

# Revisiting Our Research Assumptions 20 Years On: The Role of Interdisciplinarity

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The contributing authors for this special edition reflected on three major themes of interdisciplinarity<sup>1</sup>: (a) reality as multileveled and more complex than assumed by single disciplines, (b) researchers and practitioners in adapted physical activity (APA) being faced with complex problems that cannot be solved by a single discipline, and (c) solutions of complex problems require the use of a holistic multilevel perspectives (Repko & Szostak, 2017). They addressed knowledge integration and its relevance for practice and research in the field of APA using instrumental, conceptual, and critical classifications of interdisciplinarity. Instrumental interdisciplinarity occurs when scholars utilize or borrow ideas from another discipline to enhance problem solving in their home disciplines (Slater & Hearn, 1996). Conceptual interdisciplinarity examines assumptions of institutional and social power embedded in disciplinary work (Aran, 2004). Critical interdisciplinarity links interdisciplinary research with critical theory to create a potent mixture of critical questioning with negotiation (Summer, 2003).

APA has been described as both a cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary field, drawing upon the research traditions of the social sciences, the humanities, the arts, and the natural sciences to guide research and practice (Bouffard, 2014; Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007; Kagan, 2009; Reid & Stanish, 2003). Multidisciplinary inquiry involves disciplinary specialists working on a single problem with no attempt to integrate the different perspectives while cross-disciplinary research has been used as a synonym for multidisciplinary research, an umbrella term for disciplinary collaborations, or the viewing of one discipline from the viewpoint of another (Bouffard & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2016).<sup>2</sup> Disciplines are guided by different world views or frames (e.g., paradigms, ontologies, epidemiologies, theories). “Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world” and are from whence ideas come (Lakoff, 2004, p. xv). Communication across disciplines can be difficult and divisive as people are often educated within traditional frames that can confine understanding of the foundations of other areas of inquiry (Jacobs & Frickel, 2009; Repko & Szostak, 2017).

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*Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly* “is a multidisciplinary, international journal and the field relies on multiple disciplines to produce its body of knowledge, . . . guided by disciplines (or domains of knowledge) such as biomechanics, motor control/neuroscience, exercise biochemistry, exercise physiology, sport and exercise psychology, sociology, critical theory, poststructuralism, or philosophy” (Bouffard, 2014, p. 2). The editorial board of *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly* infrequently publishes interdisciplinary research due to rare submissions yet may benefit from interdisciplinarity as a way of building on the strengths of our diverse bodies of knowledge (Bouffard, 2014). To publicly engage in the narrative surrounding interdisciplinarity counters perceptions of being too inward looking in a rapidly changing sociopolitical climate around diversity, human experience, and movement. “We must insist on the value of complexity, so that divergent thinking is not eclipsed in the effort to speak with one voice. We must make room for the disputes that are at the centre of knowledge generation” (Viseu, 2015, p. 291). Valuing complexity requires resisting acquiescence to habits of mind, stepping back from entrenched assumptions, and reframing the way we see the world (Lakoff, 2004). Thinking differently, speaking differently, and “troublemaking” are required to bring about social change at the risk of being dismissed or marginalized as being as irrational, dismissive of our history, or underinformed by our colleagues (Lakoff, 2004; Updale, 2008). Yet calls for integration of research, theory, and practice in APA through interdisciplinarity continue to increase (Bouffard, 2014; Bouffard & Reid, 2012; Szostak, 2016). We invite you to examine how the contributing authors frame their thinking, the goals they seek, and the plans and actions they suggest for developing the research relationships needed for interdisciplinary research in APA.

Rick Szostak, in his article titled “Interdisciplinarity and Adapted Physical Activity,” explores the application of interdisciplinarity to the field of APA, encouraging researchers to avoid the allocation of scarce resources to the reinvention of previously identified and successful strategies for justifying, engaging with, and pursuing interdisciplinary research. He artfully brings together literature on interdisciplinarity, creativity, and team research to reinforce that interdisciplinary research is neither impossible nor easy. By advocating for a shared set of strategies for interdisciplinary research, he notes that communication across disciplinary researchers is enhanced, sparing the need to explain ontological and epistemological adherences, theories, methodologies, and the rationale for engaging with the knowledge base of other disciplines. Moreover, shared strategies enhance journal and grant reviewers’ abilities to evaluate interdisciplinary work.

The parsimony of the recommended guiding principle for viewing the field of APA and the preparation of students, “No intervention with one type of research” is worthy of deep reflection, as is the recommendation for mapping the *big picture* by identifying interacting variables that encase complex questions. Mapping challenges disciplinary singularity (without ignoring disciplinary contributions), historical adherence to disability as an individual problem, ableistic good intentions, a focus on restorative function, and many other axiological beliefs (see Peers, 2018). Placing disciplinary and interdisciplinary research along a continuum of research endeavors, rather than dichotomizing ontological and epistemological adherences, encourages insights that may breakdown the epistemology of ignorance that can prevent us from widening views of our field in the broader world. Dr. Szostak notes