

Editors' Introduction

Perhaps first among the many inter- and transdisciplinarians who would argue for communication and, when possible, collaboration, across boundaries of every kind is Julie Thompson Klein. In words and in action, no one in our field (however variously defined by us and our organizations) has been a more effective champion of productive engagement than she. And it won't surprise you to hear (if you haven't heard already) that she has recently been active in the formation and first endeavors of the Global Alliance for Inter- and Transdisciplinarity (the ITD Alliance). The experience has prompted her to write the first of the articles in this, the 39th volume of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*: "Alliances for Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity: A Call for Response." In it she reflects on similarities and differences among five of the founding organizations of this new Alliance: the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies (AIS), the Network for Transdisciplinary Research (td-net), the Integration and Implementation Sciences network (i2S), the International Network for the Science of Team Science (INSciTS), and the Center for Interdisciplinarity at Michigan State University (C4I).

In the course of her reflections, she reminds us of an article William Newell wrote for *Issues* in 2013, an article in which he described "The State of the Field," discussing the increasing heterogeneity of those doing interdisciplinary work of some kind and the organizations representing them. Bill used that occasion to issue a challenge to the members of AIS (the organization he founded and led for so long, as readers of *Issues* will know): Should AIS rethink its mission in light of other organizations' theories about and practice of interdisciplinarity (and, of course, transdisciplinarity, so much a part of the ID scene by then)? Julie summarizes what Bill said about the shift away from foci that had characterized AIS concerns from its start (in 1979):

[there had been a shift] from AIS interests in teaching to research, from undergraduate to graduate levels, from humanities and "soft" social sciences to natural sciences and medicine (and to a lesser extent "hard" social sciences), from an individual to a team activity, and from the ivory tower to the real world including participation of non[*sic*]-academics in research and problem solving.

Bill suggested that these trends raised questions about the very identity of AIS—and whether it should perhaps consider expanding its definition of interdisciplinary studies so as to encompass the sorts of interdisciplinary work so many others were busy doing by 2013.

Of course, Julie's discussion of the work others are busy doing now raises the same questions Bill was asking—and not just for members of AIS but also for members of the other organizations comprising the ITD Alliance. As she notes at the end of her article, "all five organizations need to conduct

the kind of introspection that Newell called for in 2013, both internal to their membership and in dialogue with other organizations.” Yes, as she says, “[p]roliferation and dispersal across an increasing number of contexts complicate understanding of both inter- and trans-disciplinarity.” However, the Alliance itself makes more possible than ever the dialogue-cum-introspection that offers splendid opportunity “for mutual learning across intellectual traditions, socio-political forces, cultural perspectives, and institutional structures and missions.” Enlightened by interaction, each organization might rethink its mission, perhaps rededicating itself to the version of inter- and/or trans-disciplinarity with which it began its work, perhaps initiating change.

As it happens, the second article in this collection constitutes the strongest possible evidence that, whatever else AIS might do if it should rethink its mission, it should never give up supporting the sort of interdisciplinary work it has most supported from the beginning—the work of an individual teacher-scholar in an undergraduate interdisciplinary studies classroom. Jennifer Schulz is just such a teacher-scholar, a Senior Instructor in Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies at Seattle University, and the article she offers here is just such an article as this journal likes to feature whenever it can, an especially fine example of the Scholarship of Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning (or SOITL) that AIS considers so important in our field.

Titled “An Integrative Interdisciplinary Pedagogy for Well-Being in a Catastrophic Era,” the article describes her experience teaching a course on the surprising relationship between well-being and catastrophe even as the pandemic raged. She explains how she employed “methods of literary analysis in conversation with phenomenological psychology and philosophy” to give students insight into that relationship via close-reading of three novels depicting times of terrible upheaval in which characters nonetheless manage to find “a sense of connectedness, community, and hope.” She further explains how thus “diving into a shared exploration of loss, fear, and displacement” took her and her students well past insight into a lived experience in which they “[showed] up increasingly in [their] full humanness” and themselves achieved a “sense of connectedness, community, and hope,” a sense of well-being, even in the midst of our own terrible times. We think you will be as moved by this article—this exemplar of SOITL at its best—as you will be enlightened by it. We certainly were.

The third article in this collection, “Interdisciplinary Studies and Implementation Science: Clarifying the Concept of Fidelity,” is about as different from the second as it could be—and that means it represents anything but the sort of SOITL work that’s been so central to AIS for so long. Rather than reporting on “the work of an individual teacher-scholar in an undergraduate interdisciplinary studies classroom,” it reports on the work of a team of researchers (specifically, researchers in science and medicine) addressing

the application in real-world situations of “interventions” meant to improve outcomes. And it addresses the need for fidelity in such application and the consequent further need for a reliable framework for evaluating fidelity. The article embodies just such shifts in the practice of interdisciplinarity (and attendant theory) as Bill Newell spoke of in 2013 and as Julie Klein speaks of in the article that opens this volume—shifts including a decided move towards work (team work) that can be characterized as transdisciplinary.

In fact, the article, by lead author Catrine Demers, from the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Ottawa, who was working with two others from that Faculty, Sayna Bahraini and Wendy Gifford, and three from the Faculty of Health at Laurentian University, Zoe Elizabeth Higgins, Roxanne Pelchat, and Pascal Lefebvre, should have real appeal for interdisciplinarians of every ilk. We think members of AIS as well as members of other organizations that accord transdisciplinary work by teams of researchers more attention than AIS has accorded it in the past will benefit from its inclusion here. And it is our hope that its inclusion will demonstrate that, however proud of its past AIS may be, AIS *is* interested in expanding the parameters of the work it endorses and encourages beyond its earlier boundaries.

Of course, as you'll see when you turn to the article itself, it actually offers a fusion of older and newer versions of ID work in that its authors emphasize how the former helped enable them to do the latter—and may help others to do the latter, as well. As they say at the start of the piece,

evaluating fidelity is essential for researchers and practitioners when making sure they implement a plan as intended. However, the concept of fidelity remains unclear, given that various conceptualizations exist within and across disciplines. To help researchers and practitioners understand fidelity, a conceptual framework integrating definitions within and across disciplines is needed.

They proceed to report on the study that issued in the “conceptual framework” they speak of—including a “scoping review” of truly unprecedented scope—and, in the process, they report on their use of “techniques that will be familiar to interdisciplinarians,” steps that enable the discovery of commonalities amid differences and the integration of disparate views, improving communication and collaboration. The steps served them well. As they put it themselves, “this very article illustrates how interdisciplinary studies and implementation science can work together.”

The fourth and final article that we're offering this year, by Marissa McCray of the University of Dayton, is “Easing the Uncertainty: How an Interdisciplinary Learning-Living Program Helped Undeclared Students Make Academic and Vocational Choices.” It represents SOITL work, as Jennifer Schulz's article does, but this time the individual teacher-scholar is discussing the

teaching and learning taking place in the whole of an undergraduate program and not just one of the classes in that program. She is interested in the extent to which the program successfully implements key elements in its mission (and the mission of the university as a whole)—those that support students as they make decisions about their majors and careers, about, in fact, the trajectories they envision for the whole of their future lives.

Given that such decision making about vocation is especially challenging for “undeclared students” who enter college with no major in mind, Marissa focuses on students in that category. And she details the way the Discover Arts Program at Dayton serves them via its Core Integrated Studies Program, a two-and-a-half-year interdisciplinary learning-living program that integrates the humanities, arts, and social sciences in its coursework and also complements the experiences students share in the classroom with those they share in their dorms. As Marissa says towards the end of her article,

Themes drawn from the data [she collected for her study] reveal how the Core Program created a means for students, even the most undecided, to navigate the uncertainty of decision-making processes by immersing them in robust interdisciplinary curricular content, challenging course projects, and thought-provoking experiential opportunities, all while fostering a tight-knit intellectual community. The interdisciplinary curriculum coupled with the learning-living component of the program offered students a highly impactful experience.

And it was an experience impactful in ways that did indeed advance the Core Program mission, complementary to that of the university itself, to shape not just students’ minds but also their characters in ways that will yield purposeful work and meaningful living later in life as well as in the rest of their academic careers. As the program motto would have it, “*Core docet cor.*” Or “Core educates the heart.”

Perhaps we might close this introduction to the 39th volume of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* by noting that organizations may develop a sense of vocation even as individuals do—creating mission statements that articulate the purposeful work that they would like to do. And we might further note that, for organizations as for individuals, it may be a good idea to revisit plans now and again, and reconsider the version of vocation they represent. Bill Newell seemed to be thinking along these lines in 2013 when he challenged AIS to consider expanding its definition of interdisciplinary studies—and rethinking its mission. And Julie Klein is thinking along these lines now, encouraging “all five” of the organizations she discusses in her article “to conduct the kind of introspection that Newell called for . . . both internal to their membership and in dialogue with other organizations.” Indeed, in the very title of her article, she issues “A Call for Response” to this challenge. We would like to do the same.

We look forward to hearing from members of our own organization—and from members of the others that Julie has named— in short, from all who share our passion for interdisciplinary work, however defined. As Julie says at the end of her article, and we will end with these words, too, “this journal is an ideal site for response.”

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