

Editor's Comments

In this number we publish an important article by William Newell, in which he attempts to articulate a theory of interdisciplinary studies. It is important partly because of Newell's long and thoughtful relationship with interdisciplinary studies, partly because serious theorizing is useful to any worthwhile endeavor, and finally, because it has stimulated some of the most interesting discussions I have heard or read about interdisciplinarity.

Newell presented his first paper about these ideas at the 1999 Association for Integrative Studies (AIS) Conference at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois, and he invited Julie Thompson Klein and Jack Meek to respond. I was impressed that he was open enough to risk a public response to this first attempt. Unfortunately, Klein's response was truncated due to time constraints.

To give Klein and others a chance to start a conversation about interdisciplinarity and theory, I suggested that we invite several people to give a panel in response to Newell's theory at the next conference (2000) held at Portland State University in Oregon. A lively exchange ensued, but neither Meek nor Klein was able to attend that conference. Newell wanted a chance to revise some of his points based on objections raised by the conference panel, so he did, and the panel graciously revised and wrote the more formal articles you will read in this issue.

I am very pleased with the results of this discourse in spite of the fact that much of the panel presentation was contentious and could be classified as mere debate. I have little use for debate that ends with a winner and a loser. However, debate as a way to clarify positions, i.e., as the first step of a conversation with the goal of understanding—even if it means suspending or giving up cherished ideas—is extremely valuable. The formal articles are less contentious, in the negative sense, though they do present forceful critiques from a variety of perspectives. Newell has said that his theory was strengthened by these critiques, and the critics had an opportunity to make contributions to interdisciplinary inquiry by suggesting routes to theories of their own (Mackey, Carp), by considering tests of theory (Bailis, Klein), and even by testing Newell's ideas in a practical way (Meek).

Carp's article is considerably longer than the others and moves further away from a critique of Newell than the others do. I am responsible for that. I felt that Carp's first presentation suggested an important, challenging perspective beyond a critique of Newell, so I invited him to develop that perspective. I pressed him to include examples and allowed an imbalance that,

while awkward, is, to me, well worth the length.

What I believe we are presenting, then, is the beginning of a productive conversation taking place on a subject that brought out many of the participants' deepest convictions. Of course, in order to be printed, we had to pause the process relatively early, and one or two quotations in three articles are incorrect in reference to the final version. However, the changes in Newell do not substantially change the respondent's arguments, and the earlier references honor the process. Wherever there is a reference to Newell followed by the parenthetical (e.v.), we refer to an earlier version.

We chose to give Newell the last word in the form of comments he made after reading the revised responses. This reinforces the impression of a debate except that Newell engaged in acknowledging as well as defending—a characteristic of conversation rather than argument.

This conversation could very well be the basis of a continuing exploration of our ideas about the nature of interdisciplinary studies, integrative work, theory, the need for theory, and alternative ways of seeing the academy and interdisciplinarians' work within it. I sincerely hope so, and I invite serious responses to the issues discussed in this cluster of articles from any reader willing to write an article about her/his ideas. Less formal comments can be made on our website, where all the papers are posted. Go to <http://www.muc.muohio.edu/~ais> and click on *Issues in Integrative Studies* online. For complete access, you will need the user name and password accompanying this volume. Please put the sticker near or on your computer!

This number's next two articles are by Steve Payne and Rick Szostak. Payne opens up the field of management studies to interdisciplinarians, offering many practical ways we can apply what has been learned in management, especially to interdisciplinary planning. Szostak has written a follow-up article to the one we published in the last issue of *IIS*. Interestingly, he has opted for a schema *instead* of a theory. In this article, he applies his schema to the issue of structure in the social sciences in order to illustrate how scholars can use the schema in a fully interdisciplinary inquiry.

We close with Linda Olds' beautiful keynote meditation on the Columbia River Basin as a metaphor for interdisciplinarity. Immediately after we heard it at the AIS 2000 conference, many people requested that we publish it. I am delighted to do so, not only because it is excellent on its own, but also because it is such a fitting conclusion to this number—the twin images of the river and Indra's net unforgettable as descriptions of and lures toward interdisciplinary work.