

Blurring or Challenging Intellectual Boundaries? The Quest for an Innovative Interdisciplinary Graduate Teaching Programme

Karla Pollmann, University of Kent, Canterbury (K.F.L.Pollmann@kent.ac.uk)

My own background: Classics, Theology, Education

Large international and interdisciplinary project on the reception of Augustine of Hippo through the Ages (<http://www.st-and.ac.uk/classics/after-augustine>)

Higher Education Academy (UK)

- ▶ National and independent organisation, founded in 2004 (www.heacademy.ac.uk)
- ▶ Aim: support UK HEIs with strategies to enhance quality and impact of learning and teaching
- ▶ International Scholarship Scheme: benefit the UK Higher Education sector by bringing back interesting, challenging and innovative learning and teaching practice to the UK
- ▶ My project: ideas for an innovative interdisciplinary graduate teaching programme (Canada, Netherlands): A) findings, B) their transferability

Agreed beforehand: ‘Inter’-disciplinarity can only exist ‘between’ disciplines, so it is not meant to *replace* disciplines, but to *enhance* them.

“Interdisciplinarity is the only way to solve word problems” (Jeffrey Sachs)

“To make interdisciplinarity possible at a HEI, institutional support is indispensable” (Karla Pollmann)

A) My findings so far (based on research at and of UBC, but the aim is diversity of possibilities, challenges, problems etc., NOT an evaluation, analysis or critique of UBC!!)

- 1) Interdisciplinarity student-driven, enquiry-based, aim is problem-solving, student makes use of possibilities of institution 'against the grain', *individualistic*, 'loner', but have the necessary qualifications/ possibility of institutional support normally mainly administrative or supportive (ISGP, Green College); student normally lined to one discipline and has a second supervisor from a different discipline by personal arrangement
- 2) Interdisciplinarity teacher-driven, based on *personal* interests, connections and motivation, individual initiative to set something up often with the help of other colleagues (including stakeholders from outside the university), often extra work involved, risks of lacking student qualifications, problem of assessment and student employability?, prejudices from others that this is without standards or simply not belonging to the 'club'
- 3) Grass-roots interdisciplinarity, comes from faculty or students, minimal institutional support, advantage of quick reaction possible to new developments (political, natural disaster etc.), highly original combinations and collaborations possible, extremely flexible and adaptable to individual needs and possibilities; problem of schedule clashes due to *spontaneity*
- 4) Interdisciplinarity provided by institution, structured curriculum, institution-driven, programme provided with certain choices, groups, interactions, support should be systemic (Science and Technology Studies, College for Interdisciplinary Studies; The Quest), the only one of the types of interdisciplinarity that can realistically be *long-term*, but needs then support from the highest level.

B) Transferability to the UK

- 1) Such students are rare in the UK???
- 2) On the individual staff level a lot is possible, both in terms of different forms of interdisciplinarity (narrow and wide?), and in terms of innovative forms of teaching from which also disciplines can profit
- 3) Grass-roots definitely a brilliant way of getting things going without too much financial aid needed, there would be support for this from the HEA and other bodies, both at the individual HEI and nationally
- 4) WHOW – definitely a dream – how far can you go??? Needed: consultation, focus-groups, clear policies and goals, unreserved institutional support up to the top.