

Editors' Introduction

By way of introduction to the first article in this, the 38th volume of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* and the first volume produced in collaboration with our new publisher, Texas Tech University Press, we might well offer the Pythonesque phrase: "And now for something completely different." Not that the article isn't as utterly interdisciplinary as it could be. But it is very differently so—and different in ways only a very few other pieces in the whole body of interdisciplinary literature have been—and indeed in the whole body of interdisciplinary scholarship of every kind.

As those of us in our field are well aware, the major portion of "interdisciplinary scholarship of every kind" has involved "inter"play and "inter"work between and among the disciplines of the natural sciences and the social sciences. And some of the humanities have certainly found their way into integrated teaching, as well. The disciplines of the creative arts and the humanities that study the creative arts? Not so much. Review of the many decades of literature discussing "best practices" in ID classrooms reveals that relatively little of it deals with classes in which the disciplines of the creative arts are integral—or even referenced.

The classes most often represented in the scholarship of interdisciplinary teaching and learning typically involve faculty and students doing just as the seminal Klein/Newell definition of ID work suggests they should do: undertaking "a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or or profession," a process that "draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights into a more comprehensive perspective" that will enable effective action. If the nearly 40-year history of this journal is any indication, the "disciplinary perspectives" teachers and researchers have found most useful, that is, instrumental in enabling effective action, are those of the natural and social sciences.

Happily, in spite of the preponderance of coursework and scholarship privileging ID work in the natural and social sciences, those of us who do teach (and otherwise perform) in the sphere of the creative arts and the humanities studying them have persisted in publishing and presenting on the often decidedly different versions of interdisciplinarity represented by our work. And both *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* and AIS conference programming have been pleased to assist in making such material available to interdisciplinarians of every ilk.

Bill Newell was himself wonderfully aware of the differentness of interdisciplinarity in the creative arts and humanities—and aware of the need to accord its differentness more attention. Of particular note are his comments

in the final chapter of *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research* (2012):

Whereas interdisciplinarians in the natural and social sciences seek to integrate on behalf of others, presenting their new, more comprehensive understanding as a finished product, [those in] the fine and performing arts and the humanities studying them (and other aesthetic texts) seek to draw others (audiences, viewers, readers) into the integrative process and encourage them to participate in a shared integrative process [that is as affective an experience as it is a cognitive one, or more so]. (p. 301)

And Bill made the important further point that, in this case, the “shared integrative process” isn’t usually aimed at the “full integration” so often wished for by others but so “seldom wished for [by those] in the fine and performing arts, and by extension in the humanities disciplines wishing to respect the deliberate ambiguity” and generative tensions “inherent” in the experiences offered by this very different kind of interdisciplinarity (p. 301).

As announced above at the start of this introduction, the first article in this volume does embody the kind differentness Bill and others have described as characterizing the work of interdisciplinarians in the creative arts and humanities. And it’s no wonder that it does so. Its author, Allison Upshaw, an Assistant Professor of Voice at Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, has a long history of performance in a variety of creative arts—and a long history of teaching the arts themselves or integrating them into instruction in other disciplines. When she decided to seek a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies (at the University of Alabama), she was asked to teach others training to be teachers how to integrate the creative arts into their instruction. And in her dissertation and other scholarly work that she’s done since, she has offered commentary on her experience with those future teachers—with the aim of elucidating the same differentness of interdisciplinary endeavor in the creative arts and humanities that we’ve been talking about here.

Furthermore, both in her dissertation and in the other scholarly work that she’s done since, including the article we are offering you here, Allison has striven to redefine the “scholarly” to include the “art-full.” One might say she’s responding to a heartfelt call from interdisciplinarian Jean Petrolle, a call that resounded in her article in the 2007 volume of *Issues*, a plea that we “enlarge possibilities” for scholarship in our field, encouraging “[interdisciplinary] scholars to imagine intellectual directions and prose forms that integrate the personal with the analytical and the critical with the creative without sacrificing creativity or scholarly rigor” (p. 111). In the years since Jean wrote her article, only a few have dared to offer *Issues* (and other venues for publication and presentation) material that thus “[crosses] borders between scholarship and artistry, scholarship and life, life and art” (p. 128). But Allison has certainly done so—in her decidedly “non-traditional” article, “L’OPERA: Layered Operations Practicing Embodiment, Reflection, and

Analysis in the Performative Paradigm.” We believe you will appreciate the reading experience it offers.

Of course, we hasten to add that we also appreciate scholarship “more narrowly defined,” in accord with the traditional literature of interdisciplinarity in its form and content. And we are pleased to offer you two such articles next. They not only instantiate such excellence in the Scholarship of Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning as we like to celebrate in *Issues*, but also demonstrate how SOITL work can inspire transformations that enhance the interdisciplinarity of undergraduate ID programs that have not, in fact, been offering students the most effective ID training possible.

In the first of the two articles, “A Case for Critical Interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinarity as Democratic Education,” Aaron Stoller, Director of Academic Programs at Colorado College, explains how his expertise in “The Epistemological Foundations of Education” (the subtitle of one of his books) prompted him to initiate a pilot program in coursework that would introduce first year students to “the kinds of intentional, deliberative processes that [as Dewey would have it] constitute deep democracy” of the sort we hope to promote in the wider world our students enter after graduation. What he envisioned—and put into practice over several years of a pilot program so successful that the college has now mandated such coursework for all first year students—was “Critical Inquiry Seminars” in which faculty would address some issue of their choice from their own disciplinary perspective but also engage students in critical dialogue on the processes and paradigms of this discipline. The critical inquiry is expanded through a series of “convergences” with faculty and students in other seminars, and dialogue on those aspects of other disciplines, too. It is this innovative variation on more conventional versions of “Introduction to Interdisciplinarity” courses that Aaron sees as embodying a version of “critical interdisciplinarity” that has already begun to infuse the disciplinary culture of the place with a new openness to dialogue across differences (such as Dewey would certainly approve, as would Bill Newell, who also believed in educating for democracy).

In the third article in this volume, Katharine Schaab of Kennesaw State University, just outside Atlanta, Georgia, also reports on a SOITL project that is having transformative effects on the ID programming at her institution—in spite of the fact that her project, unlike the major venture involving many colleagues that Aaron Stoller administered at Colorado College, was decidedly minimalistic, involving only Kate, working alone, studying three small sections of a course she taught during her very first year on campus. This brutal work of redeveloping a curriculum, mostly in isolation, is familiar to many *Issues* readers. As it happened, however, she was undertaking this work in a department much aware that the Interdisciplinary Studies major created in 2005 (and renamed Integrative Studies in 2009) had morphed into a program that was far from practicing the interdisciplinarity its descriptions still

preached. Most of the 600-plus students enrolled in its “General Studies” track were more interested in completing their degrees than in any substantive training in interdisciplinary thinking or development of competencies in that field. The department had hired Kate because they were seeking a colleague whose expertise might help them revise their curriculum so as to make the Integrative Studies (INTS) degree more truly interdisciplinary.

And with support from KSU’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Kate was indeed able to help make interdisciplinarity salient in the degree. Her pursuit of the SOITL project, as the start of a complete degree overhaul that is now underway, is described in her article, “From General to Interdisciplinary Studies: A Multi-Stage Curriculum Intervention.” We think you will find her detailed discussion of the problems she identified in the version of the “Introduction to Integrative Studies” course all were teaching when she arrived, the changes she made (and studied) in her second go-round with that course, and the data about changed outcomes that persuaded colleagues to join her in a complete re-think of the course that they began to offer in the spring of 2020 as fascinating as we do. And as inspiring. As she says at the end of the article,

Perhaps many will take heart from this evidence that even a little bit of [SOITL] work can go a long way toward persuading colleagues and administrators [who might also find themselves in programs that aren’t truly interdisciplinary] that changes that will enhance interdisciplinary studies can and should be made.

The last of the articles in this volume is “Notes from a Case Study Investigating Pornography and Healthy Sexual Development.”

Now that we have your attention . . . let us tell you how this article represents norms in our field, too, but norms other than those of the two articles discussed just above. Whereas those focus on teaching, this focuses on research. And whereas those report on the work of individual interdisciplinarians, this reports on the work of an interdisciplinary team—and on the challenges and rewards of their teamwork. We consider it a particularly fine example of the literature on collaborative interdisciplinary work, whether in the academy or in the wider world. Here is how its authors, Katerina Litsou and Roger Ingham from the University of Southampton in the UK and Alan McKee and Paul Byron from the University of Technology Sydney in Australia, describe what they offer, which is what they learned while researching their own efforts at collaborative research:

This article reports on an interdisciplinary project that conducted a series of systematic reviews of academic research about the use of pornography and sexual health. Academics from a variety of disciplines were involved; half of the team had a background in humanities and the other half a background in psychology. While working closely together, they realized that

they disagreed on many different matters, such as how to ask questions, how to use definitions, what count as data, what counts as a good outcome in research, how to structure an academic article, and how to use other academics' work. This article reports on the team members' use of reflective practice to analyze their responses to these disagreements and suggests that such disagreements can be seen as positive and productive in interdisciplinary research as they may facilitate collaboration among disciplines.

Among the most memorable and useful of their findings? “[T]he ability to have a good laugh is a key research skill” given the all-too-human natures of those involved in any interdisciplinary team. We think you’ll appreciate their other findings, too, even though they never get into the sexy stuff their title seems to promise they might.

Our best wishes to all of our readers who have made it through this difficult year—and, as Garrison Keillor used to say, “Be well, do good work, and keep in touch.”

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