth)
- But tendency to see curriculum as a **product (thing)** that is arbitrarily separated from policy-making and use
- Curriculum construction seen as **apolitical or neutral**, apart from or above competing values or interest

THESE GUYS DON'T KNOW  
WHAT THEY'RE DOING!!  
A SPECIALIST, I NEED TO  
SEE A SPECIALIST!!



THE ORIGINAL HMO HORROR STORY



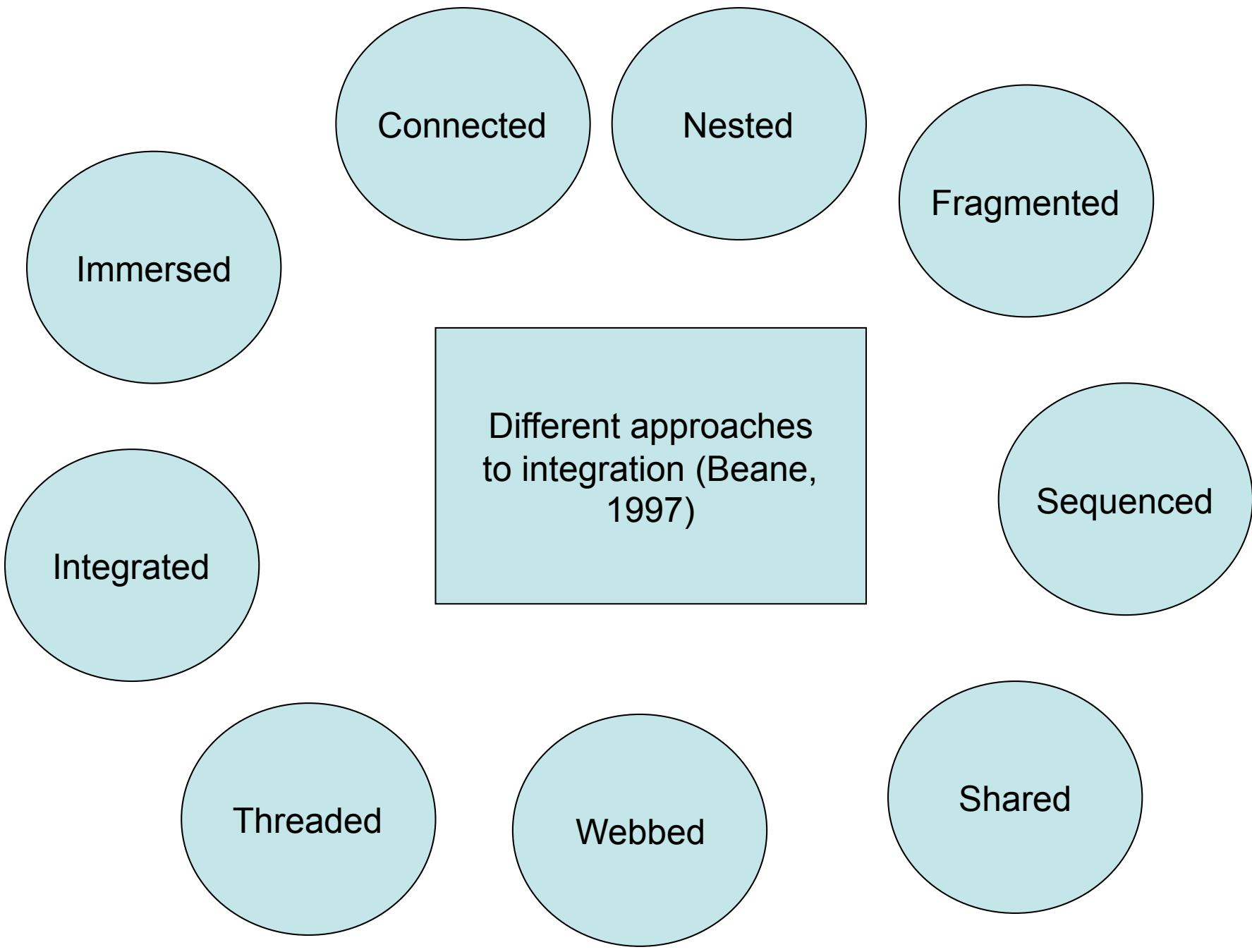
**What have  
all of these  
got in  
common??**



	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
				Geography	Religion
	PE			Maths	Science
	<b>E</b>			<b>K</b>	
			History	Art	Geography
		Science	Maths	French	German
12:30	PE	Religion	German	English	Business
12:40	<b>L</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>H</b>
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# Main sections

- Understandings of curriculum integration
- Treatment of curriculum integration @ primary
- Treatment of curriculum integration @ post-primary
- Some key implications of the integration debate



# Different approaches to integration – case of Student Tasks in the LCA

- **Functional integration** occurs naturally, seamlessly, often unconsciously, where students are pursuing **their own** learning interests... mainly through the planning and activity involved in completing Student Tasks
- **Cross-curricular or inter-disciplinary** integration – a conscious effort to associate learning taking place in a number of courses



# Irish curriculum and integration

- Key principle of primary since Curaclam na Bunscoile
- Projects such as Humanities and Integrated Science (ISCIP) at the CDU, Dublin, and Social and Environmental Studies (SESP) at Shannon CDC
- Junior Certificate Subject: Environmental and Social Studies (ESS)
- Student Task in LCA
- NCCA on key skills and Junior Cert Discussion document
- Educate Together...

# Primary Curriculum (1971)

- Integration a key principle – the **psychological should take precedence over the logical** with the child as the most active agent in his own education (DoE, 1971, 18)
- The child is one, so also should his education be one
- The organic growth of knowledge is best fostered in the child's environment
- Integration requires '**blocks of time rather than clearly defined half-hour periods**'
- Separation of religious and secular instruction into differentiated subject compartments throws education out of focus
- "School education" and "parallel education" must complement each other if the child is to live a full life as a child and a full and useful life as an adult in society

# Dangers of rote learning!

- An inspector enters a school room, asks the teacher what she has been giving her class, takes up a book and asks:
- "If you were to dig a hole thousands and thousands of feet deep, would it be cooler near the bottom or near the top, and why?"
- Not a child answered.
- Finally the teacher said, "I'm sure they know the answer but I don't think you put the question in the right way."
- Taking the book she asked, "In what state is the centre of the earth?"
- Immediately came the reply from the whole class in chorus, "The centre of the earth is in a state of *igneous fusion*" (Tyler, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, 1949)

# Sugrue (1997) findings

- Importance of **planning** rather than reliance on textbooks for integration to happen
- Even when planning was thematic, **time allocated for taught subjects as discrete entities**
- Priority was afforded to 3Rs with **preference for 'incidental' rather than planned integration**
- 'Taking integration seriously makes assumptions about **breadth and depth of subject matter knowledge** as well as uncommon levels of planning acumen' (p 210)

# Primary Curriculum Review (1990, 18-19)

- Particular cognisance taken of submission made by the Campaign to Separate Church and State
- Cited inspectors' findings that cross-subject work was most common approach to integration
- Over 90% of teachers neither subject-based or undifferentiated in their approach
- **Integration to be seen as a central *pedagogic principle*...** traditional divisions between subjects should not be discarded
- As pupils progress through the school the curriculum divisions will tend to correspond more closely to traditional subject disciplines

# Revised Primary Curriculum (GoI, 1999)

- Twelve principles of learning include ‘the integration of learning’
- Distinctions between subjects not relevant for the young child..
- Importance of a coherent learning process that accommodates a variety of elements
- Integration gives children a **broader and richer perspective** as they mature , emphasising the **interconnectedness of knowledge and ideas** and **reinforcing the learning process**
- Timetabling: Languages the only overt reference to integration
- A ‘suggested minimum time allocation’ for each curriculum area is proposed – to be used in the most flexible way possible...
- The complexity of the curriculum and the phased approach to implementation has implications for the integrated nature of the curriculum (Murchan, Loxley, Johnson, 2005).
- There is **evidence of a lack of understanding** of the principle of linkage within the curriculum [and] teachers talk about implementing the curriculum on an individual strand basis, as opposed to integrated implementation (ibid)

# Post-primary

- Curriculum Development Unit: Humanities; Irish Science Curriculum Innovation Project (ISCIP) – both began circa 1972
- Shannon Curriculum Development Centre: Social and Environmental Studies (SESP) also began in 1972
- → Environmental and Social Studies (1989ff) Junior Certificate
- The Areas of Experience model proposed by CEB
- Student Task (LCA)
- Key Skills (NCCA)
- Current NCCA Junior Certificate proposals
- ET Blueprint...



# Principles behind Humanities, SESP

- **External influences:** Crooks (1972) notes that there were 'more than 20 Humanities and Creative Studies Education Projects in England and Wales under the auspices of the Schools Council' including Stenhouse's Humanities Project at UEA
- Education seen as a **continuous process: transition** from primary curriculum...
- Emphasis on **active student engagement** e.g. use of out of school environment..
- Importance of **relationships** with peers and teachers...
- Education for **critical and creative thinking**
- All three projects were **school and teacher-based**

## Nature of integration as seen by Humanities (Godwin, 1984) and ISCIP (Bridges et al, 1972)

- Integration occurs naturally... this cannot happen if subject areas are seen as discrete “bodies” of knowledge. Many attempts at integration have failed for this reason
- In Humanities each of the integrated subjects is seen as a series of skills and concepts which are taught in the context of broadly-based themes
- Typical unit such as ‘Homes and Housing’

# Themes of SESP

- Man and his Spaceship Earth
- The interdependence of people for food and for manufactured goods
- People's aspirations

Major focus on the 'big idea' and three categories of skill, influenced by Bloom:

- researching information
- interpretation, analysis and synthesis
- judgement leading to informed attitudes to the world

# ISCIP (Bridges, K et al, 1972)

- Practical, activity-based, pupil-centred programme that stimulates the development of students' natural interests and aptitudes
- Gives students an awareness of the aspects of science that are important to the quality of everyday life
- Integrates Chemistry, Physics and Biology
- Early years of post-primary seen as an **orientation phase** (ISCIP)
- 3 major areas: Life, Materials and Energy – the basis of all science courses
- The teaching experiences and not the mere memorisation of content as vital in the education of the pupil

# Product vs Proces

McMenamin, Education Officer for Junior Certificate Science, found that there were two forces at work within his Course Committee. While some members, himself included, were heavily influenced by a process approach to science education, the science purists simply said the students 'need this in order to do the Leaving Cert because it is needed in third level'.

David vs Goliath!!

# The fate of Humanities and SESP!

## N Schools offering Social and Environmental Studies

Year	Sec	Voc	Comm/ Comp	Total
1979/80*	5 (310)	23 (232)	9 (7)	37 (589)
1996/7	5 (440)	21 (227)	7 (79)	33 (746)
2000/1	12 (419)	21(230)	8 (84)	41(733)
2005/6	11 (398)	24 (223)	8 (90)	43 (711)
2009/10	13 (383)	28 (229)	9 (92)	50 (704)

\* Denotes Humanities and SESP

# Environmental and Social Studies (ESS)

- A multidisciplinary course with an integrated methodology
- Themes used to provide a 'context within which the knowledge and understanding of History, Geography and Civic Education can be applied and within which young people are introduced to the work of historians, geographers, archaeologists, cartographers, meteorologists, ecologists and town planners'.

# Rationale for ESS

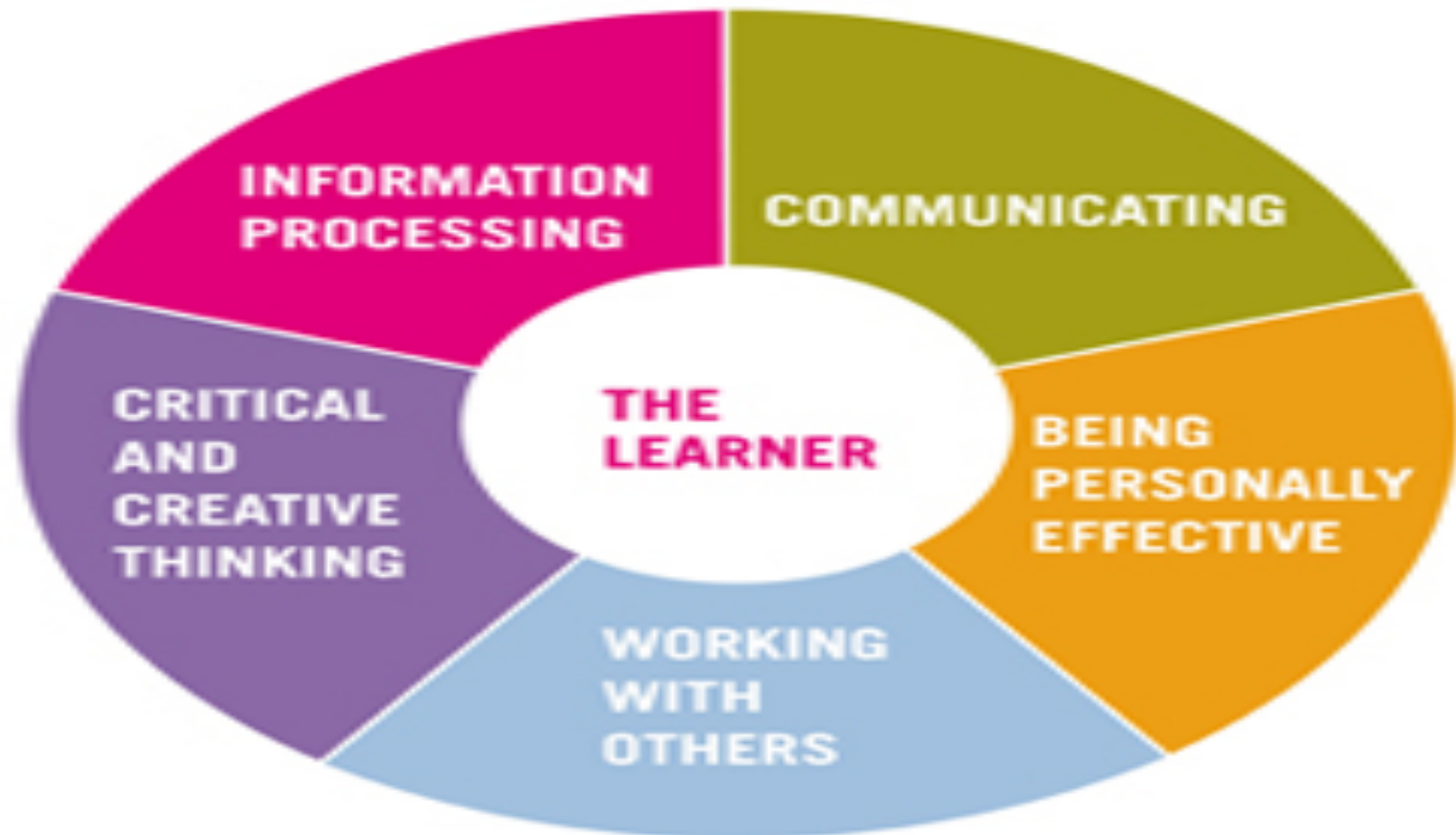
- Themes of immediate and obvious relevance to students can provide important **motivation** for further learning;
- Thematic, perspective allows **concepts** from History and Geography to interact in mutually enriching ways;
- Focus on **real-world issues** makes their **relevance clear to students**.
- An integrated methodology is **relevant to the vocational needs and life-experience of students**;
- The pedagogical principle of integration, introduced in the Primary school, is used as a **springboard for specific disciplines**;
- Integration allows the expertise of **teachers of the disparate disciplines to interact positively**;

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# Integrating key skills

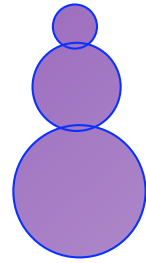
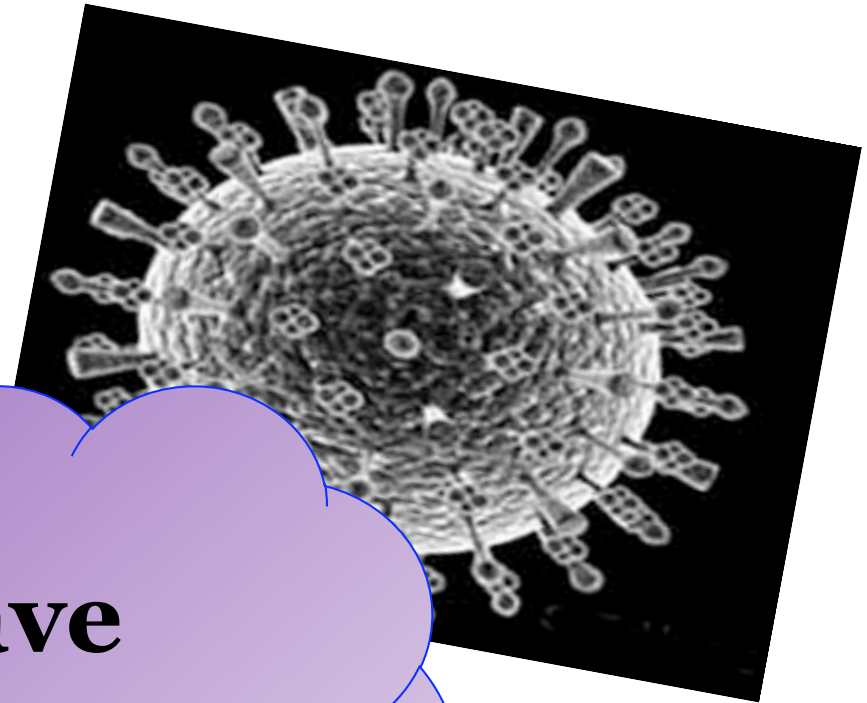


# Some findings (2010)

- Whole school approach can work
- Lever for changing practice that impacts positively on teaching and learning
- Promoting professional practice, student engagement and reflection on part of both teachers and students
- Teachers as key agents for change given that its school-based, context-specific, teacher-led
- Importance of local and external support

# Integration and assessment

- Assessment and teacher professionalism (Trant)
- SESP experience [in context of ICE report of 1975]
- ESS situation where 40% of marks go for 'other techniques' such as portfolio assessment, oral and aural exam, assignments such as field study, reports...
- LCA Student Task – 10% of marks for integration



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# Some implications

Need to

- acknowledge the context as outlined above
- challenge the hegemony of subjects
- revisit our curriculum ideology

# Hegemony of subjects

- These **socially constructed cultural inventions** have become a major part of **state discourse on schooling** (cf Education Act)
- They are a legacy of Western style Classical Humanism which views the world in divided compartments, whereas **life is not packaged into subjects!!**
- They are extremely resilient – see fate of ‘Areas of Experience’ proposal of CEB
- They provide the basis for the identity of Irish post-primary teachers e.g. conditions for teacher recognition
- Recipe for fragmentation, power struggles and for Exchange and Coordination rather than Professional model of Collaboration and communities of practice (TALIS, 2009) (see emphasis today on Department Heads and Subject Planning!)
- Can easily become a disconnected series of facts and events with deadening effects on lives of teachers and students

# Revisit our curriculum ideology

- At secondary level the curriculum is a derivation from the “**classical humanist**” tradition with an overlay of technological/ technical/ vocational subjects and a leavening provided by the development projects’ (OECD, 1991, p. 68)
- Cardinal Newman : ‘all knowledge forms one whole or circle and the omission of any one branch impairs the wholeness of knowledge...
- Apple changes ‘**what knowledge** is of most worth?’ to ‘**whose knowledge** is of most worth?’ ... says it’s about maximising the production of high-status knowledge e.g. Science, Tech, Maths today...
- **Paucity of critical curriculum debate:** what does curriculum have to say to the big problems facing our planet today?
- Pinar (2004, 35) prefers *currere*, the Latin infinitive form of curriculum, meaning to run the course or the running of the course [enabling] students to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interest of self-understanding and social reconstruction.
- Relevance for **modes and techniques of assessment** – move towards authentic approaches...

# Some opportunities

- Literacy and numeracy as cross-curricular themes
- NCCA focus on key skills
- Modern focus on generic skills at third level cf. Don Barry
- Harold Macmillan: 'Nothing you learn in the course of your studies will be of the slightest possible use to you in after life – save only this – that, if you work hard and diligently you should be able to detect when a man is talking rot, and that, in my view, is the main, if not the sole purpose of education' (Kenny, 1997, 20)



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