

Interdisciplinary Perspectives in Education and Counselling



Angus McMurtry, University of Ottawa. Adult and Workplace Learning ERU Seminar, December 2, 2009.

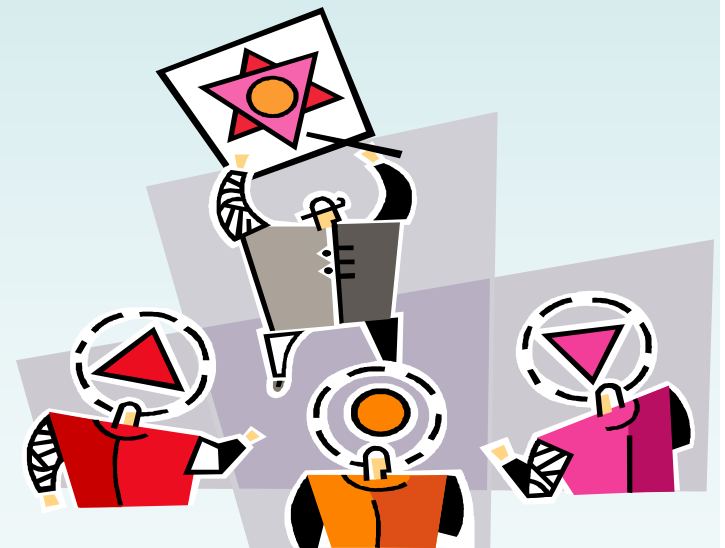
Pair-Share: What do the following two terms mean to you?

Interdisciplinary

Research Paradigms

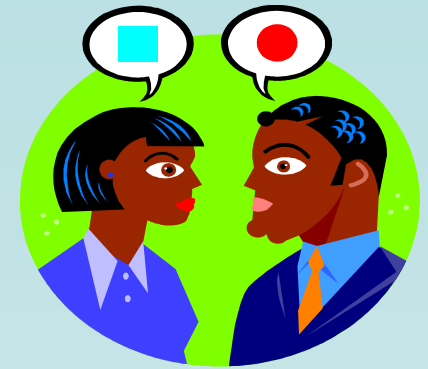
Multidisciplinary: Drawing upon insights from 2 or more disciplinary perspectives in order to better understand or address a certain issue or problem.

Interdisciplinary: Above *PLUS* the attempt to integrate these insights into some sort coherent overall concept, theme or metaphor.



Problem: The theories, methods and assumptions of disciplines are often incommensurable or in conflict.

"Quite literally, two opposing disciplinarians can look at the same thing and not see the same thing" (Petrie, 1976)



Furthermore: one cannot—and should not—attempt to avoid or eliminate these conflicts.

"difference, tension, and conflict are not barriers that must be eliminated. They are part of the character of interdisciplinary knowledge negotiation" (Klein, 2005)

Sample procedure for integration: Newell, W. (2001a). A theory of interdisciplinary studies. *Issues in Integrative Studies*, 19, 1-25.

A. Drawing on disciplinary perspectives:

- defining the problem (question, topic, issue);
- determining relevant disciplines (interdisciplines, schools of thought);
- developing working command of relevant concepts, theories, methods of each discipline;
- gathering all current disciplinary knowledge and searching for new information;
- studying the problem from the perspective of each discipline; and
- generating disciplinary insights into the problem.

B. Integrating their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective:

- identifying conflicts in insights by using disciplines to illuminate each other's assumptions, or by looking for different terms with common meanings, or terms with different meanings;
- evaluating assumptions and terminology in the context of the specific problem;
- resolving conflicts by working towards a common vocabulary and set of assumptions;
- creating common ground;
- constructing a new understanding of the problem;
- producing a model (metaphor, theme) that captures the new understanding; and
- testing the understanding by attempting to solve the problem.

Two Approaches to Interdisciplinary Integration

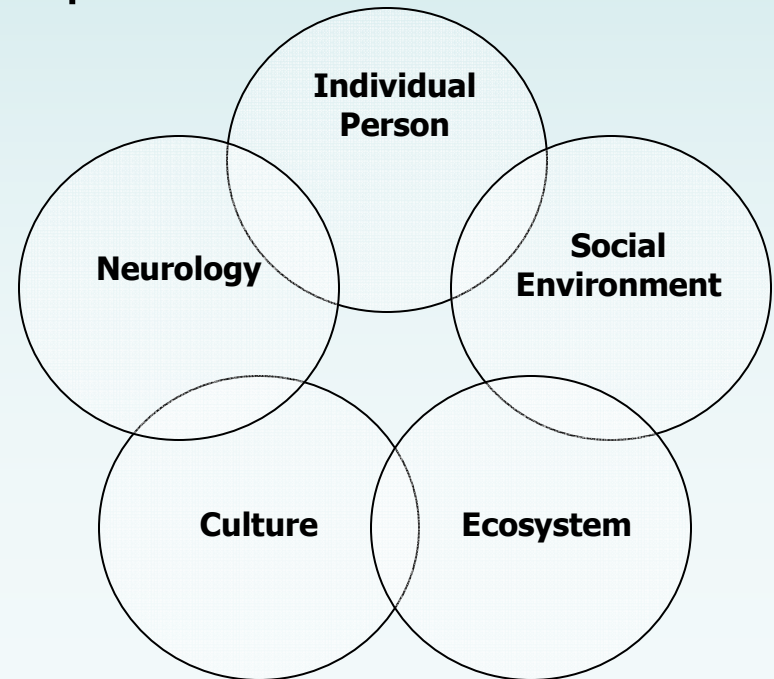
Socio-Cultural Approach

Focus on professional socialization, historical conflict, gender, class, team relationships, etc.

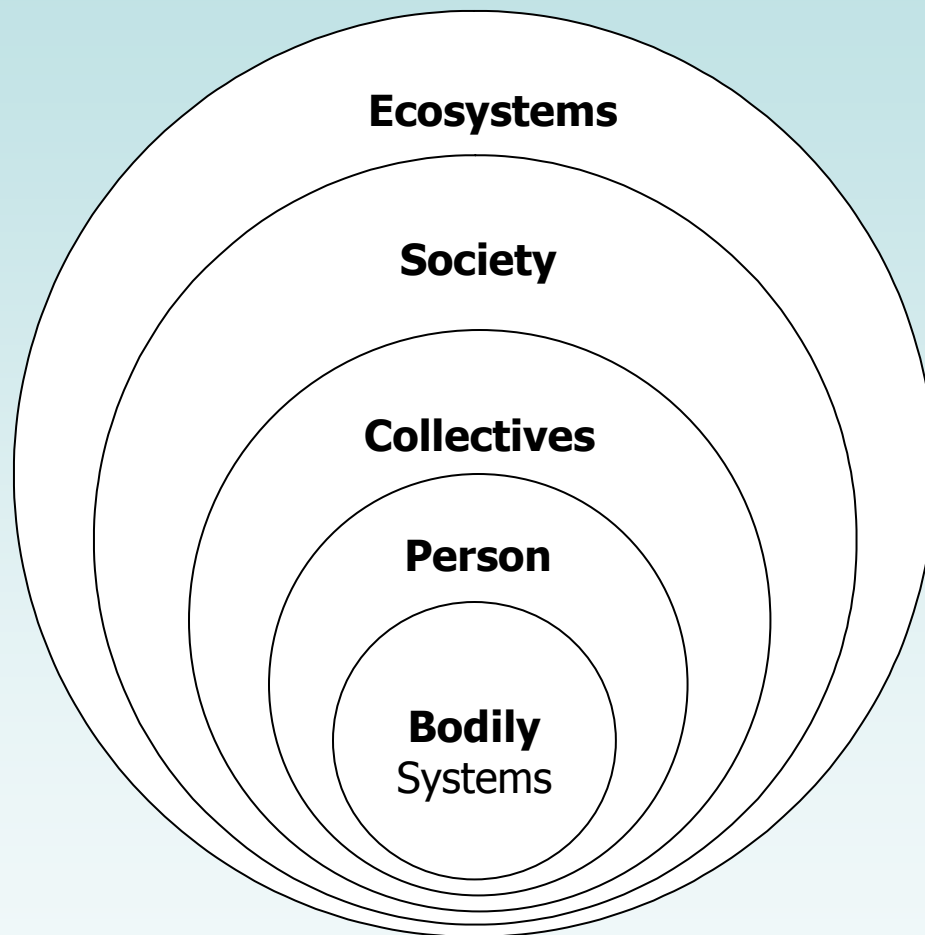


Complex Phenomena Approach

Focus on the differing sorts of systems (e.g. biological, psychological, educational, sociological) studied by disciplinarians.



Complex Phenomena Approach: Applied to Learning



Ecosystem:

Biological, Evolutionary & Ecological Theories

Society or Body Politic:

Anthropology, Cultural Studies and Critical Discourses

Collectives, Social Bodies & Disciplines:

Sociology and Social Constructivism

Person or Body Biologic:

Psychology and Radical Constructivism

Bodily Systems & Sub-systems:

Recent studies in neurology, immunology and related domains

* Complexity and Education Website, University of Alberta, Retrieved July 21, 2005 from <http://www.complexityandeducation.ualberta.ca/>