

A Shift To Problem Not Discipline

Johnny Dee Sparkes

What do we mean by
Interdisciplinarity?

- Oxford dictionary online: ‘The quality or fact of involving or drawing on two or more branches of knowledge.’
- UCL on their website: ‘Put simply, interdisciplinary means ‘combining subjects together in new ways.’ Literally, interdisciplinary means ‘working between different academic disciplines.’

What should it aim to do?

- Nowotny et al describes it as an approach that should transcend disciplinary boundaries in their book 'Re-thinking science: Knowledge and the public in an age of uncertainty'
- Should aim to adopt an inquiry that attempts to integrate disciplines to the extent that the disciplines themselves disappear and a unitary type of inquiry emerges. (Stember, M. (1991) Advancing the Social Sciences Through the Interdisciplinary Experience. Social Science Journal. 28 (1), 1-14.)
- To educate to provide a range of tools to students to equip them to deal with society.
- To have rigour and be robust.

- Be Applicable. Nowtrony in her book 'Science in search of its audience' talks about the growing importance of the 'context of application' as a site for research
- To incorporate holistic concepts more closer to practical life. '...for disciplinary structures in universities to be removed and replaced by more holistic concepts that were closer to practical life' (Chettiparamb, A. (2007). Interdisciplinarity: a literature review. 1st ed. Southampton: The Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Group, p.12.)

To Utilise Problems to assist in its learning

- “Problems designate theory and methods, not the reverse, in sharp contrast to discipline-based and curiosity-driven inquiry.” (Brewer, D. G. (1995) Environmental Challenges: Interdisciplinary Opportunities and New Ways of Doing Business. The 1995 MISTRA Lecture. Stockholm: MISTRA.)
- A focus from discipline to problem

Well how is focusing on problems the most effective approach?

- Transcends disciplinary boundaries.
- Integrate disciplines to the extent that the disciplines themselves disappear and a unitary type of inquiry emerges.
- Provide a range of tools to students to equip them to deal with society.
- Has rigour and is robust.
- The growing importance of the ‘context of application’.
- More holistic concepts that are closer to practical life.

The problems

- How do we go about deciding what problems we should address?
- How are we going to make sure that these problems are ones that are vast and are inclusive of the perspectives offered from a wide range of disciplines?

Through discussion

Through having individuals of different disciplines come together to discuss what problems should be addressed, the problems that are formulated are more likely to include ideas and concepts from all those different disciplines. And hence from that, be ones that are of much greater importance and depth to society.

Thank you for listening