
The decolonial trans disciplinarity: a challenge for which the General Studies are not prepared

La transdisciplinarietà decolonial: un desafío para el que los Estudios Generales no están preparados

Waldemiro Vélez Cardona

University of Puerto Rico (UPR)

Waldemiro.velez2@upr.edu / <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4722-2095>

Elías Villanueva Gómez

Amherst College, Massachusetts, "USA".

Evillanueva25@amherst.edu / <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4118-1346>

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SUMMARY

In this article we propose that for trans disciplinarity to be developed to its maximum potential in General Studies, various epistemologies and cosmos sciences must be incorporated into the processes of integration of knowledge that are inherent to it. Since transdisciplinary processes require teamwork, both in research and teaching, scientific and academic actors, as well as community, business, government, etc., must participate on an equal basis. This represents a challenge for which the General Studies are not yet ready.

Keywords: trans disciplinarity, coloniality, General Studies, companies, epistemological diversity.

Introduction

In this article we propose to develop the idea that trans disciplinarity is ontologically decolonial. That is, it is either decolonial or should not be considered as trans-disciplinary. We understand that for it to develop to its full potential in the search for solutions to the most pressing social problems, various epistemologies and cosmo experiences must be incorporated into the processes of integration of knowledge that are inherent to it. Since transdisciplinary processes require teamwork, both in research and teaching, scientific and academic actors, as well as community, business, government, etc., must participate.

Considering in equal conditions the different ways of knowing and being, of these actors, represents a significant challenge particularly for scientific and/or academic actors, who on many occasions have been socialized from modern-colonial epistemologies that neither identify nor make visible other ways of knowing that cannot be validated by means of the traditional scientific method. Multifaceted and multidisciplinary problems require the equitable incorporation of all kinds of knowledge to systematically alter the socio-environmental relationship with the problem in question. The incorporation of all forms of knowledge is one of the pillars on which transdisciplinary work is based.

This seems to us of particular importance in the context of General Studies, which have often been based on the Western canon of knowledge production and learning. Considering the above, we understand that the development of a trans disciplinarity faithful to its origin and representative must be constituted in an equitable integration of knowledge in which the diverse knowledges are adequately represented. The development of an authentic trans disciplinarity, that is, decolonial, given its origin and trajectory, represents a monumental challenge, for which the General Studies are not prepared.

To the extent that the General Studies were born in the European and North American academy, in which the Western Canon was and is strongly hegemonic, its development has been marked by intellectual tensions (Hutchins-Dewey debate), in which the Eurocentric and modern colonial perspective very often prevailed, in the processes of curricular development. A notable example is the case of Puerto Rico, as we will see in this presentation.

In the first section of this work, we will establish what we understand by trans disciplinarity, decoloniality and General Studies, to go deeper into the reasons that base the need for trans disciplinarity to be free of the modern-colonial obstacles that have prevented its full development. Finally, we will propose the transformations that must be carried out in the General Studies to be able to integrate the trans disciplinary approaches in their teaching and research.

Our proposal to understand by trans disciplinarity, decoloniality and General Studies.

General Studies

For us, general university education is the component of the curriculum that emphasizes both the importance of the disciplines, as well as their inadequacy and limitations to produce knowledge. It also recognizes both the importance of reason, and the risks of an uncompromising rationalism that ignores that human beings, subjectivity, affectivity, and life, have an important irrational component. That is why rationality must recognize the importance of affection, love, repentance and the experience of life.

General education recognizes the porosity and linkage of knowledge, as well as the insufficiency and limitation that represents the way in which they have been organized in universities (disciplines, departments, faculties, careers, etc.). Hence its main con-

-tribution to the integral formation of students comes from its emphasis on revealing the epistemological, economic, political, in short, cultural foundations in a broad sense, of all the ways of producing and organizing knowledge, both through history and today; and the indissoluble link of these processes with our reality and with the ways in which we represent it, build and rebuild, but above all we experience, enjoy, suffer and live. In other words, general education helps us to restore the individual/species/society relationship, without this leading to reducing or subordinating one term to another. (Morin 1993, pp. 22–23).

General education, moreover, -and perhaps, above all- actively and deliberately promotes- the connections between the various areas of knowledge, promoting the reconstruction of its fabric (complexus), as well as the understanding- of the historical reasons for its partitioning (disciplinary) and the effects that this has had and has on the processes of learning and cultural production. Hence, it is proposed to promote the holistic reconnection of knowledge, recognizing the complexity of our existence and the intrinsic unity of all the elements that shape and enable it (biological, chemical, socio-cultural, environmental, political, physical, emotional, spiritual, etc.), therefore, it must incorporate trans disciplinaryity as the most appropriate strategy to produce learning, knowledge, culture, actions and ways of living and being that produce the greatest individual and especially collective well-being.

General education, as well as trans disciplinaryity, is characterized by fostering the connection and integration of knowledge from the various fields of knowledge (social sciences, natural sciences and humanities) and by integrally incorporating the experiences and daily experiences of students in the learning processes. In this way, scientific knowledge is integrated with intuition, sensitivity and any way of producing knowledge.

We possess knowledge and wisdom as an inheritance, particularly those who have been forgotten- two or hidden (Indo-American, Oriental, African, etc.) of which we are very proud today. By locating ourselves, teachers and students, as subjects in permanent transformation we can accept and value open and unanswered questions; unsaturated spaces, orders always incomplete; while the complex relationship between certainty and uncertainty that we inhabit and inhabit is enjoyed. (Najmanovich 2006, p. 13).

Hence the affinity of general education with the question, favoring the dialogical method, to the extent that many have come to confuse one with the other. Subirats and Vélez point out that:

...we must remember that general education particularly values the question itself, knowing how to ask, to educate by means of questions, answering questions with other questions (Maieutic). In general education the question relevant to a particular knowledge is linked to other questions of other knowledge and other contexts in endless networks of relationships and interconnections and between knowledge and its social practices. To the extent that general education emphasizes asking, therefore, it turns out to be an open, critical, dynamic and constantly renewing educational experience. (2019, p. 4)

In addition, general education has been and is the component of university curricula that has had the main responsibility for promoting citizenship awareness. However, we are not referring to an exclusive citizenship with homogenizing pretensions, but to an intercultural and complex citizenship (Tubino 2003). That is, to some citizen non-attitudes and practices that are sensitive to our ethnic, racial, linguistic, gender, religion, sexual preferences, political positions and cultural activities, among others. In this context, general education

promotes the development of tolerance, empathy, solidarity and affectivity, while helping to develop high-level cognitive and intellectual competencies. At all times we must keep in mind that the possibility of the full exercise of citizenship has several multidimensional prerequisites that are deeply interconnected with each other. Hence the importance of general trans disciplinary education, both for the understanding of these links, and to promote daily practices that increase the possibilities of the exercise of a complex and plural citizenship that leads to the expansion of democratic spaces.

As it becomes increasingly evident, the minds formed by the disciplines lose their natural abilities to contextualize knowledge so much as to integrate it into their natural sets. The weakening of the perception of the global leads to the weakening of responsibility (each one tends to take responsibility only for his specialized task) and to the weakening of solidarity (nobody feels ties with his fellow citizens anymore) (Morin, 2001, p. 40). It is particularly general education that deliberately incites and promotes the contextualization of information or idea, penetrating the fabric of which it is composed (deconstruction), instead of merely trying to divide it and compartmentalize it, as the disciplines do.

General education is characterized by fostering the emergence of a new type of intelligence, based on a balance between analytical intelligence, feelings and the body; reconciling effectiveness and affectivity (Nicolescu, 1998, p. 4), and self-promoting the fullest development of human capabilities, highlighting among them autonomy. That is why it is moving away from this- the positions on autonomy, which are defined and conceived from atomized people, artificially torn - through reason - from their community membership. We understand, following Seyla Benhabib (1992), that autonomy, and the rationality that is linked to it, must be seen in interactive

and relational terms, rather than legislative terms. The kind of personal selfreliance that general education should bring about in the 21st century university is that which understands that our freedom lies in what we do for each other in the public sphere (Smith, 1997).

In short, general education:

- Includes the human being in its integrated unit (with itself, with other human beings and with the natural environment of which it is part).
- Understands knowledge in its epistemic unit
- Understands reality in its complexity and indissoluble unity
- and articulates that triple understanding through trans disciplinarity.

General Studies

The term *colonialidad*, from which it derives- coloniality comes from the important contributions of Aníbal Quijano to the study of the effects of colonialism in Abya Yala. As Santiago Castro Gómez (2007, p. 19) states:

Quijano uses the notion of 'coloniality' and not 'colonialism' for two main reasons: first, to draw attention to the historical continuities between colonial times and the so called 'post-colonial' times; and, second, to point out that colonial power relations are not limited only to the economic-political and juridical-administrative dominance of the centers over the peripheries, but also possess an epistemic dimension, that is, cultural.

Coloniality is a historical process much more complex and difficult to understand and overcome than colonialism, referring to a pattern of power that operates through the naturalization of territorial, racial, cultural and epistemic hierarchies, enabling the reproduction of domination relations; this pattern of power not only guarantees the exploitation by capital of some human beings

By others on a global scale, but also the undercutting and obliteration of the knowledge, experiences and ways of life of those who are thus dominated and exploited. (Restrepo & Rojas, p. 2010, p. 15). Decoloniality implies a radical break with power relations, with their constitutive conceptions about what is knowledge (epistemic field) and what is or is not human (ontological field). A questioning of the racial, gender, class, geopolitical hierarchies that were the founders of the modern/colonial world.

To do so, we must produce a decolonial epistemic shift in which we can build a world in which many worlds fit, those that are not controlled by abstract universals. Mignolo (2006, p. 203). The decolonial epistemic turn is precisely the denial of abstract universals in which the rhetoric of modernity presented its victories and concealed, at the same time, the logic of coloniality (for example, the African and Jewish genocide). For Catherine Walsh (2007a, p.33):

Thinking about a turn or, rather, a decolonial flight around knowledge and education requires taking seriously both the contributions and the implications of local histories and epistemologies denied, marginalized and subalternate. It also requires attention to the formation of dialogic connections between the two. But perhaps more importantly, it requires a political and ethical attention to our own practices and places of enunciation in relation to these histories and epistemologies, to the interventions that we can undertake to build and generate political consciousness, decolonizing methodologies and critical pedagogies. That is, to confront the hegemony and coloniality of Western thought, it is also necessary to confront and make visible our own subjectivities and practices, including our pedagogical practices.

Decolonial thought and project is of utmost importance considering that the colonization of subjectivities and the production of knowledge developed in the modern/colonial world was not overcome with independence but was greatly strengthened. What it is about, then, is to be able to deconstruct colonial discourses, make explicit the power relations and the ways that they determine what is or is not knowledge and reconstitute our being (Navarrete Saavedra, 2011).

To close this section, we can affirm that decolonial thought refers to the processes by which the subaltern resists the rules and racialized hierarchies within which it is confined, challenging the logic of coloniality that categorizes them as inferior or not quite human.

"Decolonial thought is one critical theory another", an attitude that takes root in the colonies and ex-colonies according to "one epistemology another" (Mignolo, 2006). It is what Arturo Escobar characterizes as a «theory of thought through/from the political praxis of the subaltern groups» (En, Yenía, 2007, p. 97).

Transdisciplinarity

Trans disciplinarity as an analytical lens refers to the academic and everyday philosophy - a multifaceted and complex that is ready to serve as an epistemological tool and method of knowledge production that allows, advance and reaffirm the development of a theoretical framework to be used in general studies, such as that academic discipline that seeks to recognize the multiplicity of being and integrate all social and academic perspective in the training of its students. We characterize it as general studies as the approach that requires a change of consciousness to deal with complex and multidimensional problems in an equitable way. It is governed by its innate goal of transgressing the surface effect of other intellectual modes, vindicating all non-Western /colonial knowledge, and restructu-

-ring the way we position ourselves in the world.

Trans disciplinarity develops through the union of all knowledge from the beginning. We call it as an epistemological and pedagogical tool, since it is the instrument that allows closing the negative space (fertile land where space abounds to create and produce a whole and new knowledge) between the student and the studied, willing to cling to the multiplicity of being and affirm the importance of subjectivity (having the ability to see social problems and moments of individual tension through various perspectives - you seek to implement philosophies of all origin and development recognizing the limits of rationality and valuing the importance of subjectivity). It allows transcending the defined schemes by which the classical/modern/colonial disciplines are composed incorporating each sense that produces explicit/implicit personal or academic knowledge (go beyond the way in which we develop knowledge in a modern/non-colonial way to include the body guides that influence the decisive process, be empathetic and open to fail).

The method of trans disciplinary production seeks in its principles to create another way of thinking, not simply the creation of another thought. Explained by Rigoberto Lanz (2010, p. 12).

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It is the method of production that in its process seeks to dismantle what produces dominant rationality or knowledge created by

modern/colonial structures (criticizing the basis of modernity or what we consider universal knowledge, to again avoid reproduction and combat the heteropatriarchal hegemony of Western knowledge). The use of a trans disciplinary productive method allows to encompass all forms of thinking, creating, feeling, living and manifesting so as not to be limited by traditional notions of how an academic discipline is called, that is, within the creation of a transdisciplinary knowledge will be given the implementation of strategies and didactic methods of approaches already existing such as the implementation of inter-disciplinary methodologies, intra-disciplinary, and multi-disciplinary. In summary, the trans disciplinary production method is dedicated to the coproduction between relevant academic and non-academic actors, participation of the governmental and civil sectors, incorporation of traditional and non-traditional knowledge excluded from the Western canon and awareness of the way in which it is generated, by who it is generated and for whom the knowledge is generated.

The decolonial trans disciplinarity, a great challenge for General Studies

The integration of diverse disciplinary knowledge is what has given identity to General Studies in the past decades. In terms of curricular organization, the existence of courses from different disciplines and disciplinary areas such as Social Sciences, Physics, Biology and Humanities, have created the need to promote multi- and interdisciplinary integration processes, which were offered with closing courses or seminars designed for these purposes. Already entered the XXI century with the growing conviction that all our vital processes are extremely complex, therefore we need to analyze and understand them by taking advantage of a great diversity of knowledge, we have understood that transdisciplinary approaches are the most appropriate to make more

relevant and valuable to General University Studies.

However, these face very significant challenges for those who in our opinion are not prepared, both epistemological and ontological, because they are still victims of the coloniality of knowledge and being, which significantly hinder the processes of integration of knowledge, which as we have mentioned are fundamental to the General Studies. As noted by Lotrecchiano and Misra (in Mokey, V.S. & Lukyanova, T.A. (2022, p.104), and citation: Interactive systems challenges to trans-disciplinary integration include perceived inequitable contributions to the project, unbalanced problem ownership, discontinuous participation, fear of failure, variability in communication types and skills, overall lack of participant satisfaction with the project processes and outcomes, among others.

To overcome the hurdles, the development of a decolonial trans discipline is necessary. That is, a teaching and research in which the various epistemologies that need to be incorporated into these processes are incorporated and valued equally so that they can really be considered as transdisciplinary.

It seems to us that this problem is adequately synthesized by García (2019, p.9), when he states that, and we quote: I contend, the epistemological denial and erasure of critical and decolonial scholars is consistent with the colonial history that has continued to erase non-European epistemologies and worldviews through the dual processes of colonization and modernity. Case in point, thesis suggests that epistemic erasure, as a historical process is not new, but in fact, symptomatic of the historical manifestations of university knowledge configurations and reified through embedded philosophical assumptions of Eurocentric supremacy and universalism.

In considering the above, we realize that the development and incorporation of transdisciplinary approaches in General Studies in contemporary universities are requiring a process of decolonization parallel

both in these approaches and in the university institutions themselves. According to Streck (2020), trans disciplinarity is in itself a decolonial practice that promotes what he calls a democratization of knowledge. (Palmer, & Fam, 2022). They invite us to delve into the ontological field of transdisciplinary processes, by stating that the integration of knowledge that is carried out in transdisciplinary collaborations requires that participants enter a new place in which they are open to perspectives, ideologies, ethics and epistemologies. This is what Nicolescu (2002) calls “zones of non-resistance”, otherness. There we allow ourselves to delve into the ideas, values and epistemologies of others, without losing ours, because we do not replace them, but integrate them with ours. According to Axelsson, (2010, p. 21). To make trans-disciplinarity truly effective, we must recognize that its challenges are not merely pragmatic, so we must recognize that we must go beyond the simple “integrationist” agenda, since this is only part of a broader negotiation, which incorporates epistemological and ontological tensions, which must be properly considered and addressed.

In his essay entitled: Trans disciplinarity as a subversion in time and space, Gibbs (2022, p.8), states that in transdisciplinary processes the knowledge of participants is shared without diluting their beliefs. In doing so, different realities and levels of reality create a complex nexus of views from which emerges an open understanding of the complexity of our object of study. All this requires to alter the power relations that have developed and strengthened since the modern-colonial paradigm of science and knowledge was established as part of the colonization of the Global South.

As Llanque Zonta, et. al. (2023, p.113) propose, imagining options for the future of transdisciplinary science requires reinterpreting the role that nonacademic actors in research, from there to build decolonial bridges between science, policy

and practices. This task involves the transformation of academic institutions to open more flexible spaces for negotiation related to both the predominant research questions and the economic resources allocated to teaching in transdisciplinary research. Trans-disciplinarity has helped to give non-*extractivist* relations in the processes of knowledge production and learning development, leading us towards “a world where many worlds fit” as the Zapatists claimed. To continue along this path, we must encourage our efforts in the development and strengthening of transdisciplinary approaches to be decolonial, particularly when they are part of the offerings in current General University Studies.

Conclusions

The development of each section of this essay leads us to a common objective, a range of General Studies offerings, whose objective is to meet the multiple social-academic needs, which uses existing disciplines in a more relevant way to develop awareness and solutions, giving way to a deeper understanding of which processes serve more efficiently to integrate knowledge, without exclusions or hierarchies. Recognizing the importance of trans-disciplinarity in this process, we delve not only into the limits, purposes and methods of its epistemological foundations but also into the future of General Studies and academic institutions.

The fundamental basis of the equitable integration of epistemologies, ontologies and processes of producing knowledge in General Studies requires reducing or eliminating existing systematic hierarchies that penetrate beyond the bureaucratic-governmental systems to the academic-cultural spaces. That's why we dedicate ourselves to delineating how fundamental decolonization of the processes of teaching and transdisciplinary research is.

The decolonial trans disciplinarity recognizes the need to overcome the modern-colonial paradigms that have been hegemonic in our universities and particularly in the programs of General Studies, therefore it seeks to claim all epistemological perspectives that can contribute to the production of knowledge, and others, restructure power schemes, understand the role of non-academic actors in this production It is here where the existence of disciplines without borders, non-*extractivist* relations in research, and collaborative work between academic, governmental, and social actors is propitiated to significantly alter the relationship between who studies, what studied and the creation of solutions to the most pressing problems of our time.

To achieve this, we need to transform and decolonize General Studies, incorporating transdisciplinary approaches, both in teaching and research. It seems to us that the discussions and conversations that we have been having in the past RIDEG Symposiums are pointing in that direction. We are hopeful that this will continue.

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Notes 1 In this article we consider general education and general studies as synonyms.

2 Beyond Interdisciplinarity “Boundary Work, Communication, and Collaboration” Julie Thompson Klein (Glossary).

3 Nicolescu (2005, p. 30).



Waldemiro Vélez Cardona

Professor in the Department of Social Sciences of the Faculty of General Studies, of the Río Piedras campus of the UPR, where he worked since 1987. He was a consultant to the Council of Higher Education of Puerto Rico in research, from 2002 to 2006. He has published on the topics of higher education, globalization, collective bargaining, economics of Puerto Rico, general education, among others. In 2002 he published the book, *The Financing of Higher Education in Puerto Rico*; and in 2013, together with Manuel Maldonado Rivera and Carlos Sánchez Zambrana the book: *Critical History of General Education in Puerto Rico: Background and Founding Stage*.

He was coordinator of the General Education Seminar of the Faculty of General Studies from 2007 to 2015 and coordinator of the International Network of General Studies (RIDEG) since its foundation in 2010 to 2019. He oversees the General Education Section of the UMBRAL Magazine, of the Faculty of General Studies of the Río Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico. During the first semester of the academic year 2016-2017 I developed, in collaboration with the Center of Academic Excellence, the Certificate in Trans disciplinary Research.



Elías Villanueva Gómez

A third-year student at Amherst College, where he currently pursues a double bachelor's degree in Women's, Gender, Sexuality and Translation Studies and Bilingual Voice. His areas of study focus on decolonization, the construction of the colonial narrative and the critical analysis of the imposition of language as a colonial tool in the contexts of the twentieth and twenty-first century. In his academic career, he has led projects of translation of theatrical works and has obtained recognition for his creative poetic projects. He has also played a role as a student leader in the school's Latino community, advocating for representation and activism within this community.