

# INTERDISCIPLINARY LIBRARY EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

*The Global Age can be understood as an Age of Interdisciplinarity, as complex global problems increasingly require interdisciplinary approaches. Interdisciplinarity is a relatively nascent curricular approach yet one increasingly needed in the field of education. This study advocates postsecondary interdisciplinary library education reforms that effectively integrate discipline-based coursework with interdisciplinary courses to prepare future librarians to utilize interdisciplinary curricular approaches in P-12 education. It conceptualizes interdisciplinary library education based on a constructivist theoretical approach indebted primarily to State, and focuses especially on literature in the field of interdisciplinary studies, published in the India since 1997. The confluence of interdisciplinary and constructivist approaches, as well as interdisciplinarity and disciplinarity are examined. Existing interdisciplinary library education programs, interdisciplinary teaching strategies, and curricular designs are explored. This study provides a conceptual model that addresses library professionalization, interdisciplinary vision, global consciousness and wide- awareness, and the democratic dimensions of interdisciplinary library education. It conceptualizes critical and sociocultural relevant education, learning communities, student-centered education, novice and non-specialist interdisciplinary inquiry, Deweyan cognitive disequilibrium, interdisciplinary research questions and questioning skills, interdisciplinary integration, and alternative academic structures and resources in interdisciplinary library education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Interdisciplinary has burgeoned worldwide at an unprecedented pace and scope during the Global and Information Ages, coinciding since the late twentieth century (Apostel, Berger, Briggs & Michaud, 1972; Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Lattuca, 2001; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004). During this era, human beings have increasingly encountered and benefitted from interdisciplinarity, so much so that the Global Age can be understood in part as a new or revalorized Age of Interdisciplinary. Increasingly, problems are gauged, solutions are discovered, and human expressions are manifest through interdisciplinary endeavor. There are many explanations for the particular phenomenon and timeliness of interdisciplinarity in the Global Age. Miller and Boix Mansilla (2004) state In a world where most of the important dilemmas refuse to fit neatly into disciplinary boxes, fostering the capacity to synthesize knowledge from multiple perspectives, to capitalize on distributed expertise, and adapt to changing disciplinary and professional landscapes becomes an essential aim in our efforts to prepare young professionals for effective participation in contemporary life.

Similarly, Davies and Devlin (2007) find, "Certain conceptual issues demand new perspectives to provide breakthroughs. These insights can certainly come from different disciplines" (p. 4). Interdisciplinary Ronald Jones (n.d.) explains the need for interdisciplinarity, which he finds linked in this epoch to the "fundamental shift in western culture from an object-based to an information-based culture wherein information networks distribute knowledge and influence on a global scale". In the Global Age, it has become increasingly necessary to understand and act upon issues through the integration of multiple discipline-based forms of knowledge and experience, what The National Academies (2005) refer to as "deep knowledge from different perspectives" (p. 17). Removing disciplinary and academic barriers through interdisciplinary pursuit facilitates the development of the fluency and skills required to engage complex issues, to create conditions that enable flashes of understanding from one field to illuminate another, and to utilize and revalorize knowledge that draws upon expertise from and interface with more than one disciplinary perspective. Interdisciplinarity addresses dire twenty-first century social and environmental crises, including global warming, famine, terrorism, and pandemics, as well as diminishing food, environmental, and energy resources, for major contemporary problems are not disciplinarily, culturally, or geopolitically bound, and require interdisciplinary solutions. Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (2003) states, "The challenges of our age are problems without passports; to address them we need blueprints without borders" (n.p.). The global issues and calamitous problems for which human beings are largely responsible have reached unprecedented levels of complexity. Interdisciplinary inquiry examines the problems and wonders of the world, cultivating creativity and inspiration that fires the human imagination, affirming meaningful connections between human existence and the world, and helping human beings transcend what divides us. It has become increasingly necessary to engage in interdisciplinary inquiry and problem solving, which extends knowledge beyond the confines of traditional disciplinary approaches and ways of knowing, and affirms the value of the interminable forms of knowledge and understanding (Greene, 2001). As Klein (2002) states, "Interdisciplinarity.. has become more important because the needs it serves, although varied and even conflicting, are pervasive" (p. 9). In the Global Age, interdisciplinary is implicated at every turn as an essential mode of research and education, a phenomenon that "has delivered much and promises more" (The National Academies, 2005, p. 1) in terms of initiating critically important human understandings and undertakings that would otherwise be inaccessible or unachievable, yet upon which the survival of humanity depends.

## METHODOLOGY

This section provides a rationale for the qualitative research design approach (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995) to data analysis employed in this *a priori* conceptual study (Phillips, 2000). This interpretative study is predicated on a constructivist grounded methodology (Charmaz, 2003), focusing on major strands of constructivist epistemology theoretically steeped in the writing of Maxine Greene. Based on a review of the literature and document analysis of interdisciplinary studies and library education programs, this study

provides solid descriptive data (Janesick, 2003) that explores the current status of research in the field of interdisciplinary library education, as well as the established ideas and theories in the field of interdisciplinary studies that pertain to conceptualizing interdisciplinary library education. To insure research data crystallization (Janesick, 2003), the review of the literature is supported by an analysis of documents, including website resources, conference programs, university catalogs, and other documents that describe interdisciplinary library education programs and professional educational associations. Document analysis is considered pragmatically useful for evaluating and interpreting qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003b). This research design illuminates the unique structures and institutional policies, as well as the normative orientations and curricular approaches, of interdisciplinary library education programs. Further, this study provides a model for conceptualizing postsecondary interdisciplinary library education, and forms conclusions based on this research. It investigates the concentric and interwoven relations in education of the disciplinary and interdisciplinary as well as the cultural and the individual, amid "the radiating spheres of public life that can either enrich or threaten our shared 'search for truth'" (Benston, 2005, p.107).

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is guided by a question posed by Geertz (1983): "The interesting question is not how all this muddle is going to come magnificently together, but what does all this ferment mean" (p. 34)? This study conceptualizes interdisciplinary library education programs and advocates interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning as a postsecondary educational reform. This study of interdisciplinary library education is itself an interdisciplinary study, forging common ground between the fields of interdisciplinary studies and library education and integrating them within a social constructivist methodology and theory of learning. Using Maxine Greene's constructivist methodological lens, this study provides a review of the literature of recognized scholars in the fields of interdisciplinary studies, social constructivism, and library education to conceptualize and produce a model of interdisciplinary library education. It is acknowledged that arguments can never prove the truth of their presuppositions or conclusions (Magee, 1999). Yet, this study supports Adler's (2001) claim "whether a fragmented system of education can in any effective way produce integrated beings is perhaps the most significant question confronting practitioners of .. .education today" (p. 151). It holds that interdisciplinary library education is essential in the Global Age as it challenges library education to more fully consider and implement interdisciplinary curricular and pedagogical innovations.

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