

The Value-Integrative Function of the Morality and Rule of Law Subject in an Integrated Curriculum and Its Mechanisms of Enactment——A Theoretical Analysis Based on the Interdisciplinary Teaching Practice of My Tribe Growth Diary

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Abstract

Within the practical context of curriculum integration reform, the reconstruction of disciplinary boundaries has prompted renewed scrutiny of the intrinsic educational value of each subject. Focusing on a school-based integrated curriculum titled “Morality and Rule of Law and Humanities,” this study conducts an in-depth case analysis of the lesson My Tribe Growth Diary to examine the distinctive function and pathways through which the Morality and Rule of Law (MRL) subject contributes to the integration of historical and geographical knowledge. The study argues that, in interdisciplinary teaching, MRL should not remain a peripheral “value add-on”; rather, it ought to assume the central role of a value integrator. By attributing meaning to multi-disciplinary knowledge, providing ethical framing, and fostering identity construction, MRL enables a critical transition from knowledge integration to competency cultivation. Building on the case, this paper proposes a four-stage pedagogical model—contextual embedding, role embodiment, conflict deliberation, and consensus elevation—and further explicates the internal mechanism through which value-oriented guidance in integrated curricula transforms knowledge into understanding, understanding into practical wisdom, and ultimately embeds such wisdom into moral character. This study offers a theoretical lens for positioning MRL within the contemporary curriculum system and provides an actionable professional framework for frontline teachers to implement high-quality interdisciplinary teaching.

Keywords

Value integration; Interdisciplinary teaching; Morality and Rule of Law; Integrated curriculum; Mechanism of competency formation.

1. Introduction

Reforms guided by the Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan (2022 Edition) are accelerating a profound shift from a discipline-centered orientation toward a competency-centered one. Against this backdrop, school-based and regional experiments in integrated curricula have proliferated. The “Morality and Rule of Law and Humanities” curriculum represents a typical attempt to reorganize content across three humanities and social science subjects—MRL, history, and geography. While such integration increases instructional flexibility, it can also generate a dilemma: without a clear leading logic, integrated curricula may degrade into a simple collage of knowledge, thereby diluting or obscuring each subject’s distinctive educational contribution—particularly the value-shaping function embedded in MRL.

Classroom observations suggest that, when historical narratives appear grand and geographical materials are visually vivid, MRL is often reduced to a “moral tailpiece” or a “rule-

of-law label,” resulting in a mechanical routine of “historical facts + geographical phenomena + MRL commentary.” This approach fails to capture the essence of interdisciplinary learning: addressing complex problems that cannot be handled by a single discipline through deep interaction among concepts, methods, and ways of thinking, thereby cultivating students’ core competencies. Accordingly, this paper asks: in integrated curricula such as “MRL and Humanities,” how can MRL transcend its conventional content boundaries to enact its value-integrative function and become an endogenous force that drives substantive interdisciplinary learning and competency cultivation? To respond to this question, the present study offers a theoretical and practical account through a close reading of the highly integrated lesson My Tribe Growth Diary.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS PRESENTATION

2.1. The Deep Structure of Interdisciplinary Learning: From Knowledge Connection to Meaning Construction

Authentic interdisciplinary learning does not merely aim to help students notice that different disciplines describe the same theme (e.g., history describing civilizational processes and geography describing environmental foundations). Rather, it seeks to guide students to understand the deeper interactions among these descriptions and to construct integrated meaning on that basis (Drake & Burns, 2004). Meaning construction inevitably involves value judgments—for example, how should different responses to environmental constraints be evaluated; what constitutes legitimate leadership; and why should cooperation be preferred over coercion in collective life. In addressing such questions, history provides sequences of evidence, geography offers spatial and environmental constraints, and MRL supplies evaluative criteria and interpretive frameworks. Thus, the core contribution of MRL lies in endowing multi-disciplinary knowledge with ethical dimensions, social meanings, and a value order—transforming “objective facts” into “educational knowledge” that can be understood, evaluated, and connected to contemporary life.

2.2. The Value-Integrative Function of MRL: A Three-Dimensional Account

Building on the above, the core function of MRL in integrated curricula can be defined as value integration, which unfolds in three dimensions.

- 1) Meaning attribution. MRL elevates historical events and geographical facts from “what happened” and “where it happened” to “why it matters” and “what it means for us.” For instance, the historical-geographical fact that “Yellow River tribes invented rammed-earth techniques” can be interpreted as laying an order-based foundation for settled agrarian civilization.
- 2) Ethical framing. MRL offers an ethical analytical framework for interpreting historical choices and social evolution. When discussing the selection of tribal leaders, for example, concepts such as fairness, responsibility, and the public good provide standards for evaluation, turning historical development into a site of moral learning.
- 3) Identity construction. Through normative interpretations of shared historical experiences and geographical spaces, MRL guides students to develop positive identification with communities, the nation, and the state—for example, by interpreting diverse tribal contributions as the origin of a “unity in diversity” cultural gene.

2.3. Research Propositions (Conceptual Hypotheses)

H1: In integrated curricula combining MRL with history and geography, MRL should serve as a value integrator rather than a peripheral “value add-on,” enabling the transition from knowledge integration to competency cultivation through meaning attribution, ethical framing, and identity construction.

H2: The value-integrative function of MRL can be enacted through a four-stage pedagogical process: contextual embedding → role embodiment → conflict deliberation → consensus elevation.

H3: Teachers' professional capacities—value sensitivity, disciplinary-logic integration, dialogic facilitation, and assessment design—constitute key conditions for effectively implementing value integration in interdisciplinary teaching.

3. EVALUATION INDEX AND MODEL CONSTRUCTION

3.1. A Four-Stage Practice Model for Value Integration

Drawing on the teaching practice of My Tribe Growth Diary, this paper operationalizes value integration through a four-stage model: contextual embedding, role embodiment, conflict deliberation, and consensus elevation. The model is designed so that value guidance runs through the entire learning process, ensuring that interdisciplinary learning moves beyond factual linkage toward substantive meaning construction and competency development.

3.2. Analytical Approach

This study adopts an interpretive, case-based analysis of a highly integrated lesson to identify (a) how value integration led by MRL is embedded in instructional sequences, (b) how disciplinary knowledge is reorganized around value-laden problems, and (c) how students' meaning construction and identity formation are facilitated through task design and classroom discourse.

4. EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS AND PATH EXPLORATION EFFECT

4.1. Contextual Embedding: Creating an Interdisciplinary Problem Space with Value Tensions

Rather than beginning with direct knowledge transmission, the lesson establishes an integrated problem space centered on the survival and development of ancient tribes. This space naturally contains multiple tensions: human–nature (survival challenges), individual–collective (role responsibilities), and tribe–tribe (competition and cooperation). By presenting archaeological artifacts (historical evidence) and cultural distribution maps (geographical space), the teacher situates students in a complex scenario where facts and values intertwine, providing a concrete basis for subsequent value reasoning.

4.2. Role Embodiment: Internalizing Social Norms Through Embodied Participation

Students are assigned roles such as leaders, sages, and historiographers. This is not merely a game-like division of labor; it constitutes an initial experience of social roles and norms. Abstract MRL notions such as responsibility and professional ethics are translated into concrete behavioral expectations (e.g., historiographers must record impartially; resource officers must be accountable for communal supplies). Role embodiment thus becomes a key step in value internalization by linking external norms to students' situated actions.

4.3. Conflict Deliberation: Value Reasoning at Disciplinary Intersections

The core of the lesson is deliberately situated at intersections where disciplinary knowledge meets value conflict.

In the survival decision-making segment, historical knowledge (possible consequences of migrating or staying) and geographical knowledge (types and patterns of natural hazards) provide the factual basis for deliberation, while the question “what choice best serves the tribe”

directs students toward MRL reasoning on collectivism, long-term perspectives, and leadership virtues. Teacher prompts such as “if we migrate, is it fair to the elderly and the weak?” explicitly moralize survival strategies.

In the alliance formation and leadership selection segment, historical processes (the emergence of alliances) converge with social rules (how leaders are chosen). Candidates’ speeches invoke standards such as competence, justice, and inclusiveness; voting simulates the exercise of public reason. By guiding students to compare the legitimacy of “seizing power by force” versus “public selection through collective recommendation,” the teacher effectively conducts an early rule-of-law-oriented enlightenment on political civilization.

4.4. Consensus Elevation: From Historical Explanation to Value Identification

The culminating act of “offering treasures to jointly build the royal city” serves as the crystallization of value integration. Through interpretive narration, the teacher symbolically maps material and technological contributions of different tribes onto core values of distinct civilizational types—order in Yellow River agrarian civilization, ritualized wisdom in Yangtze rice-growing civilization, and vitality and bravery in grassland civilization. This interpretive move not only explains how “unity in diversity” emerged as a historical fact, but also clarifies why such integration is worth cherishing as a value judgment. The lesson ultimately directs students toward identification with a core feature of Chinese civilization—embracing diversity while working in solidarity—thereby aligning historical cognition, geographical analysis, and education on socialist core values.

4.5. Professional Reflection: Competency Requirements for MRL Teachers as Interdisciplinary Designers

The success of this case implies professional requirements that go beyond traditional single-subject instruction. MRL teachers need to shift from transmitters of MRL knowledge to designers of interdisciplinary learning and leaders of value guidance. In particular, four capacities are pivotal.

- Value sensitivity and translation: the ability to identify latent value issues (e.g., power, fairness, responsibility, identity) in historical–geographical materials and translate them into essential questions that drive inquiry.
- Disciplinary-logic integration: deep understanding of historical chronological logic, geographical spatial-relational logic, and MRL normative-value logic, and the ability to design tasks where these logics converge and mutually substantiate one another in problem solving.
- Dialogic facilitation and meaning negotiation: rather than providing standard answers, the teacher acts as a moderator of deep dialogue, using probing questions, counter-questions, and alternative perspectives to support students’ autonomous construction and negotiation of meaning.
- Assessment design: development of evaluation tools aligned with interdisciplinary objectives and MRL competency goals to assess students’ value judgment, rational choice-making, and meaning generation in complex contexts, not merely factual recall.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The teaching practice of My Tribe Growth Diary demonstrates that, in integrated curricula such as “MRL and Humanities,” the MRL subject is not only indispensable but should occupy a central position in value guidance and meaning integration. The proposed positioning of MRL as a value integrator and the four-stage practice model provide a feasible pathway for addressing the problem of formal integration without substantive coherence.

More broadly, curriculum integration should not dissolve disciplines; rather, it should re-clarify and strengthen each discipline's distinctive educational contribution. This requires moving beyond superficial knowledge integration to explore deeper mechanisms at the competency level. For the MRL subject, contemporary challenges constitute a major opportunity: within a broader interdisciplinary landscape, it must—and can—demonstrate its irreplaceable role in laying the foundation for students' value rationality. Future work may examine differentiated value-integration strategies across themes and develop school-based professional development models that support teachers in acquiring the relevant competencies, thereby advancing integrated curriculum practice from formal exploration toward substantive deepening.

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