Inter-Disciplinary Education: A Pattern for History and Sociology

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Abstract

Inter-disciplinary studies in the field of social sciences such as history and sociology are unequivocally vital to gaining a more penetrating insight into human behavior. The article commences with a comparison of the concepts of "inter-disciplinary" and "disciplinary", an explication of Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogism, along with an explanation of other learning theories. The article subsequently delineates the method of inter-disciplinary teaching for history and sociology by emphasizing the necessity of inter-disciplinary studies.

Key Words: Inter-Disciplinary Studies, Inter-Disciplinary Education, Dialogism and Historical Sociology

1. Introduction

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, new knowledge began to be structured in a novel way, namely via the categorization of academic divisions across a vast array of fields (Klein, 2006). This categorization progressively engendered the formation of disciplinary structure as the be-all and end-all of categorizing knowledge for the sake of learning about the observable universe. The word *discipline* itself can be defined as an organized topic of scientific knowledge which gives rise to division and specialization within a gamut of scientific fields of study. Edgar Morin asserts that each individual discipline serves as a power system which governs specific spheres of study through the use of certain tools and methods, such as administrative entities of teaching and doing research, behavioral cultures that shape individual and common identity in every discipline and patterns of education and upbringing in the discipline (Klein, 2006).

Throughout the course of the twentieth century, dominant disciplinary discourse brought forth a cornucopia of new technologies and ways of solving humans' problems, although the escalating intricacies of human life throughout the second half of the twentieth century precluded the possibility of any given specific discipline alone to answer questions and solve problems. Therefore, the ever-increasing complexity of the human condition invariably paved the way for the emergence of inter-disciplinary cooperation. Allen Repko perceives inter-disciplinary studies as the process of answering a question, solving a problem, or acknowledging a subject which would not be possible by means of a single specific discipline alone. Inter-disciplinary studies put together various disciplines so as to obtain a more complete and comprehensive perspective (Newell, December 2007). Newell describes inter-disciplinary study as a process involving two dimensions, which critically entangles disciplinary perspectives so as to foster a better understanding of or to develop a new complex phenomenon (Newell, December 2007).

Diana Rhoten et al., assert that interdisciplinary education is a type of course planning and instruction which puts together data, instruments, information, theories, concepts or perspectives from at least two disciplines to enhance students' capacity to grasp various concepts and issues and to devise solutions (Newell, December 2007). In similar way, Veronica Boix Mansilla defines interdisciplinary understanding as the capacity to put together the knowledge and methods from two or more disciplines to enhance one's understanding of such elements as explaining a phenomenon, finding solutions to a problem, generating a product or putting forth a question that may be beyond the scope of a single discipline (Newell, December 2007). The Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research defines interdisciplinary study as research involving a collaborative team effort, whereby data, techniques, perspectives, concepts and theories from at least two fields of study are employed in conjunction with each other so as to effectively fathom a problem which is not accessible using one particular field (Newell, December 2007).

The growing agreement in terms of how interdisciplinary studies should be defined is identified by Klein (2007) and Newell and is presented by Jerry Gaff, James Ratcliff (1996) as "a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession.… Inter-disciplinary studies draw on disciplinary perspectives and integrate their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective". All definitions of what inter-disciplinary studies are share a commonality, which is the cooperation among experts in various fields with the aim of becoming better able to solve problems related to the human condition. Inter-disciplinary studies work outside the parameters of traditional boundaries with the aim of finding solutions to complex social problems.

2.Learning and Developments in Disciplinary Discourse

Formal and informal education are vital part of the learning process, regardless of whether learning is seen as the attainment of knowledge, understanding, experiencing, or changes in behavior patterns or ability attained via experience and practice (Olson & Hergenhahn 2008). In addition, although human actions are minutely governed by the effects of formal education, this education does indeed serve to foster the socialization process and the development of professional abilities. Therefore, good, solid educational institutions such as colleges and universities are vital to the survival of the modern social system. Learning is the ultimate end of established educational institutions, and impacts social life on a number of different levels:

1- Learning for the purpose of obtaining information, which involves the continual asking of questions regarding subjects, phenomena, concepts and assumptions about the human condition, the act of which sharpens one's analytical skills (Khorsandi, 2008).

2- Learning for work, which pertains to the development of social skills which assist in playing social roles (Khorsandi, 2008).

3- Learning for self-preserving, which means resolving conflicts, issues and tensions between one's personality and social life; in effect, it entails becoming critical of one's own cognitive beliefs(Khorsandi, 2008).

4- Learning for the purpose of Co-existing, which deals with learning to respect other people, cultures and thoughts. This type of learning allows a person to get in touch with him or herself, as well as others in order to resolve disputes between one another. Experiencing peace and learning to be content, even with those who may prove adversarial, is an essential skill which results from effective interpersonal communication. This type of learning requires people to live together amicably and learn from each other (Khorsandi, 2008).

In modern societies, formal learning in established educational institutions in which teachers trained in a variety of specialized disciplines, forms the backbone of learning. According to the structure of periodic learning, each generation is more specialized than the previous one, thereby necessitating specific courses relevant to that period. Mathematics teachers, for instance, can focus on teaching math without having to concern themselves with the subject matter of history class, and vice versa. Modern teachers, thus, seem to operate in such a manner that is devoid of interdisciplinary studies. Universities, however, are attempting to revamp the current scheme of things. The academic system will be structured to design inter-disciplinary structures through integration of specializations, instruments and academic methods (Khorsandi, 2008), and the public education system is placing emphasis on the disciplinary method, by which various fields of study are segregated. This seemingly exorbitant degree of devotion to the disciplinary method has invariably led to a lack of efficacy in formal education and learning. This discussion shall henceforth bring to light the value of interdisciplinary connections between various disciplines with the aim of putting forward an interdisciplinary plan of education for history and sociology courses in Iranian High schools.

3.Education Inter-Disciplinary Discourse

According to UNESCO, education is defined as all actions, effects, and methods for achieving growth and the evolution of thinking, skills, attitudes and behavioral abilities of human beings. In short, the point of education is to ameliorate the highest valued elements of the human personality, and to enhance the best values society has to offer (Khorsandi, 2008). Education may come in a number of forms, be it formal, informal, continual or implicit. An interdisciplinary education can be told apart from a disciplinary approach by drawing attention to the incorporative and mutual interconnectedness among various disciplines; there are, however, certain similarities between their principles. Combination is a distinguishing feature in the curriculum of inter-disciplinary studies. Inter-disciplinary curriculum advocates argue that acquiring social skills is a vital part of becoming an active, responsible and productive citizen in a democratic society. Therefore, tolerance of change within the education system in terms of its organized scientific structures and values is essential (Khorsandi, 2008). The integration of diverse curriculums is an innovative process of organizing educative experiences and course subjects whose purpose is to engender more profound comprehensive thinking and a better grasp of social life (Khorsandi,

2008). Content oriented integration, comprehension oriented integration, and skill oriented integration are three of the most important aspects in integrative course curriculums. Other methods of education include collaborative learning, research oriented learning, practice oriented learning, and dialogue oriented learning. All of these offer potential benefits. In this discussion, dialogue oriented learning shall take centre stage and be explicated as the focus of this paper and as a pattern of inter-disciplinary education.

4.Dialogue Theory in Inter-Disciplinary Education

The learning process in interdisciplinary periods occurs due to mutual interactions between learners and their environment. Therefore, interdisciplinary learning is a relational-social one (Khorsandi, 2008). Of paramount importance in the inter-disciplinary method is the technique of dialogue, which derives from Mikhail Bakhtin's linguistic theory and shall now be elucidated.

Linguistic theory of Mikhail Bakhtin serves as the fundamental underpinning for a dialogue based pattern of education. The concepts of *Utterance*, *Genre*, and *Dialogism* serve as the basis for this pattern. From a socio-historical perspective, utterance has come to mean a basic unit of communication; every utterance in a social context gets meaning among asserted or non-asserted statements. Speakers are affected by and they react to the actions or expectations of others. Our realization of statements is contingent on earlier spoken statements or our expectations. The concept of *Genre* refers to the stability and predictability of statements in social interactions that gradually lead to special function in dialogues within a specific sphere. This stability and predictability are styles of dialogue (Alipour, 2008).

These genres are critical in facilitating human communication, inasmuch as people's previous experience with social environment' genres forms the basis for entry into dialogue. Dialogism stresses that the nature of linguistic dialogue and an inter-disciplinary education are above all based on dialogue among learners themselves, and learners and educators from dissimilar fields of study with the aim of solving a problem or understanding a complex issue. In other words, the actual learners are the ones who, through the dialogue method, become aware of various inter-disciplinary ties. Novak research states that there are four ways through which learners establish relationships among various fields of study: content, propositions, class genres, and methods of knowing. Content serves to establish inter-disciplinary relations and occurs through learners making relations among different fields of study according to common subjects and topics. For instance, an analysis of the French revolution and its repercussions may be subsumed under the aegis of history and sociology courses at the same time. Propositions that are accepted by different fields of study may exist as the result of the natural interrelatedness among the fields. To illustrate, learners may observe relationships between history and sociology if the proposition that classes are playing critical role in social developments can be agreed upon by both sociologists and historians.

Class genres refer to interactive patterns that are gradually shaped over a specific period of time and serve to assist participants in predicting and understanding interactive structures (Novak, 2008). What happens in inter-disciplinary classes based on dialogue is that learners internalize a genre for each individual field of study and its method of teaching, and subsequently generalize it. For example, if a student, in his/her previous classes, has learnt history through the method of asking and answering questions, this method will become the genre of history class that determines the student's expectations of the teaching method in subsequent history classes. The ways of knowing involve learners' rational activities in arranging and defending their propositions through such means as theories, methods, and people's worldviews towards different fields of study. When learners recognize and apply common methods of knowing among a variety of fields of study, inter-disciplinary ties emerge.

In inter-disciplinary dialogue theory, integration takes precedence over combination; the focus here is on weeding out the common from the disparate between various fields and putting them into appropriate categories (Novak, 2008). Learners in an active environment of dialogue and communication learn from and teach each other. This method of education accepts any kind of educational absolutism, with a spirit of relativism dominating the dialogue classes. In a dialogue environment, learners get to know themselves better by communicating others; Herbert Mead believed that the ability to participate in dialogue with other people is one aspect of self knowing. In other words, self knowing is one of the spin-off benefits of dialogue.

5.Historical Sociology: Inter-Disciplinary of History and Sociology

Pat Duffy Hutcheon asserts that any of the vast array of complex behaviors exhibited by humankind may be persuasively understood through patterns of distinct disciplinary methods of the contemporary social sciences. This has to do with the fact that all behavior stems from abstract and unclear presuppositions of which researchers devoted to a single discipline may know nothing. Hence, researchers of social science should attempt to achieve conceptual transparency and common social linguistic consensus through interdisciplinary methods (Alavipour, 1997). The deficiencies involved in working solely with disparate disciplines such as

sociology, history, cultural studies, anthropology, and philosophy to explain the issues and complexities of human social life resulted in the cooperation of different disciplines, in effect, interdisciplinary attempts, and ultimately led to the engenderment of such inter-disciplinary fields of studies as historical sociology, philosophy of history, and cultural anthropology. In the 1980s, American historian Jackson Turner stated that all spheres of human activities should be taken into account, and that attempts to grasp the complexities of human life separately is unfeasible (Nozari, 1980). In 1949, Lucien Febvre also objected to there being boundaries among disciplines and described it as disastrous way of studying social life (Alavipour). Febvre, Marc Bloch and other scholars of Annales school criticized traditional history analyzed structures and inter-disciplinary integration in the field of history along with other social science fields, such as sociology, geography, economics, and psychology. In short, they believed that certain elements of human life are inextricably intertwined and could be more easily comprehended by simultaneously applying various fields of study.

The following are some valuable attempts at inter-disciplinary work in the social sciences, particularly in the fields of history and sociology: "The Political Systems of Empires" written by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt; "The First New Nation" written by Seymour Martin Lipset; "Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World" written by Barrington Moore; "States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China" written by Theda Skocpol; "The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations" written by Norbert Elias; and "Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism" written by Anthony Giddens. The core underlying theme of these works is that social structures and contemporary methods of social interactivity can be studied and analyzed from a historical perspective (Aghajeri, 2006). It can therefore be reasonably ascertained that an inter-disciplinary model is essential for the inter-disciplinary study of history and sociology.

6. Inter-disciplinary Model for History and Sociology Courses

Problem Statement:

Should history be viewed as a narrative of behaviors, actions, and achievements of humanity across a range of societies, or as the sum totality of humankind's statements, thoughts and actions (Nozari, 2000), and should social science be defined as the study of society and human communications, then there cannot be found a deep division between history and social science, at least not in terms of their subject matter. While it is true that history and sociology are studied as two distinct disciplines, each being governed by its own particular methodology, concepts, and subjects, the emergence of historical sociology, coupled with the existence of interdisciplinary studies, necessitates the integration of the two. History education, which entails explaining events which occurred in aforetimes, requires a sociological perspective in order to make students aware of the motives which underlie events. Sociological attitudes and theories help learners to figure out social backgrounds and structures of historical actions, which in turn results in learners undergoing a paradigm shift in relation to their view of history as being purely the study of events.

Similarly, the instruction of sociology from a purely theoretical view may be cumbersome for learners. Sociology teachers can benefit from historical knowledge in that it raises their awareness of the significance of time and space in studying societies, as well as making them understand that sociological regularities do not always correspond with societies' historical developments, inasmuch as such developments are erratic and unpredictable. Historical knowledge enables sociologists to view individuals as agents of development, in addition to their role of social structures. Sociology teachers who possess historical knowledge are more empowered in the sense that they may employ history as a tool by which to make sociology more tangible for students. The complementary use of both disciplines in conjunction with one another makes classes more appealing to students, thereby enhancing the learning process.

7. Two Proposed Models of Interdisciplinary Teaching For Sociology and History Courses

7.1 Model of Interdisciplinary Teaching by Single Teacher

Interdisciplinary teaching may be conducted in a number of ways, with each way being applicable according to time and place considerations. One way is for history and sociology teachers to read books from both fields. For instance, a history teacher might read books on historical sociology in preparation for teaching the Industrial or French Revolution. He or she may employ sociological theoretical frameworks to elucidate the backgrounds and social structures of the mentioned revolutions, which would serve to help students understand and analyze the causes of the events. In the same vein, a sociology teacher may use a historical example of fascism as an objective example of a group trauma, such as absolutism.

7.2 Model of Interdisciplinary Teaching by Two Teachers Simultaneously

There are classes of history and sociology in Iranian high schools which can be dealt by inter-disciplinary methods.

- Subject of history class: Constitutional Revolution in Iran (Field of Study: Humanities, Third Year, History of Iran and World 2).
- Subject of sociology class: Political Systems (Field of Study: Humanities, Third Year, Sociology 2).

As long as history and sociology are taught separately, teachers should at least provide students with explanations and insight from the other field. If a teacher were to cover the history of Constitutional Revolution in Iran, he or she may begin by delineating the various types of political systems and their characteristics, before moving on to the pre-constitutional system in Iran and its characteristics. Such a method would help ley the framework for a more profound understanding of constitutional revolution. Likewise, sociology teachers may use examples from history to teach political systems; he or she may give examples of previous political systems in the history of the world or Iran to make students better able to grasp the meaning of different political systems. However, a more appropriate and functional way could perhaps be to employ inter-disciplinary teaching through a dialogue method, whereby two teachers work together simultaneously in the same class. The five stages of application and the simple pattern of the interdisciplinary teaching method shall now be explicated.

Firs Stage: Mental preparation and objective situations

In Iran, the idea of two teachers in a classroom at the same time is unheard of; therefore, the educational system in Iran would not be in line with this method. Even as tentative method, this method would initially require a certain degree of mental preparedness on the part of the executive managers of the schools, followed by preparedness of the teachers and students. Schools' managers and other administrative branches would need an adequate amount of space, audio-visual facilities, and planning so as to provide a conducive environment for interdisciplinary classes. In other words, mental preparedness boils down to being able to persuade executive administrations of the usefulness of interdisciplinary classes.

Second Stage: Educating history and sociology teachers

Interdisciplinary teaching has its own special patterns of teaching. At first, the teachers who intend to use this method must familiarize themselves with the concept and philosophy of interdisciplinary education, and should understand the ties between their own special field of study and other fields. Finally, they should become acquainted with the methods of interdisciplinary education, such as the dialogue oriented method. The possibility of success in using interdisciplinary methods is directly proportionate to the teachers' belief in its efficiency. Inasmuch as the subject in question is historical sociology, teachers would need to read books pertaining to historical sociology in order to understand how they relate, as well as to develop a more positive affinity with both fields.

Third Stage: Preparedness of students

According to Novak's studies, learners internalize specific class genres gradually. In other words, the patterns of interactivity which are formed gradually help learners to predict interactivity structures. For example, it can be predicted that students automatically assume that a history teacher will employ the speech method of teaching, since this method is commonly used in teaching history. Likewise, the participatory genre is expected for sociology class. Students would need to be somewhat familiar with interdisciplinary classes and their goals ahead of time. For one thing, learners in an interdisciplinary class setting must be prepared to actively participate, as learning takes place during dialogue rather than speech of the teacher alone. Students should participate in dialogue confidently and transform themselves from being a mere listener into an active learner. All of these necessitate the primary education of students for the classes.

Forth Stage: Administration

The class commences with the teacher explaining his or her primary aim to the students, so as to familiarize them with the subject (for example, if the subject is The Constitutional Revolution of Iran, its roots and consequences should be extrapolated by the history teacher). The teacher may commence with an explanation of the outset of the constitution period, and how it finally led to a change in the attitudes of Iranians towards the political system. Depending upon the specific subject of the class, a sociology teacher explains different kinds of political systems and through help of history teacher and students provide a transient category on political systems such as law based systems, non-law based systems, monarchical systems and republican systems. Sociology teachers might cover various political systems and their characteristics in relation to the knowledge the students gained about the absolutist political system from the history teacher. This process may continue with other related subjects, and make all students and teachers to participate in dialogue and lead the class towards interdisciplinary learning. In this process, learners strive to identify the common denominators presented by both

teachers, and then use the concepts and methods of both subjects to gain a better understanding of both. Students would ultimately be expected to be able to identify political systems and their differences throughout Iranian history before and after The Constitutional Revolution according to the knowledge they acquired from sociology.

Fifth Stage: evaluation

Interdisciplinary questions should be used to assess the efficacy of this teaching method, by determining the extent to which students were able to integrate concepts, subjects and methods of both sociology and history. It should also be determined as to whether this integration helped students learn and grasp social and human issues. One other key question to consider is whether or not this method has resulted in learners becoming more inclined to cooperate. Do learners prefer this method to traditional ones? Such an evaluation may improve interdisciplinary methods, which will in turn encourage its application to other fields. It is altogether possible to apply interdisciplinary methods to other courses, such as psychology and sociology, geography and history, and even mathematics and physics. Interdisciplinary methods can be offered as a proposal for the development of teaching methods in the realm of public education.

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