



Academic collaboration

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Academic collaboration across the boundaries of disciplines is not a new phenomenon. In fact, before greater specialisation and clearer demarcation of disciplines occurred, researchers often worked in more than one field. Critical scholars thought holistically and tried to bring together existing knowledge across scientific borders.

With the explosion of knowledge since World War II, interdisciplinary collaboration and research has become essential and more widespread.

Interdisciplinary researchers primarily approach a specific research problem from the perspectives of different disciplines. The autonomy of the different participating disciplines is; however, maintained. Each researcher functions as a specialist of his or her own discipline and studies the problems from the perspectives of that discipline. A combination of the specialised perspectives of different disciplines offers multifaceted insights into a particular problem (Du Pisani 2003:12–13).

Interdisciplinary research is achieved by utilising different, applicable research tools. In their focus on a specific, usually very complex problem, interdisciplinary researchers 'suspend' their (often) narrow disciplinary identities and step outside their individual frames of reference in order to establish a joint frame of reference for a broader, yet deep, investigation of the research problem – always seeking new angles to find solutions.

Interdisciplinarity is further characterised by the explicit formulation of a common methodology that spans traditional boundaries between disciplines. It tends to avoid extreme specialisation of a specific field towards more holistic knowledge – unifying scientific research (Du Pisani 2003:13).

The *Journal of Interdisciplinary Ethical Research* (JIER) is therefore receptive to discipline-anchored, ethical, problem-solving methods, presupposing a common theoretical understanding between different disciplines, accompanied by mutual interpenetration of disciplinary epistemologies, creating a homogeneous theory or model.

The *Journal of Interdisciplinary Ethical Research* is also open to research that moves even further away from traditional disciplinary boundaries in its respective ethical struggles, because solutions are not always based on the application of knowledge that already exists, but on that which is also generated and maintained in the specific application context for which it is needed. These outputs cannot necessarily be brought home under a specific discipline.

Interdisciplinary research, especially with a focus on the examination of issues that arise in different academic disciplines, as JIER encourages, could (also) involve a participatory process in which the researchers together with different stakeholders such as industries, governments and broader societies, see the research process through to the implementation of the results of the research, where needed (e.g., the Sustainable Development Goals – United Nations). Interdisciplinary scientific knowledge must, as far as possible, be translated into benefits for society.

As knowledge increases, disciplines become more specialised. Researchers conducting highly specialised research should preferably collaborate with other scientists to solve complex problems. The core problems of society are not isolated but intertwined in a complex way with one another and other issues.

Solutions thus cannot be found in isolation. Within separate disciplines, researchers today are confronted with ethical, terminological, managerial, historical, educational and methodological aspects (to name a few) that require interdisciplinary sensitivity.

We must admit, research questions do not always require collaboration across the boundaries of disciplines. However, certain research topics, especially those on the borders of disciplines or

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where it concerns complex issues in a wider context than what is covered by a single discipline, require interdisciplinary research.

A scientist cannot afford to isolate themselves, as one discipline does not have all the tools to solve every research problem. To determine whether interdisciplinary research is necessary, the researcher must ask himself or herself whether the problem requires deeper study in the particular discipline and/or a broader study in a larger context.

Research across disciplinary boundaries brings together different scientific cultures with different traditional disciplinary knowledge structures. Therefore, interdisciplinary research necessarily faces specific problems and dangers – which are not referred to here, but which could be addressed by researchers.

However, the dangers, problems and weaknesses of interdisciplinary work do not outweigh the benefits if the research is undertaken correctly and carried out successfully. A team can research bigger problems than individuals and therefore accelerate the progress of science; new and wider horizons are opened; each discipline offers the others a challenge to mobilise resources; different frames of reference can be tested against each other; representatives of each discipline broaden their vision to be able to see a larger field more clearly than before; gaps in data become clearer; areas on the borders of disciplines are more clearly illuminated; new research methodologies are developed; and because the research process is more public, it reduces the possibility of errors (Du Pisani 2003:13–16).

The aim of JIER is to address the above-mentioned issues by group and/or individual interdisciplinary ethical research. It will require analytical thinking and critical scholarship, often challenging traditional boundaries, in order to provide a global platform from where academic value, locally and globally, could be added.

The *Journal of Interdisciplinary Ethical Research* further aims to initially publish approximately 10 high quality articles per year, with the vision of growing from there. The contributors should be deeply committed to the value and validity of science and ethical practice across the moral spectrum (Van den Heever & Jones 2019:n.p.). Although an ethics of interdisciplinary research is important – in fact, it is fundamental to successful interdisciplinary research and design – JIER focuses on, as indicated above, ethical challenges within different academic fields of study.

Research should be presented from qualitative and conceptual methodological perspectives, including autobiographical and participatory views. Its target audience includes international scholars, peers, researchers, educators and other stakeholders with an interest in the topics covered by the scope of the journal.

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