

Definition of Transdisciplinarity

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It seems to me that many of the problems we have on this Internet Forum on Transdisciplinarity come from the fact that we use different definitions of transdisciplinarity or, even worse, we discuss transdisciplinarity without defining what this word means. Let me recall the historical fact that Jean Piaget was the thinker who first coined the word "transdisciplinarity", around one year before the workshop "L'interdisciplinarité - Problèmes d'enseignement et de recherche dans les universités", held in Nice (France) from 7 to 12 of September 1970 (Proceedings published by OCDE in 1972). It is true that several other contributors (Erich Jantsch, André Lichnerowicz, Guy Michaud, Pierre Duguet, etc.) use this word in their contributions, but Guy Michaud, one of the organizers of the meeting, and also André Lichnerowicz, confirmed to me that it was Piaget who invented the word and asked the others to think about its meaning.

It is amusing to mention also the fact (see page 13 of the Proceedings) that the word "transdisciplinarity" was initially proposed by Piaget to figure IN THE TITLE of the meeting, but OCDE authorities decided not to use it in order to better adapt to the different systems of teaching in the different countries represented in OCDE... In his contribution, Piaget gives the first known definition of transdisciplinarity (I give it in French, in order not to distort his words) :

"Enfin, à l'étape des relations interdisciplinaires, on peut espérer voir succéder une étape supérieure, qui serait "transdisciplinaire", qui ne se contenterait pas d'atteindre des interactions ou réciprocitys entre recherches

spécialisées, mais situerait ces liaisons à l'intérieur d'un système total sans frontières stables entre les disciplines" (page 144).

In her stimulating contribution to this Forum, Helga does not give a definition of transdisciplinarity but she gives sufficient hints to point towards such a definition. When she writes "Transdisciplinarity is about transgressing boundaries", she is in obvious agreement with Piaget, even if she does not say explicitly that the "boundaries" in question are the boundaries BETWEEN disciplines.

The assertion "The third attribute of Mode-2 is transdisciplinarity" is more ambiguous, because it allows the reader to think about an identification between new "Mode-2 production of knowledge" (defined in the book "The New Production of Knowledge") and "transdisciplinarity", identification that would be in obvious contradiction with the Piaget's definition. Moreover, it is not clear if the new mode of production of knowledge - the Mode-2 - corresponds to new knowledge or is, in fact, recombination of elements of old knowledge.

I gave myself a definition of transdisciplinarity in my book "Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity" (SUNY Press, New York, 2002): transdisciplinarity is the new "in vivo" knowledge, founded on the following three postulates :

1. There are, in Nature and in our knowledge of Nature, different levels of Reality and, correspondingly, different levels of perception;
2. The passage from one level of Reality to another is insured by the logic of the included middle;
3. The structure of the totality of levels of Reality and perception is a complex structure: every level is what it is because all the levels exist at the same time.

I think that there is no obvious contradiction between the three above definitions but perhaps only a different degree of generality. I formulated my own definition in order to agree with what I know to be essential both in hard and soft sciences. I would be very interested to know what the other participants at this Forum, and especially Helga, think about this problem of

agreement or disagreement between the above three definitions of transdisciplinarity.

Fonte:

<http://www.interdisciplines.org/interdisciplinarity/papers/5/>