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Transdisciplinary and Powerful Learning

Abstract: Powerful social studies for peace engages students in all aspects of life. Transdiciplinarity combines different forms of knowledge through inquiry across disciplines and cultures. It is distinct from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work in that it enables new areas of specialization, like peace studies, gender studies and multicultural education. The National Council for the Social Studies in the USA described powerful teaching and learning as outcomes of: integrative, meaningful, value-based, challenging, and active instruction. Visioning about the near and far future enhances powerful social studies by orienting students toward a future without harm as a response to conflict.

Visionary education involves transdisciplinary learning. Pursuing peace engages students in powerful social studies involving all aspects of life. In addition to the disciplines that social education has included, people also need for conflict management the knowledge base and skill sets in other disciplines.

Transdisciplinarity combines different forms of knowledge through inquiry across disciplines and cultures (Nicolescu, 2002). Scientific methods of inquiry established in modern times comprise one component of transdisciplinarity. Another component incorporates observations that respond to the findings, which is an inclusive manner of discovery and synthesis (Mobjörk, 2010). In other words, feedback on perceptions of conclusions made from inquiry is a component of the analytical process. Considered in transdisciplinary learning are the insights of others not situated within the study and field. In an effort to avoid hegemonic and unidirectional approaches that limit knowledge advancement, the process involves reintegration of ancient and indigenous forms of information with multiple ways of understanding it. This process avoids the limitations that methods of “modern” science have had (Somerville & Rapport, 2000; Nabudere, 2012). Use of the multi-systems toolbox for working with human thinking responds to a polarized and otherwise limited worldview that constrains problem solving. The division of knowledge bases into disciplines facilitates specializations that limit the tools of discovery and problem solving when they are not all available together (Somerville & Rapport, 2000).

The need to cross disciplinary boundaries in social education has been evident in the subject area of social studies. Its inclusion of multiple disciplines demonstrates more than the integrative nature of social education. It illuminates the synergy that teachers need for accomplishing the goal of providing integrative instruction (Levin & Nevo, 2009; Richards, 2012). Transdisciplinarity is distinct from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work in that it enables new areas of specialization, such as conflict resolution (Carter, 2010a). Multidisciplinary work allows many specializations to investigate the same problem, and methods of those inquiries, such as qualitative inquiry transferred across disciplines in an interdisciplinary manner. In this way, transdisciplinarity features new fields of learning, including peace studies (Lappin, 2009). The development of transdisciplinary curriculum requires integration. It is one of several components with which educators construct powerful social education.