ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND RESEARCH ETHICS AS TRANSDISCIPLINARY FIELDS OF RESEARCH

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Abstract

Academic integrity and research ethics are not only areas of administrative and professional practice, but they are also research areas. In this session I explore the various facets of academic integrity and research ethics as areas of transdisciplinary scholarship including the historical development of the field; the plurality of methodological approaches used; and the diversity of theoretical and conceptual foundations that underpin the research. I explore threats to the development of the field such scholarship being dismissed or discounted by peers from different disciplinary backgrounds; and increased tensions when trying to navigate peer review. I conclude with a call to action for increased tolerance of methodological, theoretical, and axiological diversity and for cultivating deeper appreciation for research designs and approaches that differ from one's own disciplinary training.

As Bretag (2019) pointed out, the United States has led the way in large scale quantitative surveys, and Australia has led the way with research related to contract cheating. Bowers (1964) has long been credited with launching research into academic misconduct on a large scale (see Bowers, 1964), and later partnered with another prominent academic integrity scholar, Don McCabe (McCabe & Bowers, 1994). Research has extended beyond Anglo-European countries facilitated, in part, by the European Network on Academic Integrity (ENAI).

Academic integrity research, in particular, has developed into a field of scholarship that includes, but is not limited to policy analysis (e.g., Çelik & Razı, 2021; Foltýnek & Glendinning, 2015; Glendinning, 2013); research on plagiarism and text matching software (e.g., Curtis & Vardanega, 2016; Dlabolová & Foltýnek, 2021; Foltýnek et al., 2019; Weber-Wulff, 2016); and studies relating to teaching, learning, and assessment (e.g., Bretag & Harper, 2017; Ellis et al., 2019). In addition, the study of research integrity and ethics has also proliferated in recent decades (e.g., Hyytinen & Löfström, 2017; Israel, & Drenth, 2016). These examples are by no means exhaustive.

Academic integrity and research ethics have evolved into a transdisplinary field of scholarly inquiry. Lawrence (2010) defines transdisplinary scholarship as addressing complex problems from diverse and heterogeneous domains which cannot be solved by any singular group. Scholars collaborate across academic disciplines and

across multiple stakeholder groups that includes researchers, educators, professionals, policy-makers, students, industry, and others. Lawrence (2010) notes that the need for cross-fertilization of knowledge and experiences from diverse groups, drawing from different methodologies and theories to develop action-oriented solutions.

The definition of transdisciplinary scholarship fits well with research into academic integrity and research ethics. As research in our field has developed in both breadth and depth, so too, has it become more complex. As the global academic integrity and research ethics community grows, there is a concomitant need to develop tolerance for methodological diversity, theoretical and philosophical divergences, and even axiological variances. Peels et al. (2019) explore the notion of "value pluralism" in research integrity as an area of *professional practice*, but to date, there has been little inquiry into the need for pluralistic approaches to integrity and ethics as *fields of scholarship*.

In this session, I outline key methodological approaches including qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, experimental, interpretivist, and humanistic (including literary), highlighting how particular methodological approaches are influenced by scholars' fields of disciplines. For example, English compositionists have contributed to the field through scholarly essays (e.g., Howard, 1992, 1999); while social scientists and others have focused on the collection of data from human participants for quantitative (e.g., Curtis & Vardanega, 2016) , qualitative (e.g., Adam et al., 2017), and experimental studies (e.g., Rettinger & Kramer, 2009).

Then, I examine theoretical and conceptual approaches that have been used in academic integrity and research ethics scholarship over several decades including the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), critical discourse analysis theory (as used by Sutherland-Smith (2011), for example) and organizational development theory (as used by Bertram Gallant and Drinan (2008), for example).

I explore the possibility of threats to the development of research into academic integrity and research ethics scholarship, such as scholarship being dismissed or discounted by peers from different disciplinary backgrounds; and increased tensions when trying to navigate peer review. Dismissals of others' research can be a form of professional incivility that can extend into its own form of misconduct (for details on professorial misconduct, Braxton et al., 2011). The issue of finding reviewers who have sufficient expertise, time, and interest to review papers within this broad field of research is a topic that remains understudied, but is a pragmatic aspect of quality assurance. Complexities can arise when reviewers are tasked with assessing papers for which they have little disciplinary, methodological, or theoretical expertise. I contemplate examples of reviewer interference, such as reviewers demanding that manuscripts be changed to the passive voice when the researcher has been trained to write in the active voice, as one example. I contend that such tensions pose threats not only to the development of the research, but to the scholarly community as a space of civil discourse.

I conclude with three calls to action. First, I call for *increased awareness* of the transdisciplinary nature of academic integrity and research ethics as fields of research. Second, I call for intentional and *sustained tolerance* for methodological and theoretical plurality. Finally, I conclude with a call to go beyond awareness and tolerance, to cultivate *deep and genuine appreciation* for research designs and approaches that differ from one's own.

An obvious limitation of this work is that this scholarly inquiry is constrained by my own academic training, which spans the humanities and social sciences, leaving me without lived experience in other fields, including, but not limited to sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM), health and medical sciences, and so on. Despite these limitations, I offer this analysis to promote discourse among academic integrity and research ethics scholars as one aspect of the continued development of our research as a global community.

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