

Performance as Truth in the LIS Classroom

Sarah Beth Nelson^a, Emily Vardell^b, Brian Sturm^c, Nicole A. Cooke^d

^aUniversity of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, United States of America

^bEmporia State University, United States of America

^cUniversity of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, United States of America

^dUniversity of South Carolina, United States of America

nelsonsb@uwm.edu, evardell@emporia.edu, sturm@ils.unc.edu, ncooke@mailbox.sc.edu

ABSTRACT

Library and Information Science instructors are including art in their teaching. Ibekwe (2020) asked students “to produce artworks that illustrated how chosen information and communication theories operated in plausible, real-life, or historic contexts” (p. 427). Dali et al. (2015) describe substituting an “academically informed creative writing” option for what would typically be an academic writing assignment, “in other words, a short story that would read like fiction while touching upon the essential issues involved in dissecting and understanding the experience of reading” (p. 302). Hartel et al. (2017) proposed reinventing conventional essay assignments as a “creative deliverable,” a more spacious translation of course content into any format of the arts, including non-material manifestations such as dance or musical composition.

In the LIS field, performance is most commonly associated with children’s librarianship. McDowell and Cooke (2022), discussing storytelling, note “those skills and practices have not been readily available to or understood as important for everyday libraries and librarians” (p. 373). Worthington (2017), analyzing LIS syllabi, found that the “vast majority of courses that included storytelling, puppetry, and read-alouds were childrens’ courses” (pp. 211-212). Even these courses are typically elective rather than required, and performance is often ungraded (p. 210).

The most adventurous application of performance in the LIS classroom is outlined in Vardell and Nelson’s (2020) “Teaching Reference Interview Skills with Improv.” This paper reports on the benefits of improvisation activities, which can enhance communication, empathy, and teamwork—all essential to a librarian’s interactions with the public.

In our panel presentations, we will share how we incorporate performance into our LIS classrooms. We discuss performance for children’s librarians as well as for students entering other areas of the LIS profession. We examine how performance gets at Truth that can be

difficult or impossible to access through other means. And, we consider the ethics of requiring student performance in a course.

Our presentation will include a brief opportunity for attendees to perform and time for questions.

Exploring Soft Skills through the Fundamentals of Improv Comedy

by Emily Vardell

Emily Vardell will discuss how she uses improv comedy exercises to discuss and practice the soft skills necessary for successful reference service interactions. She uses the exercises as an active learning activity in a required reference services course to help LIS graduate students more organically explore soft skills. In addition to outlining the improv exercises, Emily will explore how she leads class discussions on the connections between improv and the soft skills needed to be an effective and responsive librarian. Students report that the opportunity to explore the provision of reference services through an improv lens helped them connect to many of the soft skills inherent in effective reference provision such as being flexible, meeting someone where they are at, making connections, and affirming patron needs. These soft skills are key to effective reference interviews but can be difficult to convey in a standard practice the reference interview exercise. By marrying discussions of improv comedy with reference skills, students are able to engage and explore these soft skills from a different lens.

The Price of Stories is Sometimes Too High: Learning from Students' Personal Narrative Performance

by Brian Sturm

Brian will share his experience in a Storytelling for Social Justice course for first year undergraduates. Designed to help them develop their own voices, the class was a bit too successful when one student used the opportunity for revenge on another student. He'll cover lessons learned and changes made to the course to avoid this "misuse" of storytelling in the classroom.

Breathing Life into Read-Alouds

by Sarah Beth Nelson

Sarah Beth will discuss the read-aloud assignment in her Library Materials for Children course. She prepares students for this assignment with a workshop on "breathing life into read-alouds," which includes recognizing the reader's creative contribution to the story. She will also share student thoughts on authenticity and authority as they relate to reading books aloud. What if a librarian wants to share a book with children, but isn't sure they are the right person to read it aloud? By practicing a read-aloud and giving each other feedback, students experiment with stepping into the authority that the reader role asks of them. Sarah Beth has had students perform in person during face to face class, and more recently online by recording their performance.

Storytelling for Social Justice and Advocacy

by Nicole A. Cooke

Nicole Cooke will discuss the creation and implementation of her *Storytelling for Social Justice and Advocacy* course. Incorporating a mixture of public speaking, storytelling, personal narrative, and current social justice issues, students learn and practice the processes and skills needed to orally advocate for themselves, the profession, and the issues they care about most passionately. Grounding their passion with ethics and cultural competence, Cooke, and her students, place special emphasis on the question “Is this my story to tell?”

Using data and self-reflection, instead of props, puppets, and picture books, student tellers learn how to lend their voices to amplify the social justice issues in their communities.

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ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

curriculum; education; pedagogy; reference transactions; students; teaching faculty

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

art in education; communication; education; LIS education; pedagogy; performance

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