

Applying A Transdisciplinary Approach to Inquiry: A Brief Paper Discussing Intellectual Interests

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The concept of transdisciplinarity is a crucial aspect of the Transformative Studies doctoral program at the California Institute of Integral Studies. This focus sets it apart from many other academic programs that students can choose to pursue higher educational degrees. Complex topics, such as trauma, resilience, growth, and development, tend to be approached in a discipline-specific manner. Taking a transdisciplinary approach can add depth to the current scientific understanding of these topics.

While I am still on the path to determining the specifics of my area of inquiry for my dissertation, my current topic is related to completing a program evaluation for classrooms serving students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD). I plan to develop a tool for evaluating special education student's resiliency along with the resilience of the organization and classroom, in general, to provide substantive and actionable feedback to increase resiliency. The areas of educational systems, special education services, students with EBD, trauma, resiliency, and growth and development are areas of intellectual interest. Montuori (2012) describes five dimensions of applied transdisciplinarity. Being able to focus specifically on the area of inquiry, resilience for me, and how it applies versus a more disciplinary focus is one of those dimensions.

A transdisciplinary approach can be contrasted with a disciplinary approach in how it understands paradigms. Montuori describes the difference between looking at intra-paradigmatic versus trans-paradigmatic as another dimension. Through my evaluation, I will have to look at my grounding and perspective in social work and be able to move beyond only that. While I am very grounded in social work, I will also need to look at the topic of resilience from an organizational management perspective to understand the larger school setting I will be evaluating. I will need to look at the paradigmatic concepts within education to see how trauma, resilience, growth, and development fits into social-emotional learning strategies for classrooms and understanding classroom management strategies.

The third dimension of transdisciplinarity, as described

by Montuori, is related to thinking processes. A transdisciplinary approach will use complex thinking and move away from disjunctive or reductive thinking. Considering the concepts related to resilience from an ecological perspective and how the various parts all interrelate and be a highly complex model for understanding the area of inquiry. Furthermore, in my current thinking about my program evaluation, I would like to make considerations for individual students (micro), the entire classroom or group (mezzo), and for the school they are placed in (macro). Evaluating systems at various levels of interaction adds levels of complexity in thinking. The ecological understanding of the interconnected and interdependent components both at a classroom level and school level also requires a higher level of complexity in thinking.

Augsburg (2014) does not classify all the thinking around transdisciplinarity as providing a space for integration of the inquirer, as Montuori (2012) argues. For my project, I am not sure what ways this will relate. One exciting way of thinking about this is through consideration of using qualitative methods. Lincoln et al. (2011) describe both positivism and post-positivism methods. They related the posture of the inquirer in those methods of removing the researcher to be more objective. Paradigms such as participatory approaches necessarily include the inquirer as they become the instrument by which data is collected and interfaced. Considering using a participatory model in my program evaluation brings in connection with the researcher.

The final dimension that Montuori describes is related to the inquiry being creative versus reproductive. Program evaluation is, by its nature, a complicated task with many variables to address and understand. Being able to develop a method for evaluating programs to determine resilience will require a great deal of creative problem-solving. Taking a transdisciplinary approach appears that it will be a useful stance to take for my inquiry.

This article was written Jacob was working on Ph.D. in Transformative Studies program while at the California Institute of Integral Studies. It is being self-published at his website, <http://jacobrcampbell.com/resources> to help other practitioner and students in their practice and give them ideas.

References

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