Navigating Borderlands: A Transnational Duoethnography of Multidisciplinary Faculty Partnership

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Abstract

This duoethnography examines how two transnational scholars—one in Education and one in Public Administration—navigated a multidisciplinary research partnership with other colleagues from Education and Environmental Science at a southeastern US public university. Guided by critical transnationalism and epistemic borderlands theory, we ask: How do we, as two transnational scholars, make sense of the intersection, epistemic friction, and complementarity among the worldviews of Education, Public Administration, and Environmental Science within a shared multidisciplinary collaboration? We conducted a dialogic session to reflect critically on our collaborative experience, then analyzed the data through reflexive thematic analysis. Insights show, first, that epistemic friction—evidenced in differing methodological preferences, writing styles, and disciplinary practices—did not require resolution. Instead, it created space for productive negotiation through translation, reflexivity, and shared commitment to collective goals, enabling epistemic reorientation. Second, institutional isolation and departmental silos contributed to initial hesitancy toward the collaboration; however, our partnership demonstrated how transnational faculty can actively renegotiate institutional boundaries. Against this background, the study contributes empirically to the literature on multidisciplinary research and practice by identifying dispositions and micro-practices that convert epistemic friction into integrative outcomes. Conceptually, it offers translation as a mechanism for navigating disciplinary and institutional borderlands. Implications suggest that institutions must move beyond symbolic gestures of support toward material investments for multidisciplinary research and practices—including workload recognition, psychological safety, and cross-campus facilitation. Such infrastructure will help sustain multidisciplinary partnerships, particularly for transnational scholars on the tenure track.

Keywords: duoethnography, multidisciplinary collaboration, epistemic friction, transnational faculty, borderlands, higher education

Introduction

Global higher education systems have long maintained siloed operations under traditional, department-based structures rooted in nineteenth-century Cartesian paradigms that typically fragment intellectual inquiry into isolated disciplinary domains (Carradini & Nagelhout, 2026; Klein, 1990). These structural distinctions get reinforced by isolated funding sources and hyper-disciplinary promotion and tenure policies that are not amenable to multidisciplinary partnerships (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Mäkinen et al., 2025). Consequently, although contemporary educational, social, administrative, and environmental challenges demand multi-sectoral approaches that enable integration and inquiry, most institutional cultures rarely create space for faculty to undertake multidisciplinary inquiry and overcome the communication and other methodological divides that exist across disparate fields (Bracken & Oughton, 2006; MacMynowski, 2007).

These structural barriers are further magnified for minoritized faculty and international scholars at US public institutions, particularly in a broader climate of legislative threats to race-related scholarship and diversity efforts (Pedota et al., 2025), as well as anti-immigrant policies that have disrupted international and immigrant scholars' recruitment, retention, and collaboration (Feeney et al., 2023). These precarities and pressures are especially salient for transnational faculty at institutions in the southern US, who often navigate local cultural codes, regional sociopolitical milieus, and restrictive administrative protocols as "insider/outsiders," experiencing dual layers of professional and social isolation as among the few international or immigrant scholars in their departments (Louis et al., 2017; Omiteru et al., 2018; Munene, 2014).

Although conventional higher education literature acknowledges academic collaboration as desirable (Mäkinen et al., 2025), what remains largely untheorized is how racial, national, and disciplinary positioning converge for transnational scholars navigating multidisciplinary collaboration (Yao et al., 2019)—a convergence this study addresses directly. Further, that body of literature also does not account for the human and affective dimensions of collaborative multidisciplinary work. This article reflects a study that contributes to these underrepresented dimensions of the literature by illuminating the reflections of two Black men from the Global South who have collaborated with others across three different disciplines at the same university in the southeastern US. By analyzing our engagement in a multidisciplinary collaborative project with faculty across Education, Public Administration, and Environmental Science, we explore "epistemic friction" that occurs when scholars with onto-epistemologies from critical inquiry lenses, bureaucratic policy metrics, and positivist sciences collaborate in a multidisciplinary space (Talbi & van Woerden, 2025).

In this manuscript, we position multidisciplinary collaborative work as a component of our broader journeys as transnational scholars who migrated from our home countries, Jamaica and Ghana, through US graduate schools into our current academic roles. Our backgrounds and trajectories influence our academic worldviews (George Mwangi et al., 2019; Suspitsyna, 2021; Yao et al., 2019). While our diasporic identities as Black men faculty also inform our institutional navigation, that dimension lies beyond the scope of the current manuscript; our focus here is on the disciplinary and epistemic dimensions of our collaboration, considered through retrospective dialogue about what it means to work within a broader multidisciplinary team spanning three distinct fields (Bracken & Oughton, 2006; MacMynowski, 2007). Therefore, this manuscript shares insights generated through our duoethnography, organized around a single research question that attends to our disciplinary and epistemic navigation within

a Multidisciplinary team collaboration. Specifically, we ask:

> How do we, as two transnational scholars, make sense of the intersection, epistemic friction, and complementarity among the worldviews of Education, Public Administration, and Environmental Science within a shared multidisciplinary collaboration?

This question enables us to provide insights into our individual and collective narratives and offer actionable implications for multidisciplinary research and practice in higher education.

Literature Review

Given the parameters of our work, we reviewed two primary lines of literature to situate it and determine its contributions. First, we reviewed the literature on disciplinary boundaries and what it means to work on multidisciplinary teams. Next, we illuminate what the existing literature says about how transnational faculty navigate the US academy.

Disciplinary Boundaries and Epistemic Friction

Although it is evident that interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for increasing innovation and creativity (Barringer et al., 2020; Cao et al., 2025), there are challenges (such as structural and cognitive) when researchers from different backgrounds come together to conduct research (Priaulx & Weinel, 2018). Inadequate awareness and understanding of other fields of study among researchers can bring about missed opportunities for beneficial and vital collaborations (Priaulx & Weinel, 2018). Scholars who view their fields of study as tumultuous tend to collaborate frequently within their fields, but less so in multidisciplinary collaboration (Van Rijnsoever & Hessels, 2011). According to Nooteboom (2000), transaction costs are higher for interdisciplinary collaboration than for collaboration within the same discipline. Furthermore, other scholars find that inadequate interdisciplinary collaboration stems from the need for extensive development in one's field of specialization to be considered a disciplinary expert (Buanes & Jentoft, 2009). For instance, researchers' gender and years of expertise are associated with the extent of disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration (Van Rijnsoever & Hessels, 2011).

Interdisciplinary collaboration can be rewarding; however, style of writing, preference for a particular kind of research methodology, how data is interpreted, and the right allocation of credit for each researcher's contribution present unique challenges to researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds when they come together to work on a research project (Kyvik & Reymert, 2017). Research within fields of study tends to lean more toward qualitative research or quantitative research approaches, or both, based on the history and scholars' contributions to knowledge within those fields (Jervis & Drake, 2014; Queirós et al., 2017). For example, Herbert Simon's contributions to bounded rationality and artificial intelligence revised the theoretical foundations of public administration (Gomes & Domingos, 2025). Also, in the field of education, the first and second streams of theoretical foundations were philosophical, and the third stream was experimental (Peters, 2014).

Transnational Faculty Navigation in the U.S. Academy

In the past 20 years, the number of international faculty in American universities has increased substantially, mainly due to modifications in U.S. immigration laws around the 1990s that made it possible for workers who are highly skilled (such as doctorate degree holders) to resettle in the United States (Johnson, 2006; Lee & Lim, 2018). As a result of the continuous increase in the number of international faculty, there is a need to understand their views on academic life and productivity, as these factors affect the entire U.S. higher education system (Kim et al., 2011; Kim & Jiang, 2021).

When international faculty are treated stereotypically, anxiety and distraction due to the stereotypical treatment can lead to underperformance in a way that is consistent with the treatment (Omiteru et al., 2018; Steele, 2010). Furthermore, transnational or international faculty experience substantial cultural differences in the U.S. higher education system (Collins, 2008). So, creating an enabling environment for all talent, including international faculty, will support full integration, enabling international faculty to be highly productive and not feel insecure (Lin et al., 2009).

Interdisciplinary research presents challenges for tenure and promotion (Klein & Falk-Krzesinski, 2017). Interdisciplinary scholars face challenges in creating unique identities within the disciplines they come from (Simula & Scott, 2021; Woiwode & Froese, 2021). Especially faculty who are not tenured struggle to make their interdisciplinary research count (Mäkinen et al., 2025). Mäkinen et al. (2025) found that in the selection and appointment of new faculty, existing (senior) faculty at universities and respective departments select candidates who fit a certain narrative and will contribute to the institutional reputation of the university and the department through their scholarly contributions, which directly contributes to the standards for tenure and promotion.

The Carnegie Foundation classifies American research universities as R1 high-intensity research universities) and R2 (high research university) based on their level of research activity (Duncan et al., 2023). Although research expectations are higher in R1 universities than R2 universities (Mantai & Marrone, 2023), each classification, whether R1 or R2, still demands substantial research expectations (Enright & McNaughtan, 2025). Similarly, the expectations for tenure and promotion at R1 universities are higher than at R2 universities, which creates unique challenges for faculty (Peterson et al., 2024). Regardless of these classification-specific nuances, however, research-intensive institutions collectively constitute spaces where tensions between disciplinary siloing and multidisciplinary aspirations are uniquely exacerbated for faculty navigating tenure and promotion.

Thus, taken together, the literature we reviewed here reveals two parallel but rarely intersecting conversations. First, there is literature that theorizes the structural and cognitive challenges of multidisciplinary collaboration. Second, there is a body of literature that documents the isolation and uncertainties transnational faculty confront while navigating the US academy. However, few studies have investigated the simultaneity and reflexivity of how these dynamics are experienced by transnational faculty engaged in multidisciplinary collaborations. This duoethnography investigates that convergence directly.

Theoretical Framework

Critical transnationalism (Munene, 2014) and the notion of epistemic borderlands

(Anzaldúa, 1987; Mignolo, 2011) provide the intersection that grounds this study. Critical transnationalism enables higher education research to move beyond conventional domestic lenses to examine how international scholars negotiate multiple identities, cultural loyalties, and the legacies of coloniality while serving in Western universities (Suspitsyna, 2021; Yao et al., 2019). This framework allows us to treat transnational identity as both untethered to the singularity of a migration event and always bound up with ongoing translational positioning that continuously interprets institutional power dynamics and professional labor (González Canché et al., 2024) through multiple lenses.

Thus, we fuse critical transnationalism with borderlands theory to make sense of our multidisciplinary work. In the context of our work, a borderland emerged when we brought our distinct, historically insulated systems of knowledge into direct collaboration (Braßler et al., 2026; Järvinen et al., 2026), notably with critical qualitative inquiry, bureaucratic governance, and positivist sciences. Therefore, by merging the two theories, we enable an analysis that engages with how our transnational journeys across geographies from Jamaica and Ghana to the southeastern US intersect with our disciplinary training to help us transform our collaborative work into a critical site of institutional navigation, linguistic translation, and multidisciplinary solidarity (Gawerc, 2021; Jang & Rakhshandehroo, 2025).

Methodology

This study used duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012) to investigate the epistemological, cultural, and institutional aspects of our work collaborating across multiple disciplines on a single project at the same institution. Duoethnography is a collaborative qualitative research methodology in which two or more researchers use active, structured dialogue to critically examine and cross-interrogate their lived experiences, professional roles, and the broader social and institutional sites they occupy (Norris & Sawyer, 2012), as previously used transnationally by Hou and Jam (2020), for example. This rigorous inquiry approach helped us collectively generate, analyze, and interpret data from our dialogue about our lived experiences, using these as a primary data source that supports broader sensemaking and critique of institutional life (Valdez et al., 2022).

Specifically, this design enabled the use of an intersectional disciplinary dyad that used retrospection to dialogically inform the data about our multidisciplinary collaboration (Sung et al., 2023). This dialogic structure allowed us to engage in the immediacy of conversational chemistry, clearly identify tension between us and our fields, and make room to understand how different onto-epistemologies intersected (Bracken & Oughton, 2006; MacMynowski, 2007). Duoethnography's analytic strength enabled the generation of polyvocal perspectives (Norris & Sawyer, 2012) within our multidisciplinary partnership.

Researcher Positionality

The broader multidisciplinary team included several colleagues from Education, Public Administration, and Environmental Science. While the full team's collaborative work forms the backdrop for this study, Author1 and Author2 serve as the duoethnographic participants, and our dialogue constitutes the primary data source. Congruent with duoethnography, we offer an explicit mapping of our researcher positionality, including our intersecting trajectories and institutional locations (McCormick & de Rivera, 2024; Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Author1 is a

transnational scholar who was born and raised in Jamaica. Author1, whose disciplinary home is Education, engages inquiry lenses drawn from critical and interpretive qualitative research approaches with an overt anti-oppressive focus that seeks to dismantle inquiry hierarchies in the academy (Lather, 2006). On the other hand, Author2 is a transnational scholar born and raised in Ghana. Author2, whose disciplinary home is Public Administration, brings professional and academic training centered on governance, institutional metrics, public policy frameworks, and structural feasibility (Frederickson et al., 2018). Both authors attended graduate schools in the US and migrated from the Global South, with Author1 immigrating from the Caribbean and Author2 from the African continent. Both transnational faculty currently work at the same southeastern US institution.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data source of this study was a 90-minute structured interactive dialogue session via Zoom, as we sought to reflect on and unpack our multidisciplinary research and practice. Our dialogic protocol focused on delineation of our disciplinary backgrounds and onto-epistemologies as it sought to elicit our experiences of disciplinary translations and tensions. Further, it elicited insights into our academic training and professional experiences before and since our migration to the US. Finally, it unpacked initial thoughts about navigating our distinct departments and shared institution.

The transcription of our dialogic session was provided by Zoom and verified before qualitative coding. The data were then analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) with both deductive and inductive coding (Saldaña, 2021). After an initial round of manual human coding, we leveraged qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) to enrich and further systematize our subsequent analytic rounds. Specifically, we used Evidano to code the data in a second round. Then, using a third and final round, we reviewed and compared the human coding and software coding to finalize the insights we provide in this article.

The transcript was manually evaluated using the broad categories of epistemic friction and institutional isolation. Epistemic friction represented the conceptual tensions between our fields and allowed us to track the translation blocks between our academic fields and onto-epistemologies (Bhaskar, 2013). Institutional isolation represented areas that discussed how our campus environment informed or constrained collaboration and helped us track the impact of our local campus (Munene, 2014). Our second round of software coding with Evidano surfaced additional layers that corroborated and expanded our first round of coding and analysis. Combining the first two rounds of coding, we streamlined and finalized the insights in our final round and offer them here for consideration of our collaborative engagement in multidisciplinary research and practice.

Insights: Navigating Borderlands as Transnational Scholars

Several insights were evident across the data in our duoethnography across all rounds of our analysis. For the purposes of this journal, we highlight two of these themes. First, epistemic difference that later resulted in reorientation, including reflexive positionality and narrative inclusion. Second, institutional constraints and the shift from isolation to multidisciplinary partnership. Below, we provide some details about each, using quotations drawn from our single duoethnographic dialogue session, which was transcribed and analyzed as previously described

in our Methodology.

Insight 1 - From Epistemic Tensions to Epistemic Reorientations: Learning Affordances of Multidisciplinary Research and Practice

As duoethnographers in this study, we each described distinct epistemic orientations and preferences that both engendered some tension but ultimately complemented the quality of the multidisciplinary collaboration. Our dialogue revealed our methodological preferences. For example, whereas Author2 stated, "I preferred quantitative more because it was easier and faster," Author1, by contrast, noted, "You prefer quant, I prefer qual." This difference was reflected in specific moments of tension among the multidisciplinary team. For example, given their preference for quantitative research approaches, Author2 crafted their segment of the manuscript as part of the multidisciplinary team using the distant observer lenses that their training predisposed them to and which characterized their research and practice prior to joining the multidisciplinary team. Author2 noted the initial internal tension,

> *Generally, in my field of experience, like, if I'm the researcher, I will observe others, right? So it's like, I will not be part of the sample…I've always been away from…not part of the sample for the research*.

Furthermore, Author2 noted, "as a public administrator, like, the way I think, I'll say unconsciously, because I've been trained in that area. But it always shapes how I think about research."

The data also revealed that Author1 noticed this during the first writing development process with the multidisciplinary team. Specifically, the data showed that Author1 observed that when Author2 first wrote their narrative,

> *you wrote it in this distant way, where you were looking on and observing, writing in the third person… Your public administrator background, your kind of fact-based, detached, disciplinary training, and methodological distinction kind of bumped against the narrative and the, you know, kind of include yourself*

approach. Thus, both Author2's internal reflections and Author1's observations during the first phase of the multidisciplinary project corroborate the tension sometimes evident in multidisciplinary research and practice. The metaphor of "bumped up" aptly illuminates the tension between detached observation and narrative self-inclusion that the first dimensions of the multidisciplinary project entailed.

The education researchers, however, as Author1 recalled, "pushed in a loving way to unmask… to come from behind that detached observer, and to actually immerse yourself." Thus, the multidisciplinary team enabled a methodological shift away from the detached observer role toward a more immersive, researcher-implicated voice. As a result, Author2 acknowledged learning to adapt through the multidisciplinary partnership: "I learned how to …take on me, myself, being part of the data, and also how best I can express myself." Furthermore, Author2 explained that,

> *I had to learn a lot on the job, right? I had to learn from my colleagues—all of you… I would say I had to learn and also kind of adjust because thoughts and ways of doing*

things were different.

Thus, Author2's researcher-reflections suggest that the multidisciplinary collaboration was a space for translating one's own epistemic habits into the framework the team invited. This reflects a clear epistemic friction that emerged as a central feature of our multidisciplinary negotiation. The dialectic between detachment and immersion was illuminated by Author2's initial detached stance and gradual shift to a more personal, engaged orientation throughout the project.

This reorientation was not, however, unidirectional. Although several members of the team had backgrounds in education and were more amenable to qualitative inquiry, the data suggest that they, too, benefited from shifts and that collectively, the multidisciplinary lenses enhanced the project. Notably, the education researchers had to temper their immersive approach to also accommodate factual precision, even as the public administration scholar had to incorporate narrative. And our environmental science colleague had to be open to drumming and other cultural aspects as components of our research-based work.

Author1 also noted that Author2's cultural and epistemological background strengthened the team's work. For instance, one significant moment of lexical translation was explained: "I remember, for example, learning from you the actual pronunciation of Sankofa…that was an important learning for me." As a consequence, Author1 expressed appreciation for Author2's insistence on the accurate pronunciation and lexical spelling of the word, so that "lexically, when we're writing, we're also having the word reflect what it should sound like." Thus, Author2's detached observation of the popular pronunciation in the US and their insistence on the correct pronunciation during our collaborative work enabled Author1 to learn and expand their understanding of the cultural context. Therefore, epistemic translation as a conscious process of learning and adjustment was evidenced by both of us learning from colleagues, and this learning permitted methodological shifts and lexical precision, both phonetically and orthographically. This negotiation reflects the kind of productive borderland space described in our theoretical framework and literature, where distinct epistemic systems meet, coexist, and usually inform one another (Anzaldúa, 1987; Mignolo, 2011).

Moreover, Author1 indicated that the team's inclusion of what is popularly termed "a hard empirical environmental scientist" was instrumental in the project. While the language of "hard sciences" is colloquial, it reflects the same positivist orientation we discuss throughout this manuscript. Nevertheless, Author1 noted how our environmental scientist colleague's training in environmental sciences bore on "the kind of fact-based delineation in the writing" and in "the details of the UN SDGs". The data also showed that our colleague's contributions from an environmental science background "also enhanced the project and made our literature review clear." These aspects of our duoethnography showed that our colleague's environmental science fact-based lenses helped to ground the project using precise, verifiable information that strengthened the project's first presentation and the first manuscript's literature review and overall framing.

Taken together, despite differences in our disciplinary backgrounds, our multidisciplinary partnership demonstrated the critical importance of significant adaptation and learning for all involved. Furthermore, our duoethnography revealed that we both perceived a shift from tension to reorientation and expansion. For instance, Author2 noted,

I would say our skills complemented each other in a sense, because we helped each other

> *better refine our main goal, which was, like, the research outputs that we were creating, yeah…We all saw how…even with our training, we can still kind of, like, deliver a research output that all of us kind of agree to.*

This lens was also evident in Author1's work throughout the data. Here, our duoethnography confirmed that despite the initial tensions, our team's diverse methodological backgrounds eventually became complementary.

Insight 2 - From Institutional Isolation and Constraints to Multidisciplinary Research Partnership and Practices

Our data revealed a pattern of departmental insularity. Notably, Author2 explained, "most of my publications have been from collaboration with people outside my university." This suggests that their professional collaborative network did not include colleagues within their department or on our campus. Further, Author2 indicated that "I've not been having a lot of engagement at the university level, right? With, let's say, other colleagues." Together, these comments reflect a degree of institutional isolation, underscoring that faculty operate within departmental silos and collaborate externally rather than across their institution, per se. Thus, the data revealed that departmental insularity was a manifestation of institutional isolation, in which faculty predominantly work with external peers and rarely engage within or across departmental boundaries.

Furthermore, our duoethnography revealed limited research engagement with others on campus, another manifestation of institutional isolation. Notably, Author1 indicated that this multidisciplinary research collaboration was their "first collaboration with colleagues from other colleges" at the institution, and specifically colleagues outside of the college of education. Although not necessarily discouraged intentionally, cross-campus collaborations seem relatively rare, and the normativity of that reality suggests that institutional structures or cultures do not make cross-campus collaboration easily feasible. The fact that we had no prior multidisciplinary research project on campus, despite being there for several years at the genesis of this partnership, underscores this apparent structural constraint. Therefore, the data suggests that limited cross-campus engagement was a prevailing condition that contributed to institutional isolation by keeping faculty within their respective colleges and departments. It also meant that our multidisciplinary partnership and the projects emerging from it constitute an exception rather than a norm.

The normativity of isolation meant we entered the multidisciplinary collaboration with some reluctance and uncertainty. For instance, like Author1, Author2 stated, "Before, I had not worked on any projects like that," further affirming the shared lack of multidisciplinary partnerships in academia. Moreover, Author1 noted that when a colleague in the college of education sent the initial invitation to form this multidisciplinary team, Author1 declined to participate. As the data showed, "I didn't feel I had anything pertinent to the continent of Africa, specifically, in terms of my research repertoire, and I didn't feel like I was going to be an authentic voice for the project." A subsequent reminder about the potential partnership and the decision to join one of the initial meetings to make a more informed decision shifted things, and Author1 ended up becoming a leading voice and contributor to the group's direction, next steps, and additional related opportunities. The sentiments from both of us highlighted initial doubts about fit and competence.

But once we stepped outside the constraints of the departmental silos and college-specific work, we became a formidable multidisciplinary research and practice team, illustrating how transnational faculty actively renegotiate institutional boundaries that might otherwise reinforce insider/outsider dynamics (Munene, 2014). And the data in this duoethnography illuminates some of the ways that our team made this possible. First, we collectively acknowledged the significance of a shared goal and mutual learning as central to our practices. As our data explicated, we "were able to kind of, like, look at the bigger goal, or…bigger mission of research, and we made that guide us, yeah. So because of that, it made, like, differences easy to reconcile." Further, our data in this study confirmed that "we all had to learn from each other based on what we wanted to do," and "we all adjusted to kind of sync better, right, with each other, yeah, in terms of like the outputs." This underscored how a common mission provided a unifying force, and our collective commitment to learn and adjust while collaborating across disciplines allowed our distinct disciplinary strengths to complement our practices.

For instance, even during our dialogue for this study, there was a clear moment of explicit contrast that reiterated our differences while also showing how openness to nuance is critical to practices within multidisciplinary work. Author2 distinguished their "quant" background as empirical as if juxtaposed to qualitative research, and Author1 had to later say, "qual is also empirical, just a different nature of empiricism." This interjection reflected the ongoing learning that occurs and is required in multidisciplinary partnerships, underscoring that both quantitative and qualitative orientations are empirical but differ in their approaches. This real-time instance between the two of us is a microcosm of the multidisciplinary realities of our collaborative team.

Nevertheless, our burgeoning body of work shows that our initial agreement to collaborate is proving mutually beneficial for the scholars on our team. What started out as a single call for papers has, to date, resulted in one fully developed manuscript under review, one successful presentation at a major conference, and another proposal currently under review for a conference next year. This duoethnography reflects yet another new subset of that developing body of work. From our multidisciplinary team's conference presentation rehearsals, which clarified and streamlined our work despite our disciplinary differences, to competing levels of availability due to institutional and other constraints, we have moved from isolation to innovation as we sustain our multidisciplinary partnership for current and future projects. As Author1 noted in our dialogue for this duoethnography,

> *our partnership across departments, across disciplines, really forced us to recognize disciplinary distinctions, but also the ways we can create disciplinary synergy because we approached the work from a place of intellectual humility… and the iterations we went through with the presentation and the first manuscript all represented breakthroughs…[where the three fields] were working in tandem.*

Taken as a whole, our study found that mutual adaptation—including methodological learnings and accommodations—was achieved through iterative feedback and a shared commitment to a cohesive, collaborative, multidisciplinary approach.

Discussion

Our analysis for this paper, including the integrative commentary in the preceding insights section, illustrated some of the affordances and concerns evidenced in multidisciplinary

research and practice. In response to our research question, our insights show that the worldviews of Education, Public Administration, and Environmental Science intersected throughout our practice, generated epistemic friction rooted in contrasting disciplinary and methodological ways of being and doing, and ultimately became complementary through sustained translation, reflexivity, and a shared commitment to collective goals. Importantly, epistemic friction arising from disciplinary differences existed but did not need to be resolved. Instead, it produced an analytic richness that strengthened the overall work of our multidisciplinary partnership. This study contributed empirically by identifying dispositions and micro-practices that converted tension into integrative outcomes and conceptually by framing translation as a process with mechanisms that help moderate structural constraints, such as institutional isolation and departmental norms. These dispositions included a willingness to learn across differences and commitments to the broader research goals of the multidisciplinary team. Micro-practices included lexical verifications, iterative drafts, transparent conversations that invited reorientations, and presentation rehearsals. Further, our translations across disciplinary lines and work-mode preferences helped us recognize the value of adaptability and ongoing learning in multidisciplinary research and practice contexts.

Consistent with much of the literature, our study corroborated the persistence of isolationism and departmental silos, as institutional structures continue to reinforce disciplinary boundaries even amid growing calls for multidisciplinary collaborations (Carradini & Nagelhout, 2026; Mäkinen et al., 2025). For example, scholars in interdisciplinary research settings often develop individual coping mechanisms to navigate persistent monodisciplinary structural demands despite institutional rhetoric supporting collaboration (Woiwode & Froese, 2021), and interdisciplinary contributions frequently go unrecognized in promotion and tenure evaluation processes (Klein & Falk-Krzesinski, 2017).

As transnational scholars on the tenure track, we had not engaged in a multidisciplinary collaboration at our institution for several years before the multidisciplinary partnership that brought us together. This duoethnography of that partnership was illuminated by our theoretical framework, which combined critical transnationalism (Munene, 2014; Yao et al., 2019) and epistemic borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987; Mignolo, 2011). First, critical transnationalism allowed us to center our own lives and lenses in the research, examining how we have navigated this multidisciplinary partnership at the same southeastern US institution. The study revealed how we negotiated our multiple identities and institutional context, though we do not go into much detail on these in this article, given its scope. Nevertheless, what was clear here is that we continue to be involved in translational positioning, interpreting institutional cultures, and exploring ways to navigate them, as similarly evidenced in Benefo and Mensah's (2025) work.

Significantly, our duoethnography revealed how a borderland existed when we brought our onto-epistemologies, distinct disciplinary backgrounds, contrasting methodological preferences, and distant versus inclusive writing styles during our multidisciplinary research and practice over the last year. Ultimately, as in other studies of transnational scholars, we have been able to transform our disciplinary, geographic, and departmental differences into a meaningful, multidisciplinary sense of solidarity (Gawerc, 2021; Jang & Rakhshandehroo, 2025), even as we continue to navigate institutional and systemic experiences as transnational scholars. Our duoethnography has strengthened our commitment to sustaining our existing multidisciplinary partnership, such that despite disciplinary differences and borderland crossings, we will continue to contribute to and advance multidisciplinary research and practice.

Implications for Research and Practice

This duoethnography reflects multiple implications for multidisciplinary research and practice, specifically in higher education. The study illuminates both empirical and conceptual insights that implicate how multidisciplinary research is engaged. First, the study suggested that epistemic friction can be generative when accompanied by routinized translation practices within a humanizing, adaptive-dispositional, and goals-focused partnership. For research, this reframed multidisciplinary tensions from a problem to be minimized into a resource that can be mobilized through processual practices. Future research might, therefore, further investigate the relational and institutional conditions that contribute to how epistemic and institutional frictions are negotiated in multidisciplinary collaborations. For practice, it suggests that multidisciplinary teams must allocate time and space for continuous adaptations, including lexicon checks, cross-readings, and rehearsals, where applicable. Relatedly, the initial hesitancy about "fit" before joining this partnership, as evidenced in our insights, suggests that institutions should proactively facilitate cross-campus introductions and lower barriers to entry for faculty considering multidisciplinary partnerships on campus, rather than leaving these developments to individual invitation and informal networks alone.

Second, the analysis underscored that ongoing reflexivity operationalizes both a methodological choice and relational achievements. Shifting from third-person description to first-person narrative, for example, required rhetorical skill and a psychosocial context in which disclosure was safe. This insight suggests that explicit reflexivity coaching, collaborative processes within teams, and team practices that attend to psychological safety, scholarly rigor, and epistemic expansions can simultaneously enhance multidisciplinary research and practice (Edmondson, 1999; Resendiz et al., 2026).

Third, our inquiry highlights that immanent translational labor must be counted as material labor in institutional recognition ecosystems, consistent with the literature documenting how interdisciplinary and collaborative work remains under-rewarded in traditional tenure and promotion structures (Mäkinen et al., 2025). Epistemic and other forms of translation were iterative and required dedicated time. Institutions must therefore implement mechanisms that protect time for collaborative rehearsals and revision cycles; otherwise, the translational work across epistemic domains and the richness of multidisciplinary research risk relying exclusively on individual goodwill and uneven contributions.

Thus, institutions committed to multidisciplinary work might consider course releases, compensated time for collaboration, or formal workload credit for multidisciplinary activities—structural interventions that address the same disciplinary-order barriers documented in recent scholarship on interdisciplinary work (Mäkinen et al., 2025), while also recognizing that such collaboration may demand more of faculty collaborators, particularly transnational scholars (Feeney et al., 2023). Furthermore, institutions may fund incubators for intra-campus multidisciplinary partnerships that new tenure-track faculty can access to learn with and from senior scholars engaged in multidisciplinary research and practice. This would help engender a richer culture of multidisciplinary collaboration, signal to new faculty that the institutions value it beyond a single grant for a single small group of scholars, and help systematize multidisciplinary research and practice as part of collective institutional ethos — beyond the Cartesian department silos and the unrecognized additional labor.

(De)limitations

Notably, while the data were rich, the study was (de)limited to the reflections and experiences of two transnational scholars, aligning with duoethnography's methodological commitment to sustained dialogue between co-researchers rather than with the team as a whole. Relatedly, while our dialogic session was extensive, our insights are drawn from a single session. To this end, we acknowledge that our work was not intended for generalizability but rather to provide insights that might resonate with and inform related contexts, contributing transferable understandings of multidisciplinary collaboration. Further, future duoethnographic studies about multidisciplinary collaborations would benefit from multiple sessions to delve more deeply into the epistemic negotiations and how they evolve over time. Moreover, our analysis, synthesis, and arguments in this manuscript illustrate only our own interpretations and not those of all members.

Conclusion

This study illuminated that it is possible to realize the epistemic benefits of disciplinary diversity. Specifically, despite epistemic friction and differences in graduate student training and transnational backgrounds, we witnessed and contributed to a multidisciplinary team's conversion of epistemic heterogeneity into integrated, higher-quality research and practice outputs. Evidently, institutions need to move from seeing multidisciplinarity as desirable to central by making material investments in time, recognition, and infrastructure to support multidisciplinary research and practice, and by supporting tenure-track, including transnational, scholars in finding psychologically safe, methodologically significant, and career-supporting advancement through multidisciplinary research and practice. Multidisciplinary collaborations can be deeply human even as they are systematic. To this end, universities must adapt their structures to leverage and protect the global networks of scholars within their campus boundaries. While we are grateful to have navigated these epistemic and institutional borderlands as transnational scholars, we hope to further strengthen those capacities in the future. Institutions must play a more significant role in enabling this kind of navigation across borderlands, for us and so many others.

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