

Horyzonty Edukacji Akademickiej 3/2025 (11-16)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26881/head.2025.3.02>

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## Invitation to read the third issue of "Horizons of Academic Teaching": Boundaries in academic teaching

The third issue of *Horizons of Academic Teaching* focuses on boundaries in academic teaching, understood broadly: as a framework for organising education, as limitations embedded in the institution and culture of the university, but also as points of tension and transition where education really "happens" – when it is necessary to negotiate meaning, risk, responsibility, and sometimes even one's own academic identity. We propose an approach in which boundaries are not merely barriers to be overcome or "demarcation lines" defending the academic order.

On the contrary: in many situations, it is precisely boundaries that initiate thinking, trigger cognitive conflict, provoke questions about ethics and power, and reveal the conditions without which there can be neither learning nor teaching – security, trust, rhythm, time and relationships.

**Wojciech Glac** opens the issue by proposing a neurobiological perspective on the didactics of crossing boundaries. This text serves as the cognitive foundation of the volume: boundaries are not only social norms and institutional rules of the game, but also developmental stimuli that can evoke novelty, surprise, and cognitive discontinuity. The author shows that the moment of "transgression" can be understood as a prediction error – a situation in which existing models of the world prove insufficient, and the brain must initiate processes of reorganisation. In this view, didactics becomes the design of conditions in which learning is possible as a reconstruction – and not just the addition of new elements to a stable structure. The analysis covers precisely outlined neural mechanisms (with the role of the hippocampus, amygdala, prefrontal cortex, reward system and large-scale brain networks) and focuses on stress – understood ambivalently. It can support learning as a catalyst, but it can also act as a blocker, depending on its intensity, duration and the learner's predisposition.

This framework helps to "set the axis" of the entire issue from the outset: boundaries are neither good nor bad in themselves; their meaning is revealed only in the relationship between the learner and the teaching situation – as well as in the individual learning experience, which can be burdened by memories of previous failures, fears or embarrassments.

This starting point proves particularly fruitful in the interview section, where boundaries are shown in biographies, practices and teaching decisions. Jarosław Jendza talks in turn with Adam Jagiełło-Rusiłowski, Ewa Szymczak, Maksymilian Chutorański and Adrianna Sarnat-Ciastko, and the entire series can be read as four different maps of the same terrain: the university, where boundaries are constantly being negotiated – between power and partnership, between formalisation and process, between human agency and the agency of things, and finally between silence and meaning.

In the conversation with **Adam Jagiełło-Rusiłowski**, the boundary of invisibility is particularly strong: the one that separates people "predestined for success" from those whom the system does not notice or considers unworthy of investment. This is a story about education as a mechanism of selection (who we see, to whom we attribute potential), but also about education as an opportunity to reverse self-fulfilling prophecies.

An important theme is theatre as a neutral space where one can build agency and experience success – and then "bring" it back to school and to thinking about organising learning. The second key topic of the conversation is *unlearning*: understood not as loss, but as the conscious dismantling of cognitive, cultural and didactic patterns.

Limits arise here when comfortable assumptions must be abandoned: about there being one correct answer, about fear as a tool, about the neutrality of "scientifically sounding" language, about automatically equating digital tools with dishonesty. Artificial intelligence is very much present in the background: not as a "technical addition", but as a challenge to educational habits, assessments and ways of building authority.

The conversation also introduces the figure of the changemaker – a person who combines empathy and opposition to exclusion with systems thinking and the ability to organise resources. Thanks to this, the tension between social good and the economics of education is not reduced to a simple "ideological vs. neoliberal" dispute but becomes a question of responsible design and scaling of solutions.

In a conversation with **Ewa Szymczak**, the boundaries are revealed primarily within the university: in work habits, beliefs and organisational culture, which for years treated teaching as a private matter, less prestigious, not requiring joint reflection or common standards. An important background is provided by reforms and institutional tools (e.g. syllabuses, learning outcomes logic) that force a transition from intuitive teaching to conscious design of the teaching process.

However, the interviewee proposes a perspective in which change does not "happen" in documents: it is made by people – those who enter the process and make the effort to learn new languages and new practices. The boundaries here are often mental, and crossing them requires patient work: building alliances and inviting others to share responsibility.

One of the most important tensions of the issue also returns: the boundary between scientific productivity and the quality of education. Instead of the promise of a quick revolution, a strategy of micro-changes emerges: small steps that accumulate into institutional change. Particularly compelling is the theme of building a teaching community – a network of relationships in which teaching becomes a platform for agreement across departments and disciplines, and grassroots initiatives become permanent structures, while maintaining contact with the everyday reality of the classroom.

The conversation also opens up the perspective of the future: internationalisation, intercultural co-teaching, and shifting the university towards lifelong learning.

The third conversation, with **Maksymilian Chutorański**, shifts attention to a boundary that is usually transparent: between what we consider "human" in education and what we treat as a neutral background – things, documents, technologies, infrastructure. The perspective of the didactics of things and non-anthropocentric pedagogy is not simply about "giving agency" to non-humans, but about seeing that things actually co-organise learning: they influence relationships, cognitive practices and responsibility.

The syllabus becomes a special focus of the conversation: at once administrative, legal and didactic, it provides security and predictability but can also be a source of tension when it fails to keep up with the dynamics of the group, social events or the logic of classes geared towards critical discussion.

Importantly, this conversation does not advocate simply 'hacking' the system or affirming it uncritically: rather, it raises awareness that boundaries are often created and maintained by the materialities that organise the world of education.

The series of interviews concludes with a conversation with **Adrianna Sarnat-Ciastko**, in which boundaries become an existential experience: they concern competence, professional identity and emotions. A particular focus is placed on silence – ambiguous and ambivalent.

Silence in the classroom can reveal a lack of knowledge, fear of judgement or withdrawal; it can also be a teaching tool, an indicator of trust and maturity in relationships, and even a form of working on mindfulness and well-being. In this sense, silence is not a "lack" but a boundary that requires interpretation: sometimes it needs to be crossed, sometimes consciously remained within.

The interview also brings out organisational and cultural boundaries: overload, pace, pressure to "deliver" and the consequences of the speed regime. The tension between the logic of productivism and the appearance of quality and the need for slowness, regeneration and meaning returns here as one of the most pressing questions about the contemporary university. Against this backdrop, the issue of intergenerationality also resonates strongly – not as a label, but as an experience of encountering different ethos of studying and learning, with the potential for community emerging when space is created for activities "above" or "beyond the plan."

Following the thread of the discussions, the issue moves on to the section "Scientific articles and studies", where boundaries are analysed not only as an experience, but also as a research problem – from international communities of teaching practitioners, through socially engaged teaching, to questions about the future of the humanities in the age of AI.

**Iwona Maciejowska** guides readers through twenty years of the history of the EuroVariety conference (2005–2025), presenting it as a case study of a grassroots initiative that has grown into a permanent European forum for the exchange of experiences in chemistry teaching.

A comparison of the 2005 and 2025 editions reveals shifts in teaching priorities: from curricular and formal issues to questions about the social responsibility of universities, sustainable development, student inclusiveness and diversity, and the professionalisation of the role of academic teachers.

Technology remains a constant element, but its role is evolving – from e-learning tools to VR/AR and AI. The text also has a strong practical dimension: it shows what a teaching conference really offers (inspiration, a network of contacts, a common language for discussing teaching), but also reveals the barriers to participation, primarily time and funding, and ways to reduce them (e.g. support for people from less privileged systems, sensibly designed hybridity). The boundaries between institutions and countries prove to be both real and possible to cross by building a community of practitioners.

The next academic text is by **Jarosław Jendza, Alicja Czernańska, Olga Czachorowska, Kaia Jakóbczyk-Roman, Marta Pałubicka, Agata Maj, Zofia Piechowiak, Julia Went and Zuzanna Krych**. The authors propose looking at borders as an experience of education implemented in the service learning formula and base their analysis on the interdisciplinary ARTIS project, carried out jointly by the University of Gdańsk and the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, in cooperation with an industrial partner and Montessori educational institutions.

The choice of empirical material for analysis is particularly important: the learning diaries of people participating in the educational formula known as "service learning". This gives us an insight into crossing borders "from the inside" – into the dynamics of emotions, relationships, project decisions, organisational tensions and the real consequences of working with an external audience.

The qualitative analysis identifies five categories describing the participants' experience, within which service learning acts as a mechanism that shifts the boundaries between theory and practice, academia and the social and market environment, disciplines and institutions, and the traditional roles of teacher and student.

An important complement to the analysis is the language of the university's mission: the authors present service learning as a way of operationalising the third mission, while at the same time raising questions about how such forms of education can be described in terms of the fourth and fifth missions.

In the next article, **Piotr Kallas** addresses one of the most disturbing questions about the future of the humanities: what is happening to literary translation and translation teaching in an era of rapid development of artificial intelligence. The author leads the reader from the media's promises of revolution and the fears of the academic community towards an attempt at "sobering up": instead of panic, he proposes a long-term perspective and a careful look at how culture has been taming the dream of a thinking machine for centuries.

The crux of the article is the shifting of boundaries: not between the "old" and "new" tools, but between automation and what remains significant as a human experience – interpretation, responsible decision-making, sensitivity to meaning, style and context.

Even if translation tools become increasingly sophisticated, literary translation cannot be reduced to the final product: it is a form of reading and thinking, and therefore an educational practice. That is why, in the didactic part, the author returns to the classroom and presents translation as an academic tool: one that exercises linguistic awareness and triggers reflection on untranslatability, ethics, and the relationship between fidelity and creativity. The boundaries of translation are also the boundaries of culture: between languages, eras, theory and craft, as well as between human agency and the growing agency of machines.

The section "Essays and reports from practice" complements the volume with the perspective of direct teaching and institutional risk involved in crossing boundaries.

**Piotr Paluchowski**, drawing on his many years of teaching experience at the Medical University of Gdańsk, addresses the problem of misinformation in medicine as one of the most pressing challenges of contemporary academic education.

The starting point is a series of optional classes devoted to past and present non-scientific theories of health and disease. The author shows that including knowledge about "non-science", mechanisms of misinformation and social determinants of the popularity of pseudo-medical therapies in the academic curriculum is a transgression of the boundaries of traditional teaching – a risky but necessary step.

Without such transgression, it is difficult to prepare future healthcare professionals for responsible relationships with patients and for functioning in a world saturated with false narratives about health. In the background, there is also an ethical boundary that must not be crossed: classes on non-scientific theories must not become their promotion or undermine the achievements of medicine. The essay thus reveals boundaries as an area of constant didactic vigilance: between critical analysis and unintended legitimisation.

**Lidia Pokrzycka**, in turn, proposes shifting the emphasis from "implementing the curriculum" to well-being and learning conditions. She describes her own model of anti-stress classes, combining card games, elements of mindfulness and contact with nature – carried out both in the classroom and in the park or forest.

At the centre are four tools: STRESmission, Qalmio, FOREST POWER and Forest Meditations, which allow you to work with tension in a non-judgmental and non-competitive way, strengthening relationships within the group and opening up space for reflection on your own habits of responding to stress. An important theme is biophilia and understanding nature as a regenerative resource that supports concentration, calmness and readiness to learn, especially in an environment overloaded with stimuli and pressure to pass exams.

This text fits in with the theme of this issue in a special way: crossing boundaries here concerns not only the method, but also the definition of what "belongs" to academic teaching – and what is usually pushed into the private sphere. The author emphasises the role of the lecturer as a facilitator of change and signals the need for systemic solutions that support mental health in higher education.

The issue concludes with an article by **Dorota Godlewska-Werner, Aleksandra Peplińska, Blanka Kondratowicz** and **Justyna Michałek-Kwiecień** devoted to the Course Seminar Competition held in the third year of psychology studies. The authors present the course seminar as a process that is much more than a set of academic tasks: it is a gradual introduction of students to the practice of scientific research – from initial inspiration and drafts, through work in small teams, to the public presentation of results and the experience of competition.

The boundaries are crossed in layers: cognitively (research thinking must be learned), organisationally (the process must be followed), socially (cooperation, communication and shared responsibility are required) and in terms of identity (the risk of presenting and taking responsibility for the quality of the project must be taken). The competition thus becomes not only a summary of the

semester, but also a moment when student passion meets academic standards of methodological and ethical reliability, as well as the experience of agency: projects do not have to end within the walls of the university – they can turn into publications, conference abstracts and activities aimed at the wider community.

The common denominator of all the texts in this issue is the belief that boundaries in academic teaching are not just an obstacle. They are also a language in which the stakes of the contemporary university are revealed: what we consider learning worth the effort, how we design the tension between security and demand, how we understand the role of institutions, what work technologies and documents do, where the boundary lies between authority and power, between efficiency and meaning, between the appearance of quality and real quality.

The third issue of *Horizons of Academic Teaching* therefore offers not so much a specific model for "crossing boundaries" as a map of many ways of thinking and acting – from the neurobiology of learning, through discussions about institutions, relationships and identity, to case studies, qualitative research and practices that redefine what we consider teaching in academia.

We warmly invite you to read on!

The Editorial Team

Gdańsk, December 2025