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# Scaling Up Education by Adopting Interdisciplinary Methods in Teaching: An Indian Perspective

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SAVYASANCHI PANDEY<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*The role of the proposed Higher Education Commission of India<sup>2</sup> must comprise efficient development and regulation of the education sector in general and legal academia in particular. The author suggests what one understands by the term ‘interdisciplinary’ and how it can be successfully incorporated into universities offering legal courses in India.*

*Considering the fact that the NEP<sup>3</sup> authorizes the HECI for the regulation of higher education in India with respect to funding, syllabus standard review (for academics) and accreditation being granted to educational institutions, this article seeks to suggest a modern approach in legal teaching by adopting the inter-disciplinary approach in the teaching pedagogy.*

*By the term interdisciplinary, the author means “efficient education that prepares the student community for a complex world to which they are unsure/unaware about” rather than the already prevailing education system, which is not helpful as it focuses only on an outcome and not the process.*

*“Inter-disciplinarity is the integration of the contributions of several disciplines to a problem or an issue where this integration brings interdependent parts of knowledge into harmonious relationships.”<sup>4</sup>*

*“Multi-disciplinarity is when several disciplines provide a different perspective on a problem or issue.”<sup>5</sup>*

*“Trans-disciplinarity involves an even higher level of integration, where the disciplinary perspectives themselves fall away, to be replaced by a unity of intellectual frameworks.”<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Author is an Assistant Professor of law at Indian Institute of Legal Studies, Siliguri, Dist. Darjeeling, West Bengal, India.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Higher Education Commission of India’ is abbreviated as ‘HECI’ in this Article.

<sup>3</sup> ‘NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY’ is abbreviated as ‘NEP’ in this Article.

<sup>4</sup> Definition as given by Marilyn Stember, University of Colorado.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

## **I. HOW “TO PUT INTER-DISCIPLINARITY INTO ACTION/ PRACTICE WHILE DESIGNING COURSES?”**

The simplest way to introduce inter-disciplinarity is to make sure that the HECI patiently and consciously makes or set-up courses around complex topics which are easily identifiable; that is, it should focus upon complex issues rather than micro-managing the entire discipline.

Let us take an example for our understanding- say, something like “Realist School of Jurisprudence”. This will specifically focus upon teaching students a set of theoretical propositions as given by various philosophers from both ‘American Realism’ as well as ‘Scandinavian Realism’ to make them understand the philosophy behind the formation of ‘realism’ as a modern school of jurisprudence.

Similarly, a course from the constitution, say “Judicial Activism/Judicial Restraint”, will help the students become familiar with the emerging theories in this sub-discipline, which as a matter of fact, is no-where defined/documentated in the Constitution itself.

These topics are much-needed when we talk about the training of law students. But, what if HECI starts focusing upon access to inter-disciplinarity instead of just training someone as a subject-domain or sole-discipline expert.

To illustrate, managing the effects of COVID-19 on Indian Courts (Entire Judiciary was functioning virtually, even now some of the courts are functioning in a hybrid manner) is an issue that, by virtue of its complexity, require integration of insights from a variety of disciplines- perhaps digital connectivity, economics and healthcare to name a few with an underlying objective to find resolutions or create an understanding with respect to these issues/problems.

Most University Professors have their respective doctorate in specific disciplines and are rewarded and promoted for their impactful research that demands the approval of various scholars as well as their peers. Teachers/Professors who can integrate and mix the insights of two or more subjects are rare, and these skills need to be developed for the professionals who belong to academia.

## **II. TEACHING IN TEAMS COMPRISING OF COLLEAGUES FROM DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES**

One way to enhance inter-disciplinary teaching is to teach in groups comprising of members belonging from various disciplines, with each member of the team providing distinct opinions or perspectives on a specific issue or topic/ problem and thus, they can bring a lot to the table.

These teams need to be an authentic collaboration with a unified demand of solution for the issue that seeks its resolution. This mandates upon the professors across various streams to be broad-minded and not be adamant upon or about the disciplinary singularity or purity.

We must take a step forward and work together as colleagues with respect to any coursework in such a way that we don't only teach our share of law, business, arts, philosophy or physics, but instead, we should emphasize upon working collaboratively as a team which is driven by the unified motto of 'student welfare/ benefit of students'. We need academicians who willingly participate in this kind of approach.

### **III. INTER-DISCIPLINARITY IN PROGRAMMES UNDERTAKEN AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL**

One argument I want to put forward is that we must not assume that just because something is good, it must be implemented everywhere.

For learners to benefit from issue-based interdisciplinary coursework, they will still need an adequate understanding and a basic knowledge in foundational requirements like critical thinking, empirical inquiry, drafting written arguments and analytical reasoning, among others.

What the author wants to convey is that an interdisciplinary education at the programme level should comprise courses laying the foundation in related discipline alongside inter-disciplinary contextual learning.

Ironically, the administrators and designers of a programme may well need to resist a temptation to make all parts of their subject maximally inter-disciplinary. Different parts of a programme are needed to serve different roles.

Some parts might be way too inter-disciplinary, while others will be preparatory and only interdisciplinary within a narrow range. And, yet others may be geared towards producing the highly knowledgeable specialists of narrowly focused areas that we still need in a modern complex society.

The formal curriculum can only guide students to a limited extent, but beyond that, there are way more important lessons to be gauged from out of the classroom, that is, experiential learning through internships or article ship, project-based learning and learning through global advancements and opportunities. All have their respective parts to play in contributing to a modern interdisciplinary programme.

If we do our jobs as educators and course work designers well, even the specialists from practical fields would be ready and willing to work together with those from other specialism's

to help the students learn complex issues in an effective and efficient way.

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