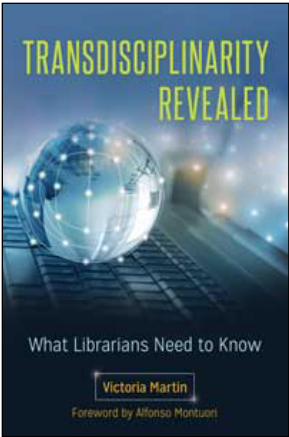


Book Reviews



Victoria Martin. *Transdisciplinarity Revealed: What Librarians Need to Know.* Santa Barbara, Calif.: Libraries Unlimited, 2017. 211p. Paper. \$85.00 (ISBN 978-1-4408-4347-1).



Academia is rooted in disciplinary distinctions, so it is no surprise that academic librarianship shares that quality. Over time, as “multidisciplinary,” “interdisciplinary,” and “transdisciplinary” have increasingly become part of the process of knowledge creation within higher education, librarians have adapted. But, while most education professionals are able to explain the distinctions between multi- and interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity is less understood, so much so that it is often perceived as a synonym for the better known modes of knowledge creation. In an ambitious work, that is both a meticulously researched history of the development of transdisciplinarity and a forward-looking call for librarians to anticipate and prepare for the challenges that will arise as it is more widely embraced and implemented, the author sets out to clarify transdisciplinarity for her readers. In doing so,

she highlights the potential and challenges of becoming more knowledgeable about, and adept at serving, this highly integrative and collaborative approach to scholarship, discusses areas of librarianship that may be profoundly impacted as transdisciplinarity continues to be adopted among scholars, and challenges existing paradigms within librarianship.

The text is explicitly divided into two parts, with explanatory chapter notes included at the end of all fifteen chapters, and suggested readings appended to the end of all but one of the chapters. Ms. Martin has also provided a very useful annotated bibliography for those who wish to deepen their understanding of the subject, a list of individuals notable for their contributions to this still emerging area of knowledge creation, a glossary of terms, and more than 29 pages of references.

In the preface, Ms. Martin cautions those looking for a practical guide that the goals of the text are to inform its audience about what transdisciplinarity is and “illuminate gaps in the library science literature.” For those unfamiliar with the topic, the author suggests in the preface that the text be read in sequential order. It is sound advice, but readers should also know that part one (that is, chapters 1–9), offers an overview of the intellectual underpinnings and development of transdisciplinarity, a detailed description of the unique characteristics of transdisciplinary research as compared to other forms of knowledge creation, robust discussions on broad areas that impact the work of academic librarians (such as how transdisciplinarity strengthens scholarly research, implementing scholarly research to address societal issues, how transdisciplinarity is impacting scholarly communication), and more. The conceptual and complex nature of many of the topics in part one occasionally makes for difficult reading (in what may be an acknowledgement of the difficulty some may have in digesting this often dense material, the longest chapter in part one is twelve pages, and two others are half that length). Additionally, some topics

(such as the ancient antecedents of transdisciplinarity, milestones in transdisciplinary thought) are examined at an almost microscopic level. But thanks to the passion with which Ms. Martin delves into her topic, she delivers on her promise to provide the reader with a well-informed understanding of what transdisciplinarity is, how it differs from other methods of knowledge creation, and the changes in research that it is inspiring.

In part two of the text, Ms. Martin moves from an examination of the historic development of transdisciplinarity to how librarians today, specifically academic librarians, may be impacted as more scholars adopt a transdisciplinary approach to their work. For example, she asserts that the disciplinary nature of knowledge organization currently employed in libraries lacks the requisite flexibility to effectively serve transdisciplinary researchers. Though Ms. Martin makes it clear throughout the text that it is not her intent to offer specific answers to the questions she raises, her discussion regarding this nettlesome issue includes suggesting specific, alternative organizational schema. Another area of focus is that of collection development. She discusses, and is critical of, the traditional approach of dividing librarian responsibilities along disciplinary lines. Similarly, methods employed to distribute collection development funds are criticized for the same reason. But, according to Ms. Martin, the problem of collecting transdisciplinarity research is seen most acutely in the selection process. It is here that the disciplinary structure that imbues academic libraries, makes it all but impossible for selectors, most of whom are responsible for supporting specific disciplines, using funds apportioned for materials for that/those discipline/s, and who may be uncomfortable in acquiring items that may not seem relevant to that discipline, or may be altogether unaware of transdisciplinary resources, to effectively identify and acquire sources appropriate for this method of research. It is a well-formed discussion, but it is not a new one. Similar criticisms have been made as they relate to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, and the author's discussions of potential remedies to the situation, including collaboration among librarians, are not new.

The two longest chapters in part two focus on reference services and information literacy instruction (IL) in the transdisciplinary environment. In each of these chapters, Ms. Martin highlights how supporting the transdisciplinary researcher is fundamentally different from those who engage in disciplinary or even multi- or interdisciplinary work. As with knowledge organization, she suggests a possible alternative method for reference service (such as synoptic reference). Similarly, after asserting that there is no readily available IL alternative that best serves transdisciplinary scholars, the author points the reader to recent work that provides a "model [that] can be successfully adopted" for that very purpose. So it is throughout much of part two that Ms. Martin seemingly hedges her bets, at one moment observing that the lack of research into library services to the transdisciplinarity researcher make it impossible to suggest meaningful solutions, then pointing to existing models that may serve as a solution. Despite that, part two is almost certain to be of interest and use to any academic librarian.

Whatever criticisms can be made of the book, on balance this is an engaging and thought-provoking work. When viewed in the light of its intended purpose—to illuminate the topic and identify gaps in the library science literature—it succeeds, unequivocally. For those heretofore unfamiliar with transdisciplinarity, it is an outstanding, and thorough, introduction to a topic that will continue to grow in importance for those in our profession.—*Joseph Aubele, California State University, Long Beach*