



# CONSIDERATIONS ON INTERDISCIPLINARITY AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF LABOUR PEDAGOGY

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**Abstract.** The text presents attempts to define and distinguish the terms multi-, inter – and transdisciplinarity. Various forms of knowledge integration and related dilemmas leading to internal contradictions in the perception of interdisciplinary knowledge were pointed out. Reference was also made to selected problems of interdisciplinarity. Against this background, questions were formulated about labour pedagogy cooperating with other disciplines – in fact, in this case, are we still dealing with a subdiscipline of pedagogy or rather labour sciences of an inter – or transdisciplinary nature?

## ROZWAŻANIA O INTERDYSYPLINARNOŚCI Z PEDAGOGIKĄ PRACY W TLE

**Słowa kluczowe:** interdyscyplinarność, transdyscyplinarność, pedagogika pracy jako subdyscyplina

**Streszczenie.** W tekście zaprezentowano próby definiowania i rozróżniania pojęć multi-, inter- i transdyscyplinarność. Wskazano na różne formy integracji wiedzy i związane z nimi dylematy prowadzące do wewnętrznych sprzeczności w postrzeganiu wiedzy interdyscyplinarnej. Odwołano się także do wybranych problemów interdyscyplinarności. Na tym tle sformułowano pytania o pedagogikę pracy kooperującą z innymi dyscyplinami – czy w istocie mamy w tym przypadku do czynienia jeszcze z subdyscypliną pedagogiki czy raczej naukami o pracy o charakterze inter- czy transdyscyplinarnym?

## The idea of going beyond assigned disciplines

In a complex social reality in which volatility prevails, and the fluidity of social phenomena and processes is experienced by almost everyone, it is difficult not to notice these intense transformations on scientific grounds as well.

Already in the middle of the twentieth century, Charles Percy Snow gave a lecture at Cambridge on „Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution”, which sparked a heated dispute of considerable scope regarding the existence, dilemmas of antinomy or necessity of cooperation between two cultures – the culture of humanists (of literary provenance) and the culture of natural scientists, the representatives of the sciences (falling within the classical concept of *science*). The latter often, not only in the colloquial sense, contributes to authentic knowledge of the world and creates opportunities for its practical control. Humanities, on the other hand, however it serves the development of personality, no longer creates such opportunities, and is therefore not a „true” science. We continue to experience these dilemmas both in the dimension of metareflection and practical activity in circles of institutional assignments, within which belonging to the prestigious sciences is a real scientific assignment, bringing tangible evaluative benefits (credits, patents, citations) to the university, while the humanities, on the other hand, is a rather well-regarded, but only a kind of „complement” in the development of science and educational systems at various levels.

The second problem emerging from a consideration of the nature of science points to two opposing processes related to its development. On the one hand, we are dealing with the increasing specialization of the detailed research carried out, and on the other, with the emergence of phenomena, processes, and problems that demand a multifaceted view and explanation from different theoretical perspectives.

The world in which we function is a whole, in which the emergence and development of individual phenomena, processes, and trends cannot be artificially separated from each other (ontological assumption), and various fields of science and detailed disciplines mutually penetrate, complement and inspire each other. And a consequence of recognizing *the multidimensionality of the phenomena (natural and social) of the world as a unity is the assumption of the necessity of cognitive and research attitudes that will be able to tame and grasp this multidimensionality of the world of phenomena, at the same time pointing to hidden*

*or difficult to access directly relationships, dependencies and connections (an assumption of an epistemological and methodological nature).* (Gara, 2014, p.40).

Such an attitude, in turn, requires building broader interdisciplinary domains of knowledge that transcend traditional disciplinary divisions, which in itself is problematic and gives rise to ambivalence. On the one hand, arguably, there are no disciplines entirely isolated from others, while on the other hand, full interdisciplinarity is not only impossible to realize, but also constitutes an illegitimate identity claim (Chmielewski, Dudzikowa, & Grobler, 2012).

In turn, R. Włodarczyk and W. Zlobicki (2011) note that the proclamation of boundaries in the mapping of scientific disciplines is an expression of rationalism and prudence because it facilitates cognition limited to separated fields, ordering the search, but these boundaries are not impassable, they are of a flexible nature, and research referring to the ideal of integrated knowledge is extremely important.

Thus, the concepts of multidisciplinary, as opposed to unidisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity and perhaps the most widespread – the concept of interdisciplinarity – are emerging in the science space.

## **Multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinarity**

It is worth emphasizing that the scopes of the meaning of the concepts of multi-, inter- or transdisciplinarity often overlap because they derive from one fundamental assumption – the need to overcome the particularism and isolationism of one discipline.

R. Poczobut (2012, p.41) points out that *when we speak of multidisciplinary research, we mean one that involves multiple disciplines of science forming a loose coalition of disciplines (called a „multidiscipline”)*. J. Gara (2014) notes that while there are factors that integrate a multidiscipline in nature, subject matter, methodology or as a result of institutional ties, the degree of their cohesiveness is less than in the case of interdisciplines (cognitive science seems to be an adequate example).

In turn, the concept of interdisciplinarity *indicates the interdependence (cooperation) of research conducted at the interface of various scientific disciplines (theories), assigned to the solution of a well-defined research problem (included in the interdisciplinary class)* (Poczobut, 2012, p.41).

This idea derives from the assumption that a given research problem is located at the interface of different (usually 2–3) scientific disciplines, which enforces

the need for their interaction for its constructive solution, requires the involvement of the conceptual apparatus, theories and research methods belonging to each of these disciplines. A classic example of this is the interaction of scientists representing pedagogy with representatives of other disciplines in the area of social sciences – psychology and/or sociology in explaining certain phenomena and processes.

J. Tabaszewska (2013), based on Hejmej's definition, considering the concept of interdisciplinarity, refers to the involvement of the researcher, who takes the risk of going beyond the discipline they represent in order to make an in-depth, multidimensional analysis of the phenomena, which in itself does not shatter the conviction of the existence of separate disciplines along with their characteristic methodology.

Interdisciplinarity is based on the assumption of the impossibility of an in-depth description of complex phenomena using the instrumentarium of only one discipline, and the recognition of the limitations of monodisciplinary methodological approaches. M. Dudzikowa notes that for some, interdisciplinarity is a kind of passing fad, *hence the ease of trivialization, the „guildism” and „tribal fights” between disciplines or departments, as well as within them, the triumphs of individual or collective narcissism, the dilettantism of „interdisciplinary” trained PhDs and the narrowness of their dissertations* (Dudzikowa, 2012, p.23). Others, in turn, based on the idea of epistemological syncretism, point to the dilution of traditional disciplines or even the collapse of the idea of interdisciplinarity in the name of unidisciplinarity. (Dudzikowa, 2012; Gara, 2014).

According to M. Nowak (2010), we are dealing with interdisciplinarity when several disciplines enter into cooperation with each other, not in order to simply apply the knowledge of one to others (this is rather multidisciplinary) but to solve the problems facing researchers in a genuine dialogue. This requires flexibility – admitting the existence of other research approaches, understanding their indispensability to each other, and a genuine exchange of information between disciplines. Such collaboration does not have to occur between disciplines that are commonly considered related, and the results are transdisciplinary, i.e., they will be able to benefit multiple disciplines, to be used to broaden or transform their subject matter and methodologies.

Transdisciplinarity means, according to J. Gara (2014), that the object of research or research attitude goes beyond the framework of traditionally understood disciplines, and the purpose of such verifications *is to provide abstract categories and models, so they are conducted at a higher level of generality and*

*abstract from the establishment of „common fields” and exemplifications (manifestations) of these general categories within the individual disciplines and their respective discourse universes. In this sense, „transdisciplinarity” consists in analyzing systemic properties as such, i.e. as properties of abstract models or presentations considered without any reference to their applications within detailed disciplines. In other words, the transdisciplinary approach examines systemic properties and categories per se (Gara, 2014, p. 37).*

Transdisciplinarity goes beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries – while in interdisciplinarity the focus is on the borderline of disciplines, taking advantage of mutual theoretical and methodological and research inspirations, we talk about the idea of transdisciplinarity when a given area of knowledge is not clearly assigned to a particular discipline, does not undergo multithreaded analysis using traditionally set disciplinary boundaries (Tabaszewska, 2013). Tabaszewska refers to the example of the transdisciplinary concept of wandering concepts by Mieke Bal (a Dutch cultural critic and theorist who works on narratology). Referring to this concept, we are talking about the process of moving concepts and research categories from one discipline to another, but going beyond simple surfing. These concepts may have been present in different disciplines, but they functioned differently in each of them. This process is nonlinear and dynamic – concepts are constantly evolving under the influence of the developing methodology of the discipline and the research problems posed. At the same time, they also often change the discipline in which they appeared (to which they „arrived”).

*K. Maliszewski (2016, p.23) treats transdisciplinarity (...) as a higher level of interdisciplinarity – interdisciplinarity that is internal, self-educative, transgressive and contemplative of its own (initial) identity. Crossing scientific boundaries, capturing models and categories from different fields, translocations generating new constellations of meanings, indulging discourses and activating the potential of traditions – all these activities across, into and beyond complicate one’s own perspective and locate research in the space of non-institutional thinking, focused on reality and the concern to grasp it as fully as possible. Transdisciplinarity is a new interdisciplinary formula for the unity of knowledge. (...)*

The author points out (Maliszewski, 2016, p.24) *that it is no longer the summation of knowledge about one thing that comes into play, but the punctuated deepening and imbuing of the issue with difference through translocation of categories, theories and texts, with a view to some unifying principle, an energetic arché that from a collection of elements, forces and dimensions forms a whole.*

*Transdisciplinarity – moving discourse beyond traditional sciences – seeks structural perspectives, and viewpoints that allow establishing meaningful constellations of meanings, and thus simultaneously: 1) enrich (secondarily) many disciplines at once, 2) establish a metadisciplinary level of knowledge.*

## **Dilemmas of interdisciplinarity**

M. Walczak (2016) notes that integration in science leading to the construction of interdisciplinary knowledge can refer to the creation of a certain whole from elements thanks to finding a unifying factor, e.g. concepts, theses, and assumptions (product of theorems). Or on adding different elements together (sum of theorems). Integration can also involve elements beyond the disciplines being integrated. The unifying factor can also be complementarity – the complementarity of different types of knowledge, subject or object dependence. The unifying element of a discipline can be its very heterogeneity, which seems to apply to pedagogy as well.

According to M. Walczak – citing authors from the Shiyali R. Ranganathan school – integration can take various forms. Among them, there are (Walczak, 2016, pp.121–124):

- 1) Conglomeration (juxtaposition of different theses or sets of information from several disciplines; often then there is no terminological or methodological consistency, and the integration is in fact apparent)
- 2) Loose coupling (combination of two disciplines in the form of targeting, comparison, influence, and tool transfer – one discipline uses elements of the other, but there is no unification of terminology)
- 3) Binding (a specific problem/subject creates a common point of reference for several disciplines, e.g., cultural studies integrating various specific disciplines dealing with individual elements of culture; they are integrated by an overarching term such as culture, such knowledge has a certain degree of coherence)
- 4) Distillation (involves extracting related concepts/subjects from different disciplines and creating a new discipline around them, e.g., education management abstracted from the management; no interdisciplinary knowledge is created, only a „new” discipline emerges)
- 5) Fusion (it is rather mono-disciplinary knowledge related to the creation of one new formally organized, borderline, „contact” discipline out of two disciplines)

The peculiar paradox of interdisciplinarity and interdisciplinary knowledge is that if there is a weak integration, interdisciplinary knowledge in the sense of a coherent theory as a mature form of knowledge is not created, while if there is a strong integration of knowledge from different disciplines („distillation”, „fusion”) and there is *the unification of, for example, terminology or assumptions, then eventually disciplinary knowledge is created because a new discipline is created. The concept of interdisciplinary knowledge contains two elements in opposition to each other: on the one hand, the element of unity of integration (unification) and the creation of somehow a homogeneous (coherent) whole, and on the other hand, the element of diversity (inhomogeneity, heterogeneity). Talking about interdisciplinary knowledge may look like an adversarial concept* (Walczak, 2016,p.125).

In view of the signalled internal contradiction of assumptions, the question arises (probably rhetorical at the moment) whether and to what extent it is possible to create truly interdisciplinary knowledge. However, it does not exclude the very idea of learning about and studying the complexity of the world from the perspective of various cooperating disciplines.

L. Witkowski (2009, 2010, pp. 56–58) points to five basic pathologies of interdisciplinarity:

- 1) hypostasizing relationship links (seeing one’s scientific activity and its products only in the context of the formal framework of one’s own discipline, the representatives of which think they know everything about it);
- 2) usurpation of the representation of one’s discipline, on behalf of which the researcher speaks;
- 3) helplessness and ineffectiveness of contacts with representatives of other disciplines, to which the researcher is not open and does not have the ability to open others to the areas of inquiry of the discipline they formally represent;
- 4) lack of ability to grasp fragmented phenomena and processes as fragments of a broader whole, difficulty in undertaking holistic analyses;
- 5) low coefficient of „prominence” of representatives of the various disciplines that makes it impossible to enter into an equal dialogue with significant representatives of other disciplines.

M. Dudzikowa (2012) also notes the dangers of trivialization or apparent interdisciplinarity, which can provide a kind of cover for pseudoscientific research. The lack of sufficient knowledge of the conceptual apparatus, theoretical concepts and methodological workshop of both (several) disciplines results

in the fact that in reality, the research does not meet the criteria of scientificness in either of them.

K. Maliszewski (2016) points out that the trap of interdisciplinarity is superficiality or a kind of bluff involving the use of the concepts of another discipline to create the appearance of novelty, and freshness of theoretical and research approaches.

There is also a temptation to focus on side problems for one/multiple disciplines, which do not have significant scientific value for one/multiple of them, and there is also the question of whether we are actually talking about scientific research, in which the researcher is supposed to know the ins and outs of two or more disciplines, or rather team research – specialists from different disciplines?

A. Nalaskowski (2018), on the other hand, referring his considerations directly to pedagogy, sees another disturbing phenomenon (with a declaration of interdisciplinarity in the background) – the ignoring by this science of its own philosophical roots and pedagogical foundations, in favour of a set of satellites, which the author counts as „super-pedagogy” – here he lists works (without substantive evaluations) dealing with issues without a clear connection to the main issues of pedagogy, from the circle of, for example, cultural studies or feminist studies. He fears that pedagogy is wherever we call it. *Perhaps we are witnessing the birth of new scientific disciplines growing out of pedagogy (...) after all, pedagogy, like sociology or psychology, grew out of philosophy. The legitimate question remains, however, whether these new disciplines annihilate pedagogy (...)? It is possible that we are dealing with a creatogenic diversity, an attractive multifaceted content and workshop (...) But it is difficult to chase away the fear that it is a blurring of clarity, a maze we have entered, forgetting the Ariadne thread. Or it is simply... our inevitable decline.* (p.73).

## **Pedagogy of work in the context of multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinarity**

Relating the previous considerations to (celebrating the half-century anniversary of its existence) labour pedagogy, we can ask what this sub-discipline actually is from the point of view of cognition and research of reality. These considerations are not evaluative in nature, focusing on posing questions rather than categorical answers to them, for a very simple reason – I am unable to responsibly provide these answers. Earlier reflections on the nature of interdisciplinarity



and the dilemmas associated with it were also accompanied by my question about personal scientific identity.

The statement about the necessity of cooperation of labour pedagogy with other disciplines seems a truism. Drawing from philosophical, psychological, sociological, economic, human resource management, cultural studies or anthropological theories seems to be the basis for making a multidimensional view of the labour domain as a phenomenon present in the name of this subdiscipline. The same is true of the need for the interaction of detailed sub-disciplines within pedagogy itself. Their considerable growth, with unclear, inconsistent criteria for their distinction, moreover, causes them to overlap and, *de facto*, specific research explorations made by one person can be attributed with equal success to several subdisciplines. Besides, it is not difficult to get the impression that the driving force for distinguishing multiple sub-disciplines does not become a substantively justified separate field of theoretical analysis and empirical verification, but the ambition of researchers to proclaim the boundaries of their interests or the formal necessity of naming specific units within an institution (e.g., establishments, studios, research teams). We also have not developed (and probably will not) clear logical, criteria that can legitimize such subdisciplines, for example – whether within pedagogy they are to be the developmental age of the individual, whose functioning is subject to descriptive and explanatory (e.g. child pedagogy, adolescent pedagogy, andragogy, gerontology), or the institutional assignment of the individual (e.g., preschool pedagogy, school pedagogy, college pedagogy), or rather the subject and type of activity that is subject to description (social pedagogy, leisure pedagogy, counselling, labour pedagogy, etc.). The multiplicity of these criteria, makes one wonder whether such a far-reaching specialization is in fact necessary (?) or rather represents an apparent activity (?).

The areas and research questions identified in labour pedagogy are constantly evolving, going well beyond their original assignment to vocational education in the broadest sense, which is conditioned by intensive cultural, social and economic development, emerging a number of new challenges for the humanities and social sciences. As Z. Wolk writes (2020, p.102), *Since labour pedagogy is a subdiscipline of pedagogy, that is, of the sciences of education, and at the same time is interconnected with many other scientific disciplines, especially labour science, it seems impracticable, but also inappropriate, to set clear boundaries for it. After all, it draws heavily from other disciplines and at the same time contributes to them, which leads to the formation of interdisciplinary areas of knowledge that are difficult to assign to a single field or scientific discipline. Labour pedagogy*

*is a typical example of a sub-discipline situated on the borderline of many different sciences, addressing interdisciplinary problems.*

However, the question arises whether these interdisciplinary problems are not often solved using knowledge integration strategies that have the character of (using the typology cited earlier – Walczak, 2016) *conglomeration* (apparent integration, without terminological and methodological consistency) or *loose coupling* (when, for example, labour pedagogy uses the terminology of management sciences). This observation does not apply only to labour pedagogy, it also applies to all cooperative disciplines.

An exemplification of the existing chaos in the area of classification of knowledge about human labour is, for example, the proposal of the conference theme organized by the Department of Human Capital Management of the University of Szczecin on May 18–20, 2022 ([www.konferencjakzkl.pl](http://www.konferencjakzkl.pl)). I am in no way judging either the idea of the conference or its substantive concept, I am only citing attempts to organize its subject matter, which are probably impossible in the current state of knowledge. The conference, entitled *Human Capital in the Enterprise and the Economy – an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, is to cover the following areas: human resource management, flexible human capital management, organizational behaviour, socioeconomic inequality, values in organizations, labour pedagogy and the economics of education (the following subfields are distinguished here: remote education, educational practices, competencies, economic education, educational efficiency, educational system, lifelong learning, knowledge management) as well as the labour market, family and social policy, ergonomics, and psychology and sociology of work (here without distinguished specific areas). Where, looking at these mappings (thematic, disciplinary?), do the research of many labour educators, including the author's, locate? By the way, we also gain insight into how representatives of other disciplines (here, economics) perceive the thematic scope of labour pedagogy and what issues they assign to it. In addition, we note the peculiarity of the language defining the subject matter of the conference, based on the tradition of economic sciences, which from the pedagogical point of view is decidedly dehumanized – although, after all, the issue itself is the subject of our inquiries – human capital, which pedagogues also deal with, is rather resources, competencies of individuals or social groups. Each of these disciplines, therefore, operates its own language, presents issues in the perspective of the dominant theories in its field, uses a methodology characteristic of the discipline, but indicates problem fields

that it customarily attributes to other disciplines whose existence it notes, and problems of a cross-cutting nature it tries to verbalize just in case avoiding disciplinary assignment.

D. Opozda (2014, p.179) reflecting on interdisciplinarity (in this particular case in relation to family pedagogy, but they seem to be valid also in relation to labour pedagogy) indicates that *interdisciplinary dialogue is justified and necessary (...) due to: 1) the broad and complex object of cognition, 2) models of cognitive relations in pedagogy, 3) the possibility of confronting the results of research and scientific knowledge, 4) practical considerations* (e.g., issues related to the training of students).

Perhaps this interdisciplinary dialogue is possible (necessary) not only in relation to **labour pedagogy**, but at a higher level of integration, in the form of *bonding* (Walczak, 2016) within the labour **sciences** – the common point of reference and integrating factor here is undoubtedly labour and man in relation to work, and theoretical reflection and research exploration of this field aims in the long run to produce knowledge of a transdisciplinary nature.

However, the mere classification of specific research areas into labour pedagogy or labour sciences does not determine the quality of inquiry and research, the validity and advisability of their conduct or the theoretical and applied dimensions of the results obtained.

It also raises the subversive question of whether it is possible to be a representative of a particular (sub)discipline without being aware (or perhaps willing) of belonging to it. It seems that in scientific practice we are increasingly seeking an answer to a specific research question, quite freely crossing essentially (in) existing boundaries. This is not an easy undertaking, given the diversity of language, methodological paradigms, and research instrumentation, but is this not what is happening right before our eyes?

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Earlier reflections are also a question about my own personal positioning in this broad mosaic of disciplines, and sub-disciplines, they are also a question about my place in it.

The theoretical categories and research areas I am (have been) concerned with, among others, which appear in the bibliographic database in the tag cloud created automatically based on keywords related to personal achievement, concern the course of a person's professional life in a developmental context (image

of the professional world in childhood, design of educational and professional path in adolescence, career patterns), social assistance and support, counselling with special emphasis on career guidance/career construction counselling, the teacher (educator) in the process of building relationships to support the student, education at the stage of higher education, the category of trust in organizations, stress and academic burnout of students. These are categories grounded in theories from the fields of psychology, sociology, management science, and pedagogy.

Do my research and ever-expanding theoretical reflection actually locate me in the field of labour pedagogy (not just in the sense of formalized assignment) or rather in the context of interdisciplinary (transdisciplinary) labour sciences?

Or maybe it is a question that has no clear answer...

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