



Early Childhood Policy in Institutions of Higher Education

Advancing the Field of ECP:

Lessons from Other Fields

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ADVANCING THE FIELD OF ECP: LESSONS FROM OTHER FIELDS

Countless books, articles, and papers have been published about early childhood care and education (ECEC) services and the policies that support their quality and equitable provision. These publications vary in purpose, method, and content. Yet two observations are common to most of them. First, rarely do their authors identify themselves as leaders or members of the field of early childhood policy, and second, rarely are they published within a durable framework that fosters their implementation by policy leaders who can use the findings to strengthen ECEC services and the systems that render them. In short, the early childhood policy field is more an idea without form than a durable domain rooted in the academic landscape.

In such a context, this review paper considers how to create a new domain of inquiry that informs early childhood policy and practice, and to advance a new approach to early childhood policy leadership development across academic institutions and entities that provide professional development. In particular, the purpose here is to review what can be learned from other fields that have sought to take root as essential domains of inquiry with durable impact. For while many have tried, it appears that few have succeeded.

The review is guided by two research questions: i) What does it take to bring a new field to fruition, using institutions of higher education (IHEs) as a vehicle for doing so? ii) What can we learn from other fields in this respect? To address these questions, I have explored empirical research on new fields that have emerged in recent decades, their history, and their ongoing development, and I have read theoretical literature on how new intellectual movements take hold and how academic structures take root to sustain them. After defining some terms, I focus on three fields—Black, Women’s, and Environmental Studies—and draw implications for the development of new fields of inquiry, and in particular, early childhood policy with all its assets (and a few liabilities). I conclude with some considerations regarding next steps.

Definition of Terms: The Organization of Thought at IHEs

Several terms are variously used in conversations regarding academia, its structural components, and intellectual threads. While I do not attempt to discern the definitive meaning of these terms, I provide definitions of their use in the present context simply for the purpose of clarity.

Fields of Study vs. Disciplines

Fields of study are typically broad in scope and loosely defined; they describe general topics of inquiry. In contrast, disciplines are more narrowly specified scholarly pursuits that are characterized by a credible knowledge base; a set of premises, principles, standards, and/or beliefs; an accepted array of rigorous methodologies; and an infrastructure for the accumulation of knowledge to develop—and contest—the knowledge base of the discipline. A “field of study” thus represents a more embryonic and less circumscribed area of inquiry, while a “discipline” signifies a codified domain of focused scholarship.

Departments vs. Programs

Departments typically serve as the administrative homes within IHEs for individual disciplines (e.g., psychology, chemistry, English, etc.). Programs tend to be interdisciplinary (see below), with less autonomy over faculty whose primary homes are usually in departments. Alternatively, academic *departments* can harbor one or more *programs*, with each representing a sub-specialty within the department. In either case, the tradition of silo-ed academic departments that represent discrete disciplines within IHEs is changing. Several interdisciplinary Black Studies and Women's Studies programs have gained status as departments within their IHEs. This status may come with trade-offs; while departments usually enjoy a higher-status voice at the IHE table (and in the budget), they may also lose the ability of programs to draw intellectual voices from across the university. The increase in interdisciplinary fields with departmental status represents an increasingly holistic approach to scholarship that contests the 19th-century tradition of classifying knowledge in discrete categories.

Centers and Institutes

Centers and institutes are research entities that can reside either within or outside an IHE. When centers or institutes reside within IHEs, they typically support degree-granting programs, providing an institutional home for the program's students and faculty, who usually have concurrent appointments in academic departments. Centers and institutes are often created to facilitate interdisciplinary research and corresponding fund-raising, and in many cases to support applied and sponsored research with external organizations. Institute directors are often located in universities and report to top university administrators, e.g., the office of the president/chancellor or the chief academic officer. Centers are often located in a college within a university, or within a department, with directors who report to the college dean or the department chair.

Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary

The terms "multidisciplinary" and "interdisciplinary" are often used synonymously to mean scholarship that engages content and methods from multiple disciplines with a new lens, such as the perspective of African Americans, women, or the environment. However, sometimes these terms are used to distinguish between scholarship that engages multiple disciplines in an additive way ("multidisciplinary") and scholarship that engages multiple disciplines in an integrative way ("interdisciplinary"). Some practitioners of interdisciplinary studies make a claim to a new, distinctive methodology. For example, a practitioner of Women's Studies might say that analyzing history, literature, and government through the lens of gender constitutes a new analytic tool, and thereby a distinctive methodology. I use the term interdisciplinary with its simplest meaning of scholarship that integrates the curricula and methods of multiple disciplines, without adjudicating whether the interdisciplinary field represents a distinct methodology.

The Histories of Three New Fields

The number of fields striving for either disciplinary or interdisciplinary status in academia is vast, as a simple internet search will reveal. For purposes of this review, I focus on three fields that meet the following criteria, with the premise that they would be likely to offer relevant implications for the field of early childhood policy. Each of them has:

- i. Taken root in the past 50 years;
- ii. Become widely populated at IHEs both domestically and internationally;
- iii. Emerged in response to social movements and/or problems; and
- iv. Achieved durability amidst changes in leadership, social context, and funding.

Black Studies

Rationale. The field of Black Studies advances a new interdisciplinary perspective to existing disciplines that has long been missing from Western scholarship, that of Africans, African Americans, and the experience of the African diaspora.

History. The advent of Black Studies (aka African American Studies¹) at IHEs came as a response to an external, and then internal, social movement. In the 1960s, the black power movement began pressing for social change, including an increase in the number of African Americans admitted to IHEs. While black political activism had taken root in historically black colleges, the push to desegregate predominantly white IHEs accelerated with the civil rights movement. Desegregation of IHEs was soon followed by on-campus protests against the cultural hegemony of Eurocentric scholarship on history, politics, literature, and the arts. Students held strikes at San Francisco State College and Berkeley to demand, among other things, the creation of Black Studies departments.

Bitterly disputed among administrators, faculty, and students, these demands centered on issues of power—who should have power to bestow academic legitimacy on this new area of study, and who would define its purpose and manifestation. The aim of Black Studies, articulated by its initial proponents, was highly contentious because it went beyond the demand for a new field of inquiry and embraced a social agenda of empowerment. Miller (1989) explained, “The black, ethnic, and, later, women's studies debates of the late 1960s and early 1970s...involved more than creating new programs and departments that would be distinguished by their multidisciplinary approach to a single cultural or gender group. The more vocal advocates...foresaw changes in the composition of the academic community as well as the opportunity to serve as agents of change and empowerment for ‘minorities’ and women in the larger society” (pp. 84-85).

¹ I use Black Studies as a generic term that represents both “Black” and “African American” Studies. However, when referring to particular departments or programs, such as those at Harvard and Temple Universities, I use the term specific to those departments, which is African American Studies.

The push for social change and racial pride put the movement for Black Studies at odds with the normative objectivity of its academic peers, a vital constituency. At Berkeley, for example, black and white faculty alike doubted the “legitimacy, viability, and rationale” of the proposal for a Black Studies department, as well as the “competence of its proponents” (Miller, 1989, p. 86; Rojas, 2007). Even so, following the multiple campus protests of the 1960s, IHEs bowed to internal pressure and created more than 200 Black Studies departments or programs, although the search for academically esteemed leadership, disputes about curricula and methods, and the struggle for legitimacy within the academy persisted for many years (Rojas, 2007). As fervor for the black power movement’s vision of an Afrocentric society waned in the late 1970s and 1980s, the number of Black Studies programs nationally and the proportion of university-affiliated African American faculty declined sharply. Today some 120 formal Black Studies degree-granting programs or departments remain.

How did they survive? Several signal events seem to have turned the tide. First, from 1970 to 1978, the Ford Foundation gave more than \$10 million (in 2005 dollars) to universities and other organizations active in the Black Studies field, supporting academic programs, journal publications, and conferences. Ford’s support accelerated a shift from “engagement with black politics to a concern with disciplinary maturity” by insisting that Black Studies adopt an “integrationist stance” and “acquire legitimacy through research.” In so doing, Ford sought to “enforce the social order found within the American university system, where individuals and entire organizations are judged by their ability to advance knowledge” (Rojas, 2007, p. 131). The pursuit of academic credibility advanced along other paths as well. Several academic journals dedicated to African American scholarship emerged (*The Journal of Black Studies*, *Journal of Negro Education*, *Western Journal of Black Studies*, *The Black Scholar*), and in 1975, a professional association, the National Council of Black Studies, was founded. Together, they created much-needed avenues for communication, the construction of an empirical knowledge base, and fellowship among scholars who identified as members of the Black Studies field. In this context, many programs endured and matured.

Another milestone was reached in 1991 when Henry Louis Gates was recruited by Harvard University to chair its Department of Afro-American Studies, founded in 1969 as a self-contained department. Gates also became the director of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research (now the Hutchins Center), founded in 1975 as a locus of interdisciplinary research. Gates assembled a “dream team” of African American scholars, many of whom held joint appointments across the university. The result for Black Studies programs and departments across the country has been called the “Harvard effect.” In short order, it gave them durable legitimacy in the eyes of the academy and educated public at large. Gates attracted external donor funding and restructured the Department’s degree program to include both “African” and “African American” studies, making room for different scholarly orientations. The Department, which had struggled in the 1970s to attract faculty and students who saw few opportunities for promotion, now has its own doctoral program, representing both a career path for aspiring Black Studies scholars and a source of new leadership in the future.

Hence, while the decline of Black Studies departments and programs in the 1970s and 1980s thinned the ranks, many of those that survived found hard-won permanence in the academic landscape. Nonetheless, heated debates about the field’s canon, curricula, and methodology continued. Gates notably advocated

for greater attention to black literature and culture, but also sought to integrate them into a larger, pluralistic canon of literary and cultural accomplishments. In contrast, his counterpart at the Department of Africology and African American Studies at Temple University, Molefi Asante, argued for an Afrocentric orientation to elevate an African canon that would support a black nationalism. With deep ties to radical intellectual communities in Philadelphia, Asante drew sufficient support to enact his vision (Small, 1999). Rojas (2007) argues that the survival of Asante's model demonstrates that there are "niches within the academy" that speak to a "very specific intellectual constituency" (p. 217). Nonetheless, the Gates model has prevailed in most Black Studies departments or programs because its pluralism has proven more acceptable to the academy than the singular pursuit of black nationalism.

Rojas (2007) further argues that enduring variation in the structure of Black Studies programs, institutes, and departments offers a "lesson for the study of academic disciplines...that smaller, newer fields, such as Black Studies, have a variety of institutional forms...[and] that intellectual movements have many options" (p. 205). Specifically, he describes three alternative organizations for new academic fields: i) operating within the existing disciplinary system as an interdisciplinary venture; ii) choosing to become an autonomous discipline with its own program; or iii) building a community with significant autonomy that is simultaneously dependent on and highly connected to other academic fields, as reflected in programs such as those at Temple and Harvard. Such variation does not reflect "a field in crisis, but one experiencing modest growth and a level of stability" (p. 205).

Women's Studies

Rationale. The field of Women's Studies advances a new interdisciplinary perspective to existing disciplines that has long been missing from Western scholarship, that of women and the lens of gender.

History. The field of Women's Studies advanced contemporaneously with the field of Black Studies. Propelled by the women's liberation movement in the 1960s, the proponents of Women's Studies argued that women were under-represented at IHEs and virtually absent from the curriculum. They sought a new lens for scholarship in multiple disciplines, including literature, history, anthropology, philosophy, and education, that would elevate the experiences and perspectives of women. The first proponents—faculty who were virtually all women—sought to expose and confront the nature and sequelae of sexism. The goal was not only scholarship; it was also a "search for ways in which a successful female revolution might be constructed" (Boxer, 1982, p. 663). Like the Black Studies movement, Women's Studies sought a fundamental redistribution of power, both in society and in IHEs.

Women's Studies grew from about 17 formal *courses* in 1969-70 to an estimated 30,000 courses and some 350 *programs* a decade later. By 1982, approximately 300 Women's Studies programs had taken hold in the U.S. and other countries. Most of these programs shared a focus on both scholarship and political action, a disinclination to cede control to "elites," and a commitment to honor women's individual and inherently subjective experiences. Founded in 1977, the National Women's Studies Association described a combination of academic and political aims that discarded the premise of objective scholarship, asserting, "The academic is political and the cognitive is affective."

With this agenda, Women's Studies scholars debated the purposes of feminist scholarship and the appropriate path toward legitimacy within IHEs. One shared purpose was to reveal the male bias inherent in the dominant disciplinary scholarship, including its research assumptions and questions. A more ambitious purpose was to formulate entirely new approaches to scholarship on women. Gloria Bowles, a founder of Women's Studies at Berkeley, wrote in 1983, "It is clear to us that there are great gaps in knowledge about women and inadequate methodological tools to study what we do know. The feminist scholars...want to build a social science which does not set apart researcher and researched, and which substitutes a larger chunk of uncontrolled reality for control-led experiments of human behavior" (p. 37).

At the same time, Bowles (1983) and her peers recognized the need to adapt to the norms of the academy (and its funders) without compromising the integrity of the movement, stating, "Feminist academics have been attacking the God of Objectivity ever since we entered the fray, but He is still very much with us, and will be for some time" (p. 36). The result was an ongoing effort to develop an empirical knowledge base (i.e., a "canon"), a theoretical framework, and rigorous methods to support both, which would be acceptable to the academy *and* the practitioners of Women's Studies (Bowles & Klein, 1983). Scholars in the field continue to make concerted efforts to address these challenges directly. For example, a recently published textbook for introductory Women's Studies courses, *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies: Ways of Seeing, Thinking, and Knowing* (Launius & Hassel, 2015), carries the publisher's note: "The text is driven by a single key question: 'What are the ways of thinking, seeing, and knowing that characterize Women's and Gender Studies and are valued by its practitioners?'"

Part of this quest for legitimacy has entailed establishing a credible Women's Studies methodology, and part has required simply undaunted persuasion. As the current chair of Harvard's Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program recently said, "It's a [continuous] battle to say you need one place for these methods and these critical texts to be considered in a holistic way...We have to fight for the budget every year, have to defend [the program] every year...The debate continues, and quantitative sociologists or empirical historians often take a dim view of the more analytical paradigms we humanists use" (Lionnet, 2018).

In the midst of these challenges, Women's Studies programs and departments have managed to survive by adapting to changing social and academic contexts. Most salient was the expansion of Women's Studies to embrace evolving conceptualizations of the social construction of gender, the fluidity of sexuality, and the "intersectionality" of identity that encompasses a person's gender, race, social class, and other dimensions. Along the way, feminist theory has been complemented by queer theory, and departments that used to be called Women's Studies may now be known as Women and Gender Studies or Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. This diffusion of the nature and purpose of Women's Studies is not without controversy; some have argued, for example, "Gender studies might or might not be feminist...but women's studies must be feminist or it is not women's studies" (Zimmerman, 2005, p. 37). Yet, this evolution appears to have given new vitality to these programs as issues of gender and sexuality have gained prominence in the academic and public discourse.

As an interdisciplinary venture, Women's Studies has drawn its leadership from diverse sources. For example, the first director of Columbia University's Institute for Research on Women and Gender,

founded in 1987, was a faculty member in the English Department. She was followed by directors who variously came from the Departments of History, Anthropology, Sociology, and again English. Staying true to the vision of the founders of Women’s Studies, the Institute provides “an intellectually rigorous and socially sympathetic environment” (irwgs.columbia.edu). This abiding orientation to an ideological compass, combined with the ability to adapt to academic norms and radical changes in the social and academic contexts—changes that essentially undermined the initial premise of the field by contesting the very construct of “woman”—has allowed a contested field to survive and in many cases, thrive.

Environmental Studies

Rationale. The field of Environmental Studies advances an interdisciplinary approach to a pressing social problem with broad societal implications.

History. The emergence of Environmental Studies shares some features with the paths taken by Black and Women’s Studies, and yet also differs in important ways. Like its counterparts, the academic field of Environmental Studies responded to a broad-based movement to address a social problem that demanded an interdisciplinary approach to its scholarship. The field has also similarly struggled to create consensus regarding its purpose and curriculum, while adapting to changing social and academic contexts. However, the trajectory of Environmental Studies has been distinctly international in nature, reliant on generous philanthropy, and driven by a core purpose that engenders less resistance than the pursuits of liberation and empowerment that has characterized Black and Women’s Studies. The complex problem of environmental degradation, and the serious—indeed existential—threat it poses, has been widely recognized within and beyond IHEs (notwithstanding those who dispute the science of climate change), providing a rationale for the field. The field is thus more similar to early childhood policy in that the care and education of young children enjoys broad international attention, public support, and growing policy commitments.

Before the 1960s, students who wanted to study the environment would have read textbooks on the discipline of “ecology,” i.e., the study of nature. This changed in the 1960s with a surge of concern about environmental pollution, along with the advancement of empirical methods that could identify its agents and consequences. What had been called “gunk” in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, was soon understood as a type of water pollution with identifiable properties and ontology. In the 1960s and 1970s, while an “environmental justice” movement simmered, the focus (and title) of the field evolved. Empirical scholarship shifted the field from “ecology” to “environmental science,” which was more focused on understanding the impact of human behavior on the environment, and then to “environmental studies,” which advanced an interdisciplinary approach to the study of environmental degradation.

During this period, environmental issues gained significant international attention. In 1972, the United Nations (UN) held the Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, engaging 115 governments to focus on the impact of human interactions with the environment. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which since 1948 had tried to rally public support for conservation, joined these efforts to develop a worldwide infrastructure to protect the environment, while pursuing development in

high-poverty countries. Conference attendees agreed on a declaration containing 26 principles on the environment and economic development. Soon afterwards, the UN created its Environment Program, the European Community (later the European Union) created its Environmental and Consumer Protection Directorate, and countries began to erect regulatory frameworks for environmental protection. This surge in public awareness, and the transnational and national infrastructure it inspired, gave critical momentum to the field of Environmental Studies and its funding. Notably, governments needed experts to staff their administrative agencies, and when this demand for expertise was heard by IHEs, Environmental Studies departments and programs proliferated worldwide.

In 1992, another international milestone was reached at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, also known as the “Earth Summit.” Wide coverage of the conference ushered the concept of “sustainability” into public use, training the focus of environmentalists worldwide on not only understanding this existential problem, but also on devising its solutions. The Earth Summit triggered a boom in efforts to build an academic infrastructure for the field. Soon after the conference, sustainability degree programs were created² and the number of professional associations grew, including the Association of Environmental Studies and Scientists (AESS) and the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, both of which subsequently launched journals and held periodic conferences. Frank, Robinson, and Oleson (2011) argue, “This constellation of conferences, organizations, and representatives—from the inter-governmental, international non-governmental, governmental, and university sectors—provide[d] key mechanisms bridging world ontological and epistemological conditions and university curricula” (p. 554).

Importantly, this expanding web of journals, associations, and scholars also offered communal support and identity to faculty and students in Environmental Studies programs. Career trajectories became clearer and opportunities within institutional domains increased. Clark et al. (2011) describe AESS as “an organization to assist professionals by assembling a supportive community of environmental educators, researchers, and problem solvers, by clarifying and promoting standards for successful interdisciplinarity in the classroom and in the field, and by offering advice and support on career issues for both up-and-coming professionals and established faculty and practitioners” (p. 99). To further advance the field’s worldwide expansion, the International Network for Sustainability Science was created in 2009 “as a global platform for linking academic networks to share knowledge on the present status of, and diverse approaches to sustainable development” (Yarime et al., 2012, p. 108).

As the infrastructure grew, the painstaking work of building academic legitimacy continued. In 1990, the National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE) was formed by a group of IHE deans and faculty in the field, as well as members of Congress and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce. Together, this diverse group petitioned the government to create a National Institute of the Environment, in the image of the National Institutes of Health, to fund Environmental Studies research. While their efforts were unsuccessful, they were able to persuade the National Science Foundation to take on Environmental Studies as part of their mandate. The struggle for sufficient funding persists, however.

² Hereafter, the term “Environmental Studies” includes “Sustainability Studies.”

Interdisciplinary scholars in Environmental Studies must compete for funding with well-established, more traditional disciplines that are often first in line in IHE budget considerations.

Some argue that, as members of an interdisciplinary program, Environmental Studies scholars are disadvantaged in the bid for IHE support because the disciplines “often have a monopolistic grip on hiring, firing, and the tenure-granting process,” (Vincent, Roberts, & Mulkey, 2016, p. 418). Clark et al. (2011) describe this disadvantage in terms of the very identity of the field: “When questioned by administrators and disciplinary colleagues, interdisciplinary scholars must be able to explain the intellectual foundation, methods, validity, and significance of their work. They often must fight for identity, recognition, roles, legitimacy, and standing...Teachers in the disciplines, for example, have textbooks, problem sets, animations, and visualization packets readily available as well as articles, critiques, and sessions at professional societies about best practices” (p. 101). This disadvantage extends to the pressure to publish. When seeking grants, “disciplinary work is often privileged in academic journals and in grant proposals...The training of interdisciplinary scholars and their research output emphasizes breadth of integration rather than narrow focus. This is sometimes perceived as a weakness by reviewers, who tend to look for demonstrated accomplishment in a specific research area” (Clark et al., 2011, p. 102).

In place of traditional sources of support, extraordinary philanthropy has helped to sustain and expand the field. For example, in 2004, philanthropist Julie Ann Wrigley gave \$15 million to Arizona State University to establish the Global Institute of Sustainability, a hub of university-wide environmental initiatives. In 2012, the Walton Family Foundation gave another \$27.5 million to support the Institute, the home of the School of Sustainability, which now offers undergraduate and graduate programs, including doctoral and professional leadership programs. Other examples include a \$25 million challenge grant from the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation to support the Institute for Sustainable Solutions at Portland State University and a \$20 million gift from an anonymous donor to establish the Environmental Initiative at Georgetown University.

Even with this sustenance, debates regarding the field’s purpose, principles, theory, and identity endure. Though few dispute the problem-solving rationale for Environmental Studies, how best to do so has achieved less consensus. Is the field’s primary purpose one of the liberal arts, i.e., to disseminate knowledge for the public good, or is it one of professional development? Is its purpose to create environmentally aware citizens, to create environmental professionals who can solve complex problems, or to create environmental scientists who are specialists in scientific problems? Citing the broad purpose of professional development, the Council of Environmental Deans at the NCSE has initiated a multi-phase (and ongoing) process to articulate core competencies for environmental program graduates, and the curricula that would support them.

Calls for greater attention to theory have also been issued. Proctor et al. (2013) argued, “Environmental studies and sciences (ESS) is without question a critical area of scholarly inquiry, as environmental issues loom large in our world. Yet whether this inherently applied field will fully achieve its promise is, in our view, a matter not only of practice but of theory. We call for greater attention to the theoretical assumptions underlying ESS as a necessary step to its continued intellectual and pedagogical development and real-world relevance, and [we] urge ESS to weave more theory into its undergraduate

and graduate curricula.” Vincent and Focht (2009) further argue that this type of press for disciplinary maturity is critical, saying, “Despite the obvious value of program diversity and adaptability...the lack of a shared identity fuels perceptions by some critics that interdisciplinary environmental programs lack rigor... Despite [a] 40-year history and the large and growing number of programs, no consensus has emerged on program identity, core principles, or interdisciplinary structure” (p. 165).

Amidst these roiling debates, the Council of Environmental Deans expressed a threshold consensus regarding the field’s purpose: “Environmental programs provide an interdisciplinary focus on the interface of social and natural systems,” and “Solving environmental problems requires a holistic approach and...environmental scholars, professionals, and scientists should be trained to be systematic, process-oriented thinkers capable of understanding complex nature-society relationships” (Vincent & Focht, 2009, p. 176). Without question, the field continues to grow dramatically. A 2012 census identified 838 colleges and universities offering interdisciplinary environmental studies baccalaureate and graduate degrees, a 29% increase from 2007 (Vincent, 2010; Vincent et al., 2013). While important questions for the field remain, Environmental Studies programs have achieved a durable presence within IHEs in service to a global problem that will not be solved with speed or simplicity.

Theories of Change That Apply to Academic Fields

While these narratives tell the empirical story of how new fields have taken hold within IHEs, theories of institutional and intellectual change can offer insights into the nature of these contemporaneous evolutions. In particular, several theoretical frameworks take distinct but complementary perspectives on how and why IHEs adopt new forms—departments, programs, institutes, or centers—to recognize new disciplines (or interdisciplines). While some of these theories focus specifically on the creation of durable academic disciplines, others address institutional change more broadly, but with particular applications to IHEs.

The Rise of New Academic Fields

Core question: How do new academic fields emerge?

Hambrick and Chen (2008) describe two overlapping phases—first cited by Merton in 1973 regarding the rise of the field of Sociology—that are common to the emergence of new academic fields: i) differentiation, in which early proponents argue that important phenomena are not being adequately addressed—and cannot be addressed—by existing fields, and ii) legitimacy building, in which the founders and their successors press their claim with the arbiters of status in universities. The authors suggest that the building legitimacy demands both intellectual persuasion and emulation, i.e., “conforming to the methodological or paradigmatic conventions of more well-established fields” (Hambrick & Chen, 2008, p. 38).

Adding to the two phases of Merton’s model, Hambrick and Chen (2008) posit the existence of a third phase: mobilization, in which a field’s “early actors” coalesce, form a critical mass, derive energy from

each other, and construct an infrastructure for their work (pp. 33-35). Again, this phase can be interactive and recursive with other phases, such as when mobilization informs and revises earlier efforts at differentiation. Together, these three phases constitute a dynamic process in which new academic fields emerge and gain momentum that demands recognition at IHEs.

Institutional Isomorphism Among IHEs

Core question: Why do diverse IHEs recognize the same academic fields in similar forms?

Meyer et al. (1997) and others have advanced a relevant theory of institutional change that produces isomorphism—i.e., sameness in institutional forms and concepts—among actors who participate in and are influenced by a shared culture. The theory of isomorphic change is not exclusive to IHEs, but has been applied to them nonetheless, indicating that a fourth phase, comprised of selection and imitation, could be added to Hambrick and Chen’s framework.

Taking an international perspective, Meyer et al. (1997) focus on how and why *countries* adopt similar institutions despite striking contextual differences. They argue that contemporary actors (i.e., country leaders) routinely organize and “legitimate” themselves by adopting universalistic models of institutions. In a process of isomorphic change, countries that might otherwise be quite different in cultural, historical, and geographic context imitate the institutions of other developed countries, such as “mass-schooling systems organized around a standard curriculum, ...expansive environmental policies, ...[and] standard definitions of disease and health care” (p. 153). Their interest in “keeping up” with the community of developed countries motivates countries to select and imitate the apparently successful institutional innovations of their peer countries. In the argot of social media, this imitative instinct might be labelled, “FOMO,” i.e., Fear of Missing Out.

Frank, Robinson, and Oleson (2011) apply this theory to the international emergence of Environmental Studies in IHEs, asking the question, “What social forces stand behind the rather sudden worldwide appearance of university-level environmental education?” (p. 548). The obvious answer might be, “Environmental education springs up in universities globally because it fulfills critical needs and meets attendant interests related to local and domestic environmental degradation” (p. 548). Instead, the authors argue that the expansion of the field has depended on IHEs imitating each other, more than any responsiveness to local needs and interests. For example, they note that of the 44 courses in the University of Guyana’s Environmental Studies curriculum, 43 do not prioritize regionalized or local content, offering instead “highly generic and scientific course contents, no more (or less) relevant in Guyana than in Ghana or Guinea-Bissau” (p. 551). The authors conclude, “Environmental education rests on decidedly universalistic premises,” which were born in international forums and reflect the influence of a “world society” on each IHE whose “defining feature is not its capacity to serve proximate needs and interests, but rather its capacity to generate and convey objective and universal understandings—that is ‘knowledge’” (p. 551).

In this “world culture” view, IHEs imitate each other to remain on the leading edge of knowledge generation. Adaptation to local needs and interests takes a back seat, even while local contexts generate variation in the adoption of universalized models (Pizmony-Levy, 2011). Frank et al. (2011) suggest that,

first, the field of Environmental Sciences advanced when “the substance and significance of the relationship [between humans and nature grew] in global institutions and...the relationship [was] increasingly deemed comprehensible” (p. 546). Then, the phase of selection and replication began, in which IHEs chose the models of inquiry that appeared most legitimate or successful, and replicated them in order to bolster their own legitimacy as world-class institutions. In other words, building on Hambrick and Chen’s framework, as the field of Environmental Studies differentiated itself, mobilized resources, and gained legitimacy at IHEs, FOMO kicked in and additional IHEs signed onto the idea and imitated its forms.

Adding to this perspective, Patvardhan et al. (2015) summarize literature that further suggests a tendency toward isomorphism by members *within* fields. Specifically, they posit a nuanced interaction between the formation of identity within new organizational categories (such as a field of inquiry), the achievement of legitimacy, and the tendency for “sameness” (i.e., isomorphism) within the entities representing the new category/field. In this view, the formation of a collective identity for a new category/field confers both internal and external benefits. For example, collective identity “facilitates knowledge transfer, innovation, and group performance,” and influences “strategic decision making” and “stakeholder relationship management” (p. 406). At a broader level, collective identity “enables external audiences to distinguish among fields...and to perceive them as attractive and legitimate” (p. 406). To attain these benefits, actors in the new category/field “mute their individual distinctiveness” in service to perceptions of the new identity, and thus promote a “sameness” in the meaning and form of the new category/field (p. 408). As the category/field gains legitimacy, other institutions then replicate the new institutional form, fostering isomorphism. For example, while Asante’s vision at Temple University is a notable exception to this precept, the Gates approach to elevating black accomplishments in a broadly pluralistic canon has been widely recognized and replicated within and among Black Studies departments and programs.

The Emergence of Scientific/Intellectual Movements

Core question: Under what conditions is a scientific/intellectual movement likely to emerge, gain adherents, win intellectual prestige, and ultimately acquire some level of institutional stability?

Using a *sociology of ideas*, Frickel and Gross (2005) advance a theory of scientific/intellectual movements (SIMs) that is relevant to the emergence of academic fields. Simply stated, SIMs are “collective efforts to pursue research programs or projects for thought in the face of resistance from others in the scientific or intellectual community” (p. 206). The authors make four key propositions:

- i. A SIM is more likely to emerge when high-status intellectual actors (e.g., tenured faculty) “harbor complaints against what they understand to be the central intellectual tendencies of the day” (p. 209).
- ii. SIMs are more likely to be successful when structural conditions provide access to key resources, which allow them to be “orchestrated, coordinated, and collectively produced” (p. 213).
- iii. The greater a SIM’s access to various micro-mobilization contexts, the more likely it is to be successful. These are “local sites in which representatives of the movement and potential recruits can come into sustained contact with one another” (p. 219)

- iv. The success of a SIM is “contingent upon the work done by movement participants to frame movement ideas in ways that resonate with the concerns of those who inhabit an intellectual field or fields” (p. 221).

To varying degrees, each of these propositions were evident in the emergence of Black, Women’s, and Environmental Studies. First, internal pressure and leadership from tenured faculty appears to have been quite important. While external social movements motivated IHEs to attend to the academic development of each field, Black and Women’s Studies in particular emerged in response to pressure on IHE administrators from students and faculty. In the case of Black Studies, some faculty were not sympathetic to the radical nature of the black power movement, but critically, they helped to negotiate solutions that would be acceptable to both sides. Female faculty at IHEs who had joined the women’s movement were central to the movement within IHEs for the field of Women’s Studies.

The need for resources is self-evident and the innovative creation of interdisciplinary programs, centers, and institutes has been instrumental in giving each field a “local site” to congregate and develop a shared identity, even while their primary appointments reside in discrete disciplinary departments. Finally, the need to gain legitimacy by framing the movement in ways that accommodate the concern of the academy has been an ongoing challenge for all three fields, sometimes painfully so for both Black and Women’s Studies, which have been most reluctant to relinquish control of their vision to longstanding powerful elites.

The Role of Local Context and Leadership

Core questions: How do new fields of knowledge define themselves? What affects this process of self-definition and conceptualization?

Using a *sociology of professions*, Small (1999) focuses on the interactions between a field’s proponents and their context in the process of identity formation and implementation. He argues that how a new intellectual enterprise is defined and conceptualized is the result of the struggle for legitimacy in interactions with three constituencies: i) local constituents whose support (and institutional resources) it requires; ii) the wider academic community, whose support—and scholars—it needs; and iii) the wider public arena, whose support lends durability when the commitment of IHEs wanes amidst scarce resources. This attention to context in the realization of a universalistic model is consistent with the local adaptation found by Pizmony-Levy (2011).

Small (1999) focuses on the examples of African American Studies at Harvard and Temple, where the departments represented “explicitly different definitions of the scope, key methods, and substantive areas of study” (p. 661). After years of struggle at both universities, both African American departments had found themselves equally near the point of termination in the late 1980s, with either administrators or review committees at both institutions recommending their elimination. Two highly respected and persuasive leaders, Professors Asante and Gates, were able to revive them with quite different visions, but with equal success. Small identifies differences in how leaders at the two departments conceptualized their goals and realized them through strategic interactions with the various constituents who bestowed academic credibility, resources, and abiding intellectual support for their visions. Thus, while broader

evolutionary forces may play a role in the expansion and replication of a new field, Small's analysis is a reminder of the importance of strategic and sustained leadership in both local and wider contexts to advance a field with dwindling devotees.

Implications – Key Components

Taken together, this review of both empirical and theoretical literature suggests that the following components are needed for the advancement of a field of inquiry and its establishment as a durable domain within IHEs:

Rationale/Purpose

A new field needs a clear *rationale* and statement of *purpose* that differentiates it from existing disciplines. The field's proponents must answer questions that include:

- Why is new field needed?
- How is it different than what already exists?
- Don't existing fields adequately cover this area of research and curricula?
- Is the field's purpose professional development, advocacy, and/or knowledge accumulation?

Disciplinary Infrastructure

New academic fields need to develop the following structural components to expand and thrive:

- A *theoretical and empirical knowledge base*, i.e., consensus-based theoretical framework(s) and an agreed-upon knowledge base.
- Articulation and evidence of rigorous *methodology*, which supports the field's shared *epistemology*. How do we know what we think we know?
- Common *curricula* that are not being used by existing academic fields and field-specific *textbooks* to support field-specific pedagogy.
- Evidence of *leadership* from scholars who will lead the charge, mobilize resources, develop and use curricula, produce new knowledge, and sustain standards of scholarship.
- A sense of *identity*, i.e., dense networks of scholars who identify as members of an academic community with shared beliefs, methods, standards, and purpose. To represent and advance a field, scholars (and students) need to identify as its members. Patvardhan et al. (2015) argue that to form a collective identity, participants often seek to discover *consensus* regarding common claims and their meaning, but an alternative is creating *coherence* concerning shared problem domains, mutual interests, and practices (p. 429).

- Evidence of *students* who will seek to enter and sustain this field, and an understanding of what their purpose would be in doing so. This requires a merit-based reward system, i.e., a *career trajectory*, to promote good work.
- *Organizational and communicative mechanisms* to promote knowledge accumulation, community, and identity, including:
 - *Associations*, which hold conferences, publish journals, foster networks;
 - *Common standards* for what is good work and what is not; and
 - *Field-specific journals* to provide a mechanism for advancement of new knowledge and attract scholars who are under pressure to publish.

These components of a disciplinary infrastructure resemble what Kuhn (2012/1962) described as a paradigm, i.e., a set of shared commitments, beliefs, exemplars, methodologies, and practices.

Funding

A new field needs its own *funding* to draw, house, and sustain faculty. This funding can be internal and/or external.

Legitimacy

The components of rationale/purpose and disciplinary infrastructure serve to confer *legitimacy*, first and foremost in the eyes of the academy. In a bi-directional process, the accrual of legitimacy helps to generate funding, and the accumulation of resources serves to confer legitimacy. To reach this virtuous circle, the field must make the transition from a social movement to a credible academic endeavor, recognizing that its legitimacy will be judged primarily by the academy. As Rojas (2007) argues, the experience of Black Studies indicates two threshold requirements for the award of academic legitimacy: 1) the production of new and disinterested knowledge; and 2) expert certification. “A sign that an academic discipline has achieved high status is that its members have gained the power to award degrees and recognize other experts in the field. In short, academic disciplines engage in the training of elites, not the broader population” (Rojas, 2007, p. 215).

This process of advancement from a social movement to a field of inquiry, to a disciplinary or interdisciplinary academic field, and finally to a degree-granting program or department with a *durable* foothold in academia, can be represented thus:

Rationale/Purpose + Disciplinary Infrastructure + Funding + Legitimacy = Durability

Implications - Key Challenges

This review further points to several barriers that can slow or hinder advancement in this process:

Field Not Needed

- The perception that existing fields sufficiently cover this area of research and curricula, perhaps as a sub-specialty.

Field Not Sufficiently Rigorous

- The perception that the new field is driven by a desire to elevate a political/social agenda more than to fill a need for scholarship.

Leadership Lacking

- Scholars are sufficiently happy in their current academic homes and/or feel the need to publish in their respective (silo-ed) domains.

Identity Lacking

- Creating communal identity is particularly challenging in interdisciplinary fields because scholars usually have disparate departmental appointments and obligations.

Resistance and/or Rivalry

- Scholars in neighboring fields/disciplines may refrain from supporting a new field because power and resources are perceived as scarce (zero-sum) and the new field represents competition for those resources.

Students Lacking

- Attracting students is hard before legitimacy is established, and establishing legitimacy is hard before attracting students. How to gauge demand and market a nascent field? What career opportunities can a new field offer to prospective students?

Pressure to Publish

- Without journals dedicated to the new field, scholars who seek to advance their careers will conduct research that is amenable to journals dedicated to established disciplines.

Insufficient Funding

- Funding is hard to get when competing with established departments whose budgets are recurring and first in line. Moreover, other new fields of inquiry may also be vying to be considered disciplines/programs/departments and thus competing for funding.

Early Childhood Policy – Taking an Inventory

The lessons from the empirical and theoretical literature can be specifically applied to the field of early childhood policy in the following ways, hallmarked by a set of questions:

Rationale/Purpose

Working definition of purpose: To seed a new approach to leadership development across institutions and entities that are providing professional development and to create a new domain of inquiry that informs policy and practice, an essential field that will have durable impact.

- Beyond the development of ECP leaders, would the field produce scholarship that speaks directly to the academy? How would it balance the two?
- Why is it needed outside Policy Studies?

Theoretical and Empirical Knowledge Base

- Does the ECP field have theories of policy change in early childhood? Does it have theories of how to achieve positive child/family outcomes?
- Do we agree on what we know? The number of consensus statements is growing:
 - *A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behavior, and Health for Vulnerable Children* (2007)
 - *Investing in our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education* (2013)
 - *Puzzling it out: The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-kindergarten Effects: A Consensus Statement* (2017)

Methodology and Epistemology

- Are the methods of ECP scholarship sufficiently rigorous? The trend is toward more rigorous experimental and quasi-experimental methods and the wider use of counterfactuals. But tensions remain between the primacy or appropriate blend of quantitative and/or qualitative methods.
- Need for a localized, individualized approach to services, which is not always consonant with the quantitative studies that build replicable knowledge and inform large-scale policy (Dahlberg et al., 2000).
- Need for attention to cultural differences, which are hard to measure quantitatively (Reid, Kagan, & Scott-Little, 2017).

Curricula and Textbooks

- Does early childhood policy have field-specific curricula and textbooks to guide new programs and provide a consistent articulation of the field's knowledge base?

Leadership

- Would ECP scholars come from Policy Studies? Developmental Psychology? Could they be practitioners without a doctorate? Is there an ECP *identity*?

Students

- Would the field only recruit students who intend to work as early childhood policy leaders? What would be the reward system, i.e., the *career trajectory*?

Associations

- Do the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Society for Research in Child Development adequately play the role of developing the ECP field? Do they articulate *standards* for the field?

Journals

- Where would ECP scholars publish?
- Does ECP have a dedicated peer-reviewed journal? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*? *Journal of Early Childhood Research*? Both accept policy pieces, but not exclusively.

Funding

- As an interdisciplinary program, ECP must compete for IHE funding with well-established disciplines, and the pursuit of significant funding outside IHEs remains a highly competitive process. Would a philanthropic entity with a devotion to young children take this on?

Next Steps

Where to start? Key questions to consider:

- To what extent does early childhood policy possess the components of a disciplinary (or interdisciplinary) infrastructure?
- To what extent will ECP require external funding to thrive?
- Who will lead the charge? What associations or other entities can and will show leadership in developing the field?
- What is the organizational goal? Autonomous department? Institute or center? Program within a department? Discipline or interdisciplinary?

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