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# “Deep Interdisciplinarity” as Critical Pedagogy: Teaching at the Intersections of Urban Communication and Public Place and Space

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# “Deep Interdisciplinarity” as Critical Pedagogy: Teaching at the Intersections of Urban Communication and Public Place and Space

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## *Abstract*

Interdisciplinary is a word that has been picked up by institutions of higher education, research foundations, and even popular culture as a way to articulate the need to move beyond the traditional disciplinary boundaries within which we categorize knowledge about the world. While disciplinary silos in higher education often reflect structures within which teaching and learning are engaged, we contend that critical pedagogy provides an opportunity for innovative thinking and creativity to emerge via Giroux’s (1981) critical notion of praxis. We discuss how Penny’s (2009) notion of deep interdisciplinarity can serve to guide course development in a way that enables any interdisciplinary course to achieve its inevitably unique goals. Deep interdisciplinarity, we contend, can enrich both critical and interdisciplinary pedagogies in two prominent ways: first, by expanding critical pedagogy’s focus to directly address instructor-instructor interactions as a significant in-class performance of critical reflexivity; and second, by enabling teaching and learning opportunities to reach into the places and spaces of everyday life. Using our own co-taught interdisciplinary class on urban public place and space as a provocative example, we advocate for finding opportunities to transform traditional institutional and disciplinary silos of understanding into unique learning environments situated on the “bridges” between them. Overall, we call for critical pedagogues to rethink their relationship(s) to interdisciplinary knowledge and for instructors in interdisciplinary classrooms to rethink their relationship(s) to critical pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Critical Pedagogy, Interdisciplinary Pedagogy, Communicative City, Public Place and Space, Deep Interdisciplinarity, Urban Communication

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2012), between 2004–05 and 2009–10, multi/interdisciplinary studies degrees increased by 30 percent, and the number of institutions of higher education offering multi/interdisciplinary degree programs has grown from just over 6,000 in 1970 to over 42,000 in 2010. Amidst the rise of interdisciplinary opportunities, institutions have moved beyond whether to promote interdisciplinary learning and towards addressing, as Davies & Devlin (2007) articulate, "how best to incorporate [interdisciplinarity]" (p. 4). With the goal transforming both teaching and learning experiences in deeper ways, we see Penny's (2009) deep interdisciplinarity approach to be a framework capable of furthering critical pedagogy by reinvigorating the transformative possibilities embedded in Giroux's (1981) notion of praxis.

Deep interdisciplinarity celebrates the complexity and dedication critical pedagogy requires while simultaneously encouraging both instructors and students alike to see the world in altogether new ways. Supporters of interdisciplinarity as a pedagogical approach draw attention to its unique opportunities to encourage non-traditional, creative processes and products of education. We contend that deep interdisciplinarity can guide the development of any interdisciplinary endeavor in higher education to move teaching and learning beyond the typical single instructor, college classroom model in significant ways. In particular, adopting a deep interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning shifts both critical and interdisciplinary pedagogies in two distinct ways. First, it more directly address the development of instructor-instructor interactions, and second, it calls for reimagining learning environments beyond a classroom's walls to transform expectations of both teaching and learning in any given context.

By articulating how our upper-division undergraduate interdisciplinary course emerged as an instantiation of "deep interdisciplinarity," we hope other (possible) instructors can envision adapting such a framework for their own purposes, teaching at their own intersections, while engaging in entirely unique processes of meeting each other (and their students) "where they are." By critically reflecting on our own integration of deep interdisciplinarity into our course on urban public place and space, we hope to inspire other interdisciplinary educational endeavors to see such a framework as able to produce innovative teaching and learning opportunities inherently connected to the central tenets of critical pedagogy. It is at the intersections of critical pedagogy and interdisciplinary pedagogy that we see a springboard for creative directions for higher education to exist. We have chosen to explore two specific areas of intersection: the unique interactions between instructors in a co-taught interdisciplinary course and the

creative opportunities to move institutional learning environments into everyday life. Both areas are grounded in critical pedagogy, specifically in the notion that successful interdisciplinary education provides opportunities for students to simultaneously explore theory and practice of course concepts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Critical pedagogy aims to move both teaching and learning towards (re)creating a “socially just world that is ‘not yet’... [to] mark the end of human suffering” (Kress, 2011, p. 261). Freire’s (1970) continued call to move teaching and learning beyond echoing the “expert” (in this case, the “instructor”) also serves to move interdisciplinary courses in new directions. In particular, we see developing a critically reflexive approach to the process of teaching and learning in interdisciplinary contexts to be a necessary precursor to a successful interdisciplinary course experiences for both instructors and students.

While noble in its aim to foster nontraditional and critically reflexive inquiry, critical pedagogy is frequently criticized as abstract, idealistic, and thus ill-suited to prepare students to succeed in the “real world” (e.g., Ellsworth, 1989). The opportunities critical pedagogy provides to connect critical inquiry with experiential transformation beyond the classroom environment, however, is often overlooked in such critiques. Giroux (1981) writes that praxis serves as “the transition from critical thought to reflective intervention in the world” (p. 117). Consequently, critical pedagogy has a responsibility to move critical thought beyond the classroom. How we should engage in critical praxis, however, has only been addressed in fractured ways that primarily address the role of critical pedagogy in advocacy (e.g., Muro, 2012), community engagement (e.g., Schultz, McSurley, & Salguero, 2013), and citizenship (e.g., Rautins & Ibrahim, 2011). None of these provide a unified approach to extending teaching and learning beyond the traditional classroom and into the physical places and spaces about which both occur in everyday life.

In our experience, a praxis-based approach to teaching and learning required us to navigate critical reflexivity far before we ever considered what critical pedagogy looked like in the act of teaching. In other words, we needed to negotiate our own educational backgrounds and experiences before we ever met our students. Our challenge in designing a co-taught interdisciplinary course became clear: how should we ask our students to take a perspective in their assignments that did not require summarily adopting and/or rejecting one of our own individual perspectives about the course?

In answering this question, we found ourselves attempting to operationalize praxis in our course in specific ways. First, our performances of perspective-taking

and knowledge-creation in the everyday practices of teaching revealed many nuances embedded in the ways we negotiated meaning, explored alternate perspectives and values, and identified ways we could move forward together. Since we felt strongly that engaging in our own civil disputation and compassionate debate would model supportive critical inquiry, we attempted to establish such a critical approach as the standard for both our own instructor-instructor interactions and all instructor-student interactions. Second, given our course's focus on urban public place and space, we quickly began to imagine alternative places and spaces of learning that would encourage our students to remain critically reflexive as they interacted with the physical places and spaces of the city they otherwise study and discuss conceptually in the classroom.

It was in these ways that we saw our application of deep interdisciplinarity to connect theory and practice by building bridges between what Mutemeri (2013) calls "school knowledge" and "everyday knowledge." We thus see deep interdisciplinarity as a framework guiding both discussions and embodiments of the inherent dialectical relationship between theoretical articulations of approach and experiential practices in the world. Both in the classroom and in the world (in both theory and praxis), our instructor-instructor interactions served as a model of practical critical inquiry. Such opportunities to perspective-take on so many different levels, we found, to be integral to the creation of a truly interdisciplinary course.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY PEDAGOGY

Interdisciplinary pedagogy scholarship has seen its own growth and development throughout the twentieth century with scholars focusing most frequently on the usefulness of combining disciplinary knowledge (and/or processes of knowing) (e.g., Blair, 2011; Hillbruner, 1962; Jarmon, Traphagan, Mayrath, & Trivedi, 2009; Mitchell, 1974), novel approaches to designing particular types of curricula (e.g., Carleton, 1979; Krizek & Levinson, 2005; Collis, McKee, & Hamley, 2010; Dhar, 2011; Natalie & Crowe, 2013; Peterson, 2008; Weber, 2008), and addressing the role of interdisciplinarity in processes of collaboration (e.g., Arefi & Triantafyllou, 2005; Fraser & Schalley, 2009; Rockwell, 2008). While each of these trajectories have aligned to support the endeavor of interdisciplinary education, they have not clearly formed a collectively recognizable notion of what "good" interdisciplinary education looks like. While much interdisciplinary scholarship focuses on specific interdisciplinary initiatives or the need for universal principles or models to guide interdisciplinary education, we contend that the value of interdisciplinary education lies in its inability to be any singular thing. Rather than attempting to create an always deficient number of subcategories to reflect all possible interdisciplinary educational types or envision universal guide-

lines for producing “successful” teaching and learning associated with those types, we see the future of “good” interdisciplinary education to be its ability to adapt to whatever circumstances it encounters.

Embracing the complexities of interdisciplinary teaching and learning processes and environments amidst the more streamlined disciplinary roots from which the U.S. university has grown remains a challenge for contemporary institutions higher education. Barthes (1972) sees this challenge to be facing a philosophical obstacle larger than an historical orientation: “In order to do interdisciplinary work, it is not enough to take a ‘subject’ (a theme) and to arrange two or three sciences around it. Interdisciplinary study consists of creating a new object, which belongs to no one” (p. 72). While the notion that what is yet to be imagined can be “owned” by no one in particular may seem logical, the very notion of disciplines, fields of study, professions, and institutions are premised on the ability to privilege knowing about the world in some ways over others. In a world of “experts,” determining who should be the expert of interdisciplinarity becomes complicated quickly. Penny (2009) argues “no one” should be the expert because the very ways we act interdisciplinarily, requires simultaneously abandoning any quest for ultimate expertise. He explains that to do interdisciplinarity well, we must turn away from a focus on expertness and towards ways in which we can authentically collaborate to invent entirely new orientations to topics of study.

By integrating the central tenets of critical pedagogy with interdisciplinary educational endeavors, the possibilities for both teaching and learning expand exponentially. In particular, we see Penny’s (2009) notion of deep interdisciplinarity as a specific framework capable of shifting understandings of “successful” interdisciplinary endeavors in higher education to better align with critical pedagogy’s praxical roots. While instructors who use critical pedagogy in their classrooms have an individual responsibility to apply its central tenets, our motivation is to articulate how critical pedagogy can (and does) enable students to “intervene in the world” in salient ways as well. Interdisciplinary education is one place (and space) in which critical pedagogy can provide new rigor and possibility for interdisciplinary teaching and learning while simultaneously reshaping expectations of our work lives, community lives, and individual pursuits beyond traditional classroom environments so often associated with higher education. While interdisciplinary course development is a complex epistemological, ontological, and axiological endeavor, deep interdisciplinarity provides what we see to be an adaptable framework for embracing critically-reflective directions of possibility for interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

## DEEP INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Penny (2009) articulates the experience of “deep interdisciplinarity” as an intense commitment to a complicated endeavor:

“[It] must be constantly attentive to the schisms and discontinuities that emerge when such practices are combined...to understand the way that fundamental commitments shape the value-systems of these disciplines; and to draw upon historical precedents in order to construct a sense of historical continuity...We must remain alert as to which reagents react violently—who has the protective clothing, and who wears the burns. This perhaps fanciful analogy, in my experience, captures the intensity of some collisions of disciplinary world-views” (p. 34).

In juxtaposition, the notion of “shallow interdisciplinarity,” works from the assumption that “one can simply drag the methodology or subject matter from an outlying discipline into one’s own” (p. 35). Rather, “deep interdisciplinarity” recognizes “that the specialist expertise of one’s own discipline is necessary but not sufficient to a certain task” but instead “confronts an ontological chasm, which, when considered, can throw light upon not only the differences between disciplines, but on un-interrogated assumptions within one’s own discipline” (p. 36). Deep interdisciplinarity thus embraces and demands engaging in the critical notion of praxis (Giroux, 1981).

In this way, deep interdisciplinarity guided our approach to designing course content and learning goals, creating assignments and evaluative rubrics, and engaging in classroom interactions that embraced the uncertainty that teaching an interdisciplinary course inevitably entails. This approach relies upon the acceptance that interdisciplinary teaching produces “the formation of practitioners who are neither artists nor engineers” (Penny, 2009, p. 31). In other words, the very identities our disciplinary fields, institutional titles, department course listings, and academic descriptors require had to be shed in favor of exploring something so important to both of us that the topic of inquiry emerged as primary and our institutionally-created selves emerged as secondary. We no longer were Assistant Professors of Communication and Community & Regional Planning, respectively, but instead co-instructors interested in meeting each other (and our students) “where we are” as a way to inspire novel ways of understanding and experiencing communicative approaches to studying urban public place and space.

We embraced such identity “collisions,” as Penny refers to them, yet the physical proximity of ourselves as co-instructors in front of a class of students listening to the other talk about her area of expertise and from her disciplinary and experiential perspective required often difficult in-the-moment negotiation on a daily basis. By engaging in overt interrogation of each other’s world view, academic perspective, and disciplinary assumptions, our students were asked to reject ex-

pectations of acting like a passive audience for our academic dialogue and instead transform into engaged participants in the critical inquiry of the topic at hand. Deep interdisciplinarity thus provided a way for us as instructors with sometimes non-compatible perspectives about the topic at hand and our students to advance a variety of unique perspectives simultaneously. This approach required us to reject any quest for expert status in favor of embracing the challenge of explaining our relativity and relevance in the world by promoting praxis. By encouraging students to extend their learning beyond the classroom, the challenges of doing this work became lost in the very real ways our students applied what they learned.

## AT THE INTERSECTIONS

Our unique opportunity to engage in deep interdisciplinarity to envision the creation and teaching of an interdisciplinary, co-taught course was possible most significantly because we were supported by both our university President, who has openly supported interdisciplinary initiatives for some time, and our Provost, who enabled this opportunity to move outside “standard” teaching assignments to support “meaningful interdisciplinary work.” As two Assistant Professors in our respective fields, we became aware of our overlapping interests during a New Faculty Orientation activity that was geared towards discussing teaching interests and approaches to pedagogy. Our initial exchange about teaching, however, quickly gave way to a discussion of dissertations, research, and scholarship more generally. We quickly made plans for meeting over coffee which naturally evolved into a working relationship. We have been lucky enough for that relationship to further evolve into a friendship of sorts over time, and we attribute much of the ease of our working relationship in this course to our interpersonal dynamic apart from our topical, professional interests. We recognize that our existing relationship may have been the primary reason that the tenets of deep interdisciplinarity were so enticing to us. We actually did have commonalities that enabled us to easily—and in mutually supportive ways—negotiate our differences in perspective, values, and foci when it was appropriate to do so.

In Fall 2011, we pursued an opportunity to offer an interdisciplinary course between the fields of Communication and Community & Regional Planning (where each of us is officially “housed”). While coordination between these departments on our campus is otherwise unusual due to field practices and institutional organization, the alignment between communication and planning made sense to us. In Summer 2012, with support from the Provost, we were able to offer a co-taught upper-division undergraduate interdisciplinary course entitled “Seeking an Equitable Boise: Exploring the Creation, Character, and Consumption of Public Space, Place, and Policy,” a course that brought together students majoring in Communication, Sociology, Criminal Justice, and Community and Envi-



ronmental Health to study a complex set of issues related to the topic at hand. We quickly agreed that by adopting a central frame of “urban communication” we could explore both “urban” and “communication” albeit with different terms, discussions, and foci. For one of us, that meant understanding how public space acts as a form of direct and indirect messaging to the community. For the other, that meant focusing on who (and what) affected the evolving conceptions of what is considered “public” and how “the city” is continually contested. For one of us, the role that planning plays in reinforcing and protesting these value-laden and market-driven assertions was primarily important. For the other, the processes that enable and constrain such reinforcements and protests was more interesting. We both, however, shared a clear commitment for students to be able to learn in the classroom and in the city we were studying. We thus chose to offer the course in our university’s downtown classroom site (apart from the main campus where most classes are offered) because it allowed immediate connections between classroom readings and the “world” those readings discussed.

By intertwining our curriculum and assignments with the city in which we were teaching, we sought to incorporate Giroux’s (1992) call for critical pedagogy to remain founded in praxis. Thus, deep interdisciplinarity seemed to be a natural guide for integrating a critical approach to teaching and learning with our particular interdisciplinary context. In the final section, we discuss more specifically how this approach moved our course onto specific “bridges” between teaching and learning; critical and interdisciplinary pedagogy; and our disciplinary homes. This approach to envisioning our course in terms of deep interdisciplinarity fundamentally changed what—and how—we were able to teach (and learn from) our students and each other.

## DEEP INTERDISCIPLINARITY IN PRACTICE

From our perspective as co-instructors, the employment of Penny’s (2009) deep interdisciplinarity produced two specific contributions to conversations about critical pedagogy and interdisciplinary endeavors in higher education. First, deep interdisciplinarity requires critical pedagogy to focus on both “teacher-student” interactions and what we refer to as “instructor-instructor” interactions. This furthers the discussion of how co-instructors fit into existing critical pedagogy literatures. Second, we call for a refocus on praxis that requires critical pedagogy to move both teaching and learning beyond the confines of the traditional classroom. This provides the potential for every teaching and learning environment to be unique, and thus produce unique opportunities for knowledge creation as well. We offer these two contributions as refinements to existing literature on what “good” deep interdisciplinary endeavors and “good” critical pedagogies look like in higher education.

### *Instructor-Instructor Interactions*

The first contribution that deep interdisciplinarity made to our classroom came in the form of extending critical pedagogical practices to help inform our instructor-instructor relations. Since developing and teaching this class provided an impetus for advancing our own knowledge about urban public places and spaces, as well as that of our students, it became quickly apparent that our performances as co-instructors would necessarily model what critical inquiry should be for our students. Our course both exposed our students to diverse ways of knowing (as evidenced in our readings and demonstrated in our co-teaching performances) and utilized students' diverse experiences as integral parts of the class (as seen in their everyday assignments to "be" in the world around them with expectations to return to class to critically reflect on how their current experiences resonated—or diverged from—their past experiences with urban public place and space).

Thus far, critical pedagogy literature has focused primarily on the teacher-student interaction (Freire, 1970). Embracing Giroux's (1983) claim that students must be empowered to question the power relations inherent in the classroom, we draw attention to his simultaneous call that "teachers rather than students should represent a starting point" from which critical discussions emerge (p. 194). As such, our co-taught interdisciplinary classroom inherently required critically reflexive instructor-instructor interactions in the classroom. Much of the commitment we make to empowering students to be participants in critically questioning instructors as part of their course experience is inherently tied to explaining (and displaying) what "that" looks like. Since students may not have had such an opportunity or experience prior to entering a class guided by critical pedagogy, it is our responsibility to model for them various possibilities of critical inquiry. In particular, this means that successful critical inquiry moves beyond the practice of debate (resulting in a singular "winner") but it also extends beyond questioning each other in private or deferring to the other at all costs. We thus contend that co-instructors in an interdisciplinary course should question each other in front of their students as a way to successfully display respectful, critical inquiry in the classroom—critical questioning can be seen as a critical practice of pedagogy. We see such a performance to be fraught with power relations, epistemological and ontological orientations to knowledge, and various reflections of our own interactions with urban public places and spaces; this complexity is central to the experiences we reflect on here.

How we should discuss and explore our dual perspectives on the same topic in this interdisciplinary course became much more important than we initially realized. In planning conversations, it became apparent that we both utilized something called the "communicative city" in our teaching and scholarship. We looked to an area of scholarship that brought attention to the "borderlands" between communication studies and urban studies with a "focus on the theoretical and

substantive questions one can ask when viewing the issues of urban development and politics through the lens of media and cultural theory”; most often this area of study is referred to as “urban communication” (Gibson & Lowes, 2007, p. 5). Thus, we agreed to focus on “cities” as grounded in “important communicative function[s]” that are “both symbolic communication and communication context” (Jassem, Drucker, & Burd, 2010, p. vii). In other words, we collectively believe that the social constitution of our cities relies upon an understanding that what we experience as “urban” both creates and is created by the ways in which we communicate. This point of convergence in our world views provided a natural segue way into conversations about how to introduce this perspective to our students.

In considering how to explore the “communicative city” as both a concept and a tangibly functioning entity, we decided to use a single reading on the subject (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008) from which to begin our own dialogue about it. While this reading provided us an opportunity to facilitate a discussion around what “good” urban public places and spaces entailed, it more importantly provided an opportunity to discuss the limitations of understanding cities primarily through such a lens. By starting from a singular (albeit incomplete) perspective about the “communicative city,” we were able to facilitate discussions that focused on various strains of specific topics that emerged in class. This complexity allowed us to perform an instructor-instructor interaction that collectively—although not always uniformly—attempted to identify and articulate what we were (un)able to see through Gumpert & Drucker’s (2008) communication lens. This allowed us to focus on both processes of urban planning and their (un)intended effects. The silos of understanding that already exist in the fields of Communication and Urban Planning and Design necessitated that our performance of deciding (how we should determine) what constituted “best,” “good,” and “(un)intended,” to name a few, be collective, collaborative, and supportive. This often uncomfortable and difficult experience of critically inventing new ways to collaborate simultaneously created novel understandings of both the communicative city and urban public places and spaces. Precisely because we engaged in processes of “translation” between our individual perspectives, the complex issues we addressed in the course became exempt from over-simplification or pre-determined desired ends; rather, we strived to engage in authentically collaborative approaches to teaching and learning.

Thus, deep interdisciplinarity treats instructor-instructor relations as both planned and improvised in ways that embrace the spirit of critical pedagogy—in always meeting each other in places (and spaces) we would not have imagined to be possible before engaging each other in this way. The most frequent way that these instructor-instructor interactions were called forth was when students asked us to clarify commonly used academic and practitioner-oriented terms such as

“public,” “space,” “engagement,” “access,” and “public interest” when differing theoretical and applied meanings for each emerged. Such questions demanded we negotiate separately understood meanings with explanations not previously considered, which allowed room for multiple, and often competing, understandings of related topics to also emerge. The frame of deep interdisciplinarity, thus, did not ask that we attempt to usurp each other’s “expertise” by replacing it with her own, but to mutually support each other’s perspectives, even when they were in opposition to one another at first glance.

These collisions often were foreseeable although sometimes they came to the surface unexpectedly as deeply embedded in our individually held ideological orientations to the world. Thus, our interactions during in-class conversations and site observations often reflected different (sometimes compatible and sometimes incompatible) viewpoints that often seemed to originate in separate understandings of a policy or its aims. While we both generally view “good” policy about urban public place and space to be reflective of diverse interests and able to encourage varied uses apart from those in positions of power, we differed on what the primary focus of policy should be: effect or process. For one of us, the interesting conversation should be around the disconnects that appear between how people actually talk about (and act in relation to) the public places and spaces in any given city rather than the abstract generalizations about what one should say about (and do in relation to) them. The other of us, however, sees focusing on how officials articulate “good” policy to be worthy of attention in order to inform participatory processes of change in useful ways. In other words, “good” policy produces “good” publics (and consequently “good” cities). In this way, our worldviews, while deeply overlapping in our respect for attentive participatory processes of governance in one sense, differ more overtly as we further articulated the origins of our worldviews (we have different experiences and backgrounds that cause us to “know” the role of policy differently). Further, for what aims those worldviews should be engaged also emerged as more nuanced than we originally anticipated. While we both agree that “good” policy about urban public place and space is important, we don’t always agree about what it might look like—or if it’s even possible. Thus, deep interdisciplinarity provided us a guide for productively interrogating each other’s worldviews—sometimes in terms of the conceptual but more often in terms of our own experiences with policy, public life, and urban infrastructure. Aligning with deep interdisciplinarity, critical pedagogy enabled us to have mutually supportive interrogation between instructors serve as a model for how we should interact in a city that is inevitably filled with diverse people, perspectives, and motivations for participating in city life.

### *Teaching and Learning in Urban Public Places and Spaces*

The second way deep interdisciplinarity guided our course had to do with its call to keep one eye on “practice” at all times. For us, this was not about introducing students to how other people put the idea of the “communicative city” into practice; instead, we challenged our students to put their own understandings of the ideas we discussed into practice by exploring the city in their own ways. We asked students to put down their readings and their notes and walk outside, to look around, to listen, and to reflect. We asked them to identify public places and spaces they already knew and to discover ones they had walked by many times but never noticed. Their final project asked for their unique understandings of the connections between readings, experiences, and perspectives to be reflected.

Students’ final projects were individual, multi-vocal, and critically reflexive. Each student created an 8-10 minute long walking tour podcast with five “stops” to explain particular public places and spaces in Boise as a singular narrative that asked a visitor to Boise to “see” it in a way they may not otherwise have considered. What emerged across projects was a diverse representation of a singular city. Some students told better narratives, and some narratives resonated more with our external judges (the City Manager for Comprehensive Planning and the Executive Director of the Boise Convention & Visitors’ Bureau). Collectively, these projects produced a vision of the City of Boise that revealed a compelling story inclusive of a variety of perspectives about how Boise is historically significant, uniquely interesting, and/or presently important.

Two projects in this story stood out: one podcast focused on the City’s Basque District (a commonly revered part of Boise for its character, history, and culture by its leaders) and won a unanimous “first place” decision from the external judges; a second podcast focused on Boise’s evolution as a democratic center of political influence and won a unanimous “first place” decision from us as co-instructors. In other words, there were two levels of success—related but not mutually exclusive—both presentations were deserving of excellent evaluations. But just as our course was guided by the tenets of deep interdisciplinarity that brought us together in performative collaboration as instructors in the classroom, these projects brought our students together to see the various ways that a “successful” final assignment could resonate with different audiences. Guided by praxis, “success” in our classroom mimicked “success” in life outside the classroom—it was divisively determined in relation to varied values privileged by the evaluative audiences they reached.

Our focus on the relation between audience values and individual perspective-taking, however, did not stop at the production of a final project for a particular audience. The second part of the assignment required students to assess and respond to possible critiques about their adopted perspectives in the creation of their walking tour. By providing each student with an opportunity to con-

sider how he or she would respond to a potential critic (of their own imagining), students were able to use our critical questioning model of engagement to increase their own understandings about public place and space in Boise. If students would have been asked to simply adopt a perspective that aligned with one or the other of us, critical pedagogy would have been moot. Our point, instead, was to enable our students to move beyond already existing understandings of Boise and create new possibilities for imagining, (re)organizing, and (re)presenting the city in novel ways—in ways that they themselves would not have previously been able to articulate as either possible or useful before taking our class.

Thus, our final project was designed to prompt thoughtful self-critique because in imagining what some unknown critic might say, one also imagines useful responses, explanations, and articulations of how what one did choose is significant. We saw this in our students' writing as well. Just as in their podcasts, some of them were clearer than others, some were more complex than others, and some were unique while others were more predictable. But all of them engaged in a process of learning that required imagination of other perspectives; the practice of imagining and responding to possible critique is not an academic rehearsal for real life but an opportunity to engage in critical thinking that directly translates to living in everyday life. In this way, we embraced critical pedagogy's call for praxis because we asked our students to not "just" imagine new possibilities but to "try them on." As such, this project amounted to asking our students to embrace the same spirit of deep interdisciplinarity that we did (as co-instructors) by requiring them to bring their own unique disciplinary and experiential backgrounds to our class and utilize them (not re-learn or forget them). We expected our students to demonstrate critical inquiry in all that they did—not just parrot back two different perspectives side-by-side.

Through both instructor-instructor performances of critical engagement in the classroom and a central commitment to asking our students to extend their classroom into the world in which they lived, we sought to challenge our students to see—and engage—diverse perspectives about urban public place and space that became known by peering (in various ways) through a lens of the communicative city. By demonstrating that differing viewpoints can be performed in different ways, the spirit of critical pedagogy was able to emerge in student interactions with various audiences (in and beyond the traditional classroom), in teacher-student interactions around course material, and in instructor-instructor interactions performed in the course. We thus see deep interdisciplinarity to enhance critical pedagogy by embracing differences that require continual negotiation, collaboration, and willingness to respond to critique rather than treating such differences as a problem in need of a universally palatable solution.

## DISCUSSION

If we fail to find ways to bridge our disciplinary academic silos and move disciplinary knowledge out “into the world” both inside and outside of academia, aspirations for critical pedagogy will also undoubtedly fail. In order to prepare our students to adapt to the “real world” in all its forms, we must reject the notion that “school knowledge” is somehow different than “everyday knowledge” (Muteri, 2013, p. 87). And we must do in our classrooms the very difficult work of learning, (re)learning, and (un)learning how to teach together in ways that we could not possibly conceive of before engaging in such an undertaking. Critically reflecting on our particular interdisciplinary course offers our experience of embracing deep interdisciplinarity to ultimately first, enhance critical pedagogy to more directly address instructor-instructor interactions in interdisciplinary contexts; and second, charge interdisciplinary education with rejecting simple binaries of knowledge and knowledge-creation in favor of adopting unique, creative, and fluid processes of teaching and learning. It is only by embracing the critical components of interdisciplinary pedagogy (not attempting to “simplify” it by using watered-down terms that exist separately across disciplines) that we can identify new intersections and bridges from which to speak, to think, and to adapt and thus move higher education forward—not resign it to reproduce what is already known in different forms.

Given the recent debate about educational institutions’ role in producing critical thinkers (e.g., Accenture, 2013), what seems to be at the center of the discussion is what education should entail. Based on our experiences, we need to challenge classroom practices that resemble what Freire (1970) refers to as the “banking” model of education (information transfer from one “mind” to another in the same way a bank may transfer “funds” from one account to another). Instead, we must focus on how to meet students “where they are” when they enter our classroom (usually expecting a single instructor who will set up a series of expectations, which each student will attempt to “master” and demonstrate their mastery in order to be awarded a suitable grade at the end of the semester). One way engage students in the spirit of both critical pedagogy and interdisciplinary educational endeavors is to create new teaching and learning opportunities altogether; deep interdisciplinarity asks us to do just that.

### *Benefits of Deep Interdisciplinarity for Critical Pedagogy*

While many readers may already resonate with critical approaches to teaching and learning, it is important to recognize that critical pedagogy has a history of being denounced as too abstract and void of practical relevance for students and teachers alike by its critics (e.g., Knight & Pearl, 2000; Ellsworth, 1989). We, however, find it more useful to reject the overly simplistic theoretical-practical

binary that such critiques employ in favor of adopting approaches to critical pedagogy that produce clear opportunities for both students and teachers to advance critical thought by applying it to “real” opportunities in the world(s) important to them. In other words, if we prioritize critical thinking at the expense of critical doing, then we have not engaged critical pedagogy to its fullest potential. Similarly, if we reject academic knowing in favor of only teaching to students’ existing understandings of their experiences prior to entering the classroom, then we have failed to teach them how to adapt to the multiple jobs they will most likely hold in their lifetime, the technology they (let alone we) have not yet even imagined, or how to be capable of innovative contributions to whatever career—and life—experiences they may encounter. We believe that the inherent critical framework of a deep interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning can not only further enrich the literatures on critical pedagogy but also more concretely develop the connections between theory and practice more generally that a focus on praxis requires. In our experience, the integration of critical and interdisciplinary pedagogies through the framework of deep interdisciplinarity can better guide instructor-instructor interactions in the classroom, while also providing an ongoing opportunity for those employing such a framework to share their unique contributions and experiences in an effort to continually provide illustrative ways to foster praxis in interdisciplinary contexts.

### *Benefits of Deep Interdisciplinarity for Interdisciplinary Pedagogy*

In an era of education reform that simultaneously seeks to produce innovative, entrepreneurial critical-thinkers (Tugend, 2013) with skill sets applicable to very specific areas of employment (Accenture, 2013), it is timely to ponder the implications of such a call for pedagogy in higher education. Both critical and interdisciplinary pedagogical discussions remain prominent parts of teaching and learning scholarship, but their literatures remain painfully separate. We see this as an opportunity for critical pedagogues to rethink their relationship(s) to interdisciplinary knowledge and for instructors in interdisciplinary classrooms to rethink their relationship(s) to critical pedagogy. We see sharing our own critical reflections of an interdisciplinary co-taught classroom experience as an opportunity to nurture a more robust conversation about how such an integration of approaches to pedagogy can be useful for teachers, students, and the institutions that support them both. We hope this discussion of our course as has provided insight into both the benefits of embracing deep interdisciplinarity into co-taught interdisciplinary courses in higher education but can also serve as an inspiration for others to develop their own approaches to teaching courses (and learning environments) that may not neatly fit in the confines of traditional disciplinary-specific classroom approaches to teaching.



In explaining how the advent of critical pedagogy has advanced interdisciplinary pedagogy scholarship, we see clear opportunities. First, knowledge creation between co-instructors in a co-taught learning environment is a unique and significant contribution to a student's higher education experience that cannot be replicated in the traditional disciplinary-specific classroom. Second, there is room to recreate articulations of learning "outcomes" that better align with the strategic plans of most institutions of higher education and simultaneously support interdisciplinary knowing in some form. Third, salient abstract concepts related to particular topics of inquiry must be simultaneously connected to the places (and spaces) students already care about in tangible, individualized, and unique ways.

Moving beyond the primary epistemological assumptions of any one field required carefully navigating between the role of "expert knower" and "humble inquisitor" (Penny, 2009).

While the role of "expert" is often much easier to take on than the "humble inquisitor," the enduring passion to continue to ask ourselves and our students to reflect on "ways that each of us can vary from one another" (Allen, 2011, p. 4) keeps the spirit of critical pedagogy continually at the center of what counts as "good" teaching and learning. Focusing on the complexities of power embedded in the inherently unequal ways in which we come to know about the world around us asks higher education to remain continually aware of how the way we talk about what we teach "produces, maintains, and/or resists systems of power and inequality" (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001, p. 109).

Consequently, by embracing deep interdisciplinarity, what we know can be dramatically expanded. The history of "things" is often only as deep as its disciplinary (or "expert") history allows (Foucault, 1972). For instance, for us, the disciplinary history of the Communication field is often grounded in the processes of human communication and how they have evolved, affected, and adapted to various situations, audiences, and purposes over time. The disciplinary history of Urban Planning and Design is often united around a central desire to modernize cities in relation to larger economic, political, and historical forces while balancing concerns about equity, environment, and growth. Its focus on spatial configurations and design of places, infrastructure, and activity further situates such forces in particular ways. By placing these disciplinary histories in conversation, the significant processes and topics that each discipline alone seeks to articulate moves the other towards a more comprehensive exploration of urban life. We looked to urban communication as a way to bridge various disciplinary divides with the idea of the "communicative city." Other courses have infinite possibilities to find their own ways of bridging ways of knowing that embrace and reflect the spirit of deep interdisciplinarity in significant ways. For these reasons,

we see critical pedagogy to inherently improve interdisciplinary education initiatives in ways that better connect students, instructors, and the world(s) that we all engage.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

While there are other ways we could have discussed this course (e.g., in relation to student evaluations or by focusing more on teacher-student interactions), we feel the instructor-centric perspective articulated here reveals the need to further explore, integrate, and reflect upon possibilities for interdisciplinary and critical pedagogy scholarship to improve each other in salient ways. By moving knowledge (and the creation of knowledge) outside of the easily recognizable silos that have historically shaped what we know (and molded what we know into recognizable forms), we create new possibilities for both. Before we attempt to make claims about what deep interdisciplinarity as a pedagogical approach can—and should—look like across various instances of seemingly good (and/or bad) practices of teaching and learning, it seems appropriate to first clearly articulate its framework. By explaining how such a framework was useful in our particular set of circumstances, we hope to prompt others to consider possibilities for their own course development, facilitation, and evaluation in similarly spirited ways.

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