

Editorial

**Author:**Johan Wassermann¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Humanities Education, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Johan Wassermann, johan.wassermann@up.ac.za

How to cite this article:

Wassermann, J., 2018, 'Editorial', *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 14(2), a635. <https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v14i2.635>

Copyright:

© 2018. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

When analysing the structures of faculties of education in South Africa, one cannot but be struck by the wide range of appellations, for example departments, clusters or units used for purposes of demarcation. Some are logical academic categories or groupings, for example Mathematics and Science Education, Educational Psychology, Education Studies or Leadership and Management Education. However, such neatness is not shared by Humanities, Social Sciences or Social Studies Education as they include a plethora of fields such as Sport Science Education, Life Orientation Education, Music Education, History Education, Tourism Education, Geography Education, Gender Education, Social Justice Education, Commerce Education, Language Education and Art Education, to name the most common fields. Often academics in these disciplines not only teach the academic content but also the subject-specific methodologies. This is contentious as in-depth transdisciplinary expertise is expected.

Academics and students in the above-mentioned disciplines are invariably left to create some form of internal cohesion and logic that might explain their academic work and justify the existence of the Humanities, Social Sciences or Social Studies Education departments, clusters or units they find themselves in. This is a hard row to hoe when compared to the neat epistemologies embedded in the more clearly demarcated academic departments, clusters or units. A possible way of creating cohesion among the disciplines embedded in Humanities, Social Science or Social Studies Education is by means of transdisciplinarity. Drawing on the works of Jantsch (1972) and Godemann (2006), 'transdisciplinarity' refers to contexts that require academics to work together across disciplinary boundaries, also known as 'boundary talk'. This transfer or integration of knowledge and understandings is limitless and can ensure wide engagement with scholarly ideas shared from diverse knowledge bases. Transdisciplinarity can also manifest itself in other forms of 'boundary talk' related to, for example university policy, information communication technology usage, pedagogy and student relations. It can, however, also bring about tension and resentment when disciplinary identities are threatened.

In light of the above, this special edition of *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* – an accredited DoHET publication (ISSN: [Online] 2415-2005, [Print] 1817-4434) dealt, in 12 articles, with 'Transdisciplinary manifestations in Humanities, Social Sciences or Social Studies Education'.

In his article, Davids mapped out how a history project on the District Six removals evolved into a collaborative transdisciplinary inquiry that transcended disciplinary boundaries. This resulted in the use of a myriad of conceptual frameworks of research approaches across disciplines. This is followed by an article by Jarvis in which she argues that restorying can be used as a teaching-learning strategy to engage Social Sciences students, in the context of Human Rights Education, in transdisciplinary boundary talk. Such talk happened in the space between, across and beyond academic disciplines. Crossing disciplinary boundaries was also the focus of the article by Ntombela and Mngomezulu. In their contribution, they interrogated a learning support programme at a South African university that transcended disciplinary boundaries. For their part, Kruger and Evans engaged with the transdisciplinary possibilities on how to read peace education and teach English to speakers of other languages through multiple literacies theory. Linguistic teaching was also the focus of the contribution by Evans and Nthulana. This article focussed on the linguistic challenges faced by Tshivenda-speaking learners and teachers when they have to transition disciplinary boundaries to English in Grade 4.

Textbooks as transdisciplinary constructions also came under the spotlight. Maposa, in his article, investigated the representation of the temporal notion of post-colonial Africa in South African History textbooks. He laid bare the ambiguous manner in which temporal notions of post-colonial Africa were framed – which creates a challenge for learners who have to engage with the textbooks. Pillay and Maistry focussed on gendered discourses in Southern African Business Studies school textbooks. Overall they found that gendered ideologies continued to prevail in a remarkably overt manner in the textbooks analysed.

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

The idea of integration as a form of transdisciplinarity was foregrounded in two articles. In her contribution, Iyer investigated attempts at integrating History and Geography and how it led to disciplinary commonalities and teacher discongruity. On their part, Mpofu and Maphalala proposed an integrated curriculum approach for assessing student teachers' professional competence. An original slant on transdisciplinarity was adopted by Woest, who in her contribution, investigated the demands placed on beginner teachers to teach subjects that they were not qualified in. This resulted in amongst others, fear and frustration.

In his article, Wasserman reasoned that the personal narratives of the History of South Africa of the History students who participated in his study shunned a broader disciplinary framework. Instead they favoured a form of political history dominated by race. Finally, Pieter du Toit turned the educational research lens on himself and reflected

on his more than 20-years of involvement in a postgraduate higher education qualification for academics.

Although the 12 articles which appeared in this special edition speak of transdisciplinarity in numerous ways, they were held together by an internal cohesion and logic that speaks about the nature of Humanities, Social Sciences or Social Studies Education in South African universities. The fulcrum around which Humanities, Social Sciences or Social Studies Education revolves is the rich transdisciplinary nature of their make-up.

References

- Godemann, J., 2006, 'Promotion of interdisciplinary competence as a challenge for higher education', *Journal of Social Science Education* 5(2), 51–61.
- Jantsch, E., 1972, 'Inter- and transdisciplinary university: A systems approach to education and innovation', *Higher Education* 1(1), 7–37. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01956879>