

**Title:**                   **What Evidence in the Scholarship of *Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching*: do we know anything?**

**Presenter:**           **Dave Morrison**  
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### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Critically evaluate the evidence of interdisciplinarity in SoTL
- Articulate the discord between doing and teaching interdisciplinarity
- Articulate the hidden legacy of essentialist disciplinarity in scholarship of interdisciplinary learning and teaching
- Consider/Discuss solutions to the intrinsic problem of studying interdisciplinarity from a disciplinary perspective

### **Session Outline**

Interdisciplinarity remains a persistent goal in higher education, and yet after more than forty years of research it also remains defined in a wide array of incommensurable ways, especially in terms of learning and teaching. Much of this disharmony stems from often indiscriminate use of a wide range of local SoTL (and scholarship on interdisciplinary research) by unrelated theorists compiling examples to build an aggregate depiction of practice (Thompson-Klein, 1990, 1996, 2010; Lattuca, 2001; Newell, 2001, 2006; Repko, 2008; Szostak, 2008; Wexler, 2012). But the evidence of interdisciplinarity provided by SoTL has typically been overstated, and very large discrepancies overtly ignored or explained away, e.g. the often extreme differences in what interdisciplinarity is perceived to be across disciplines, fields, and individual teachers; the presumption that ethnographic data is interchangeable across studies in terms of interdisciplinarity; and the presumption that historical self-identification as interdisciplinary is a reliable source of examples which can be used to define interdisciplinarity. This has left a dearth of reliable evidence, regardless of very large amounts of publication on the topic, and consequently no well-substantiated direction for building interdisciplinarity into our learning and teaching.

I want to open with some of the findings of my doctoral research on what interdisciplinarity is and how we can teach it to students (Morrison, 2014), and then open the discussion to what kinds of evidence SoTL can lend to understanding interdisciplinarity, and what it can't, and can anything be done to promote the former. I would like to pick through what the problems actually are (or are not), looking at examples from some foundational studies that nearly all others have built on, but also some recent SoTL on interdisciplinarity that has taken different directions or made bolder claims to empirical reliability (OECD/CERI, 1972; Boix-Mansilla and Duraising, 2007; Huutoniemi et al., 2010)

## Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

- [20min] Introduction to the history of research on interdisciplinarity in SoTL, with focus on the use of evidence in these and my own research on problems and solutions.
- [25min] Guided discussion considering examples of evidence and arguments in the foundational literature and the use of SOTL for understanding interdisciplinarity. Some questions we will look at are:
  - What are the pros and cons of the methodologies used?
  - How generalisable are the results?
  - What is the legacy of the foundational works, and should it be so?
- [10min] Open discussion of what we do or do not know now and where to go next. Some questions we will consider are:
  - Can there ever be a generic understanding or is pluralism unavoidable?
  - Can interdisciplinarity ever be adequately understood through disciplinary SoTL, if so how?
  - Are there other, better, ways to approach it and what role would SOTL play in this?

## References

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