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Stages of Instruction: Theater, Pedagogy and Information Literacy

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Stages of Instruction: Theater, Pedagogy and Information Literacy

Structured Abstract:

Purpose

This article will offer a new perspective on library instruction by examining its relationship to various aspects of theatrical performance.

Design/Methodology/Approach

The author uses personal observations as inspiration to examine what has been written in scholarly literature about various theatrical practices in instruction, applying the conversation to the library instruction context. Additionally, research from business and professional literature is also incorporated into the discussion. This literature review focuses on three general areas. First, a review on how to use tools and perspectives from the theater to help librarians prepare their lessons; second, an examination of the librarian as performer; and third, a discussion on how theater might help librarians deal with repetition and burnout.

Findings

The literature on this subject has been extensive and includes an all-encompassing range of practical suggestions, research findings, and theoretical analyses.

Research limitations/implications

This article looks at this subject through the lens of scholarly literature. Empirical research on this topic is still needed.

Practical implications

The author presents a number of theatrical practices librarians might consider incorporating into their instruction sessions.

Originality/Value

Much has been written about the connection between teaching and theatrical performance, but seldom from a librarian’s point of view. This article is of value to librarians looking to develop a memorable one-shot instruction session and those looking to examine the connection between teaching and performance.

Keywords:

library instruction, information literacy, performing arts, teaching, acting

Stages of Instruction: Theater, Pedagogy and Information Literacy

Everything is scripted. My library instruction sessions are prepared down to the tiniest detail. It's all planned, from the seemingly random examples I use while demonstrating searches, to the mistakes I “accidentally” make while searching, to the jokes I sprinkle throughout the class, to the small talk I initiate with the students before class begins. The sessions tend to be a barrage of information: library basics, catalog searching tips, database queries, lots of striking visuals, and even a few corny jokes. This is library instruction as if it were a Broadway show. I make this analogy in particular because I spent years working in the theater community before embarking on a career as a librarian. Naturally, I thought librarianship would be far from the world of the stage. However, since beginning work as a teaching librarian, I have taken far more from the world of theater than I ever expected. As it turns out script, dramaturgy, rehearsal, comic timing, audience interaction, and even costume all figure into teaching.

Some aspects of this connection — particularly the elements mentioned above — would apply to a new teacher in any setting. Any new teacher, for example, will need to devote a great deal of time to preparing effective lessons. However, certain parallels between the stage and instruction can be considered particular to librarians. First, while other professors have a 12-week semester, teaching librarians often have 60 minutes and a lot of ground to cover. The student, like an audience member at a piece of theater, has just one chance to take in all the information they'll need to know. After all, not many people go to see a show more than once. Another relevant parallel particular to teaching library instruction sessions and performing in a show: repetition. Repetition is a factor for any teacher, but particularly for library instructors: Many of the same

elements (such as how to search the catalog, or how the field of scholarly communication works, or how to use databases off-campus) must be covered in every class. As any actor, stagehand or usher can tell you, this has a clear parallel to the theatrical performance.

These three parallels — the importance of preparation, the necessity of effective one-shot performance, and the role of repetition — are not just correlations between teaching and performance. Each is also a challenge all librarians must address to create effective information literacy instruction sessions. Therefore, these parallels will be inspiration to further examine how librarians can meet these challenges and make their lessons charismatic and memorable. The result is a cross-disciplinary review of literature, with personal commentary intended to relate the suggestions and issues presented to the particular concerns of a librarian in a higher education context.

The reasons for this discussion go beyond the personal. Teaching librarians, who have much to learn about pedagogical methods in the early phase of their careers, are often called upon to learn on the job. Lack of training for librarians in terms of teaching is an oft-discussed problem in the library literature (Kilcullen, 1998; Shonrock and Mulder, 1993), though recent research shows that this is improving somewhat (Julien, 2005; Sproles *et al.*, 2008; Westbrook and Fabian, 2010). Due to the fact that many librarians still lack formal training for the teaching role, further discussions of pedagogical tactics in information literacy instruction may prove useful for new teaching librarians.

Performing and its relation to library instruction can be examined from a number of areas of study. Though some discussion can be found in library literature, far more can

be found in pedagogical literature written for all educators. Additionally, certain other fields (such as retail) have utilized the tools of theater; therefore professional literature from these areas also inform this discussion. Finally, certain advice on theatrical presentation can be found in business-oriented literature on creating effective, dynamic presentations. The reason for this cross-disciplinary approach lies in the scattershot nature of library literature on this subject. In cases where library literature on practical theatrical techniques in teaching (such as vocal projection) is fairly scant, one can find articles and even books that discuss these specific performance techniques in a broader context. Publications on this issue might be anecdotal, research-based, theoretical or a combination of all three; all of the above are discussed herein. The literature, which includes surveys, editorial articles, how-to publications, commentaries and theoretical analyses, has also brought to light a number of pertinent areas of discussion — such as critical pedagogy — made prominent through the connection between performing and instruction. Throughout, I will apply these issues to a librarian's perspective. The aim in doing so is not necessarily to prescribe a set of actions, but to illuminate a number of conceptions, philosophies, and practices that may help make library instruction sessions more effective and engaging both for teacher and student. By investigating these ideas, librarians may get a sense of the nuts and bolts of theatrical instruction, find innovative methods of introducing the library and its resources, or simply become conversant in the scholarly communication on this issue.

Setting the Stage

Before a performance, all parties involved must take a number of steps for the show to go on: audience members must buy their tickets and arrange transportation to the

theater; actors must audition, learn lines, rehearse and put on their costumes; designers and stagehands must ready the performance space. As teaching librarians, we act as playwright, director, performer, and even stage crew for our information literacy instruction sessions. Preparation, for each of these roles, is key. In this first chapter, I'll examine literature on theatrical techniques of preparation that a librarian might utilize in order get ready for the class: to turn the library classroom into a theater, turn our lesson plan into a playscript, and turn ourselves into performers.

A live performance must, of course, begin with a physical space. The celebrated director Peter Brook has noted that any empty space can become a theater (Brook, 1968), though there are key differences between a theater (often a passive space) and a library classroom (which is necessarily an active space). But Brook's statement calls to mind a helpful parallel between the theater and the classroom: both have the potential to become a transformative space. How can we, as librarians, promote the transformative potential of our classrooms? The question is complicated by the fact that physically rearranging a library classroom is often impossible for logistical reasons. Nevertheless, experts recommend small changes which can be enacted almost anywhere. Doorley and Witthoft (2012), in a book on promoting innovation in the business world as well as the classroom, suggest making time to prepare a space before an activity, paying particular attention to orientation — is the focus of the room currently on an object or each other? — and ambience. Merely by adjusting lighting and opening windows, several experts argue, a presenter can raise energy levels (Doorley and Witthoft, 2012; Weinschenk, 2012). For active spaces such as the library classroom, Doorley and Witthoft recommend “raw materials, bright light, bouncy music,

saturated colors and open windows” (p. 45). Further recommendations can be found by examining how-to literature on setting the stage for business and classroom presentations. Several strongly recommend consolidating your audience close to the stage, or front of the classroom (Flacks and Rasberry, 1982; Sedniev, 2012; Weinschenk, 2012). In addition to the acoustical benefits, “You will quickly find that an audience that is cozy and close to you is easier to maintain eye contact with and easier to keep engaged” (Flacks and Rasberry, 1982, p. 180). Will these subtle changes in atmosphere make a difference? Scholarship on the matter indicates it may: In an examination of the effects of studio space on teaching and learning, Taylor (2009) found students “who reported a positive effect reacted mainly to the atmosphere” (p. 226). Fostering an open, welcoming atmosphere in the library classroom could therefore help establish the library as a space in which students can embody the active, curious and able researchers we encourage them to become.

Once a performance space is established, a next priority might be writing the script, which is, of course, the basis for theatrical production. A lesson plan isn’t traditionally considered a script; nevertheless it can be infused with elements of theatricality. For example, a fruitful area of scholarly inquiry for those looking for a fresher approach is that which regards incorporating narrative into a lesson plan. Or more succinctly: storytelling. By telling stories in the classroom, a teaching librarian might use similar narrative tricks as are used in theater: building suspense, a climax, interesting characters, and an easily digestible message. And all this without any props or costumes. Most scholarly literature on libraries and storytelling refer to stories told to younger children — natural enough, since storytime is a major feature of a public

library's offerings. For our purposes, a far more useful discussion can be found in pedagogical literature focusing on storytelling in higher education, and in professional literature on theatricality in the workplace. Abrahamson (1998), in an excellent scholarly examination of storytelling in teaching, relates a brief history of the art form (from primitive oral societies, to medieval troubadours, to today) before discussing the potential benefits for students in higher education. Namely, Abrahamson argues, storytelling enables teachers to facilitate students' connection with the course material through personal experience. Storytelling also has the benefit of both bringing people together and encouraging individuals to learn new behaviors: Green (2004) writes that it fosters a stronger student-teacher connection and makes a lesson easier to remember by providing a nonthreatening way of easing into knowledge. Scholars also make specific suggestions for incorporating classic tools of storytelling into class (Tauber and Mester, 2007; Rubin, 1985). Ideas include baiting the students with a peripheral stimuli (a controversial statement, for example) in order to increase engagement, feigning mistakes, or even incorporating any of the physical acting techniques discussed in the next chapter of this article (such as voice animation), which can be innately surprising to students.

Others discuss storytelling in a broader context, focusing on how might one merge these tools with class objectives. They propose two major ways to incorporate story into class: by telling anecdotes, or by turning the structure of the class into a narrative framework (Green, 2004). Anecdotes can add quite a bit of levity without without taking too much time; for example one story I tell students concerns a particular database and its initially confusing layout: "When I first started using this database I marched up to my

supervisor and told her it was broken, because there weren't any links to the articles. And then she showed me that I was actually just looking in the wrong place. So that was an oops." In how-to literature on business presentations and public speaking, the importance of anecdotes is continually emphasized, with particular attention given to creating a dynamic beginning that will grab the audience's attention (The Results-Driven Manager, 2004; Weinschenk, 2012; Sedniev, 2012). Alternatively, a teaching librarian could structure the class in terms of a story — for example, this class is your map for the treasure hunt that is the research process. Perhaps even more interesting is a concept put forward by Gallo (2010), who wrote a book on creating presentations in the style of Steve Jobs. Gallo maintains that presenters should frame their arguments by using not just stories, but stories that feature antagonists: "Steve Jobs established the foundation of a persuasive story by introducing his audience to an antagonist, an enemy, a problem in need of a solution" (p. 63). Students who come to an information literacy instruction session, therefore, might benefit from being presented with a problem (a research paper, an unfamiliarity with databases) and the various search strategies a librarian would put forward as solutions. "As an instructor, you can capitalize on the inherent narrative structure of research as the quest for knowledge" (Green, 2004, unpagged). This would have the interesting implication of making the roles we are playing (perhaps adventurer and tour guide, in the treasure map example) more explicit.

An even more explicitly theatrical exercise might be one from the retail industry, which uses the theater as a framing device for understanding and improving personal encounters. A framework such as this feels more like metaphor than storytelling, but

can still instill a narrative structure into a lesson plan. In the retail perspective, the theatrical metaphor is a customer service tool, intended to improve customer-staff interactions. Baron et al. (2001) noted that “references to frontstage, backstage, scripts, roles, and settings, in the context of service encounters, are commonplace” (p. 102) before arguing for a more nuanced application of the metaphor in retail setting. In the library classroom this metaphor might be applied to the class itself (student as audience; class as show), or to a student’s approach towards the research process (student must design a research question, rehearse the process, improvise during moments of failure, and so on). This latter application echoes an alternative theatrical metaphor also proposed in retail literature: participatory theater. Taking inspiration from popular environmental productions such as *Tony n’ Tina’s Wedding*, Williams and Anderson (2005) found promising results after implementing a participatory theater paradigm to customer service interactions: “In traditional theater, the customer as audience typically does not play a major role... However, based on a participatory theater context, customers can be engaged in different aspects of theater production. A consumer can be lead actor (more central to the consumption of service), a director (provides direction for how the consumption process is to proceed), or some other role...” Williams and Anderson found value in participatory theater as narrative because it puts the consumer — or student — back in a decision-making role. This kind of metaphor might be an interesting framework for librarians to experiment with in their classes, a storytelling exercise that is far more collaborative than performative.

However it is incorporated into a class, scholars have argued the tools of story will “stimulate listeners in a sense of unfolding and discovery” (Lowman, 1995, p. 124). As

with some of the other theatrical tactics discussed herein, the dominant issue for teaching librarians may be finding the time to incorporate these storytelling techniques in a one-shot library instruction session. Additionally, there's the credibility factor: Presenting the library instruction session as a treasure hunt or a "Choose Your Own Adventure" story seems more than the students of today would accept. Insights from those who have done so might add considerably to the scholarly discourse on information literacy instruction. In my own experience, unabashed enthusiasm for a metaphor or a story can go a long way, even if the metaphor itself causes a bit of eye-rolling. Perhaps it is most helpful, when considering how to incorporate storytelling into a library session, to consider the ultimate purpose of using narrative techniques in a classroom: to capture the students' imagination, to establish ourselves as relatable figures, to make our lessons more memorable, and to have a bit of fun while doing so. By keeping these goals in mind, it might be easier to take a few chances on writing a riskier, more ambitious lesson plan.

It takes more than a script and a space, of course, to put on a show. Other theatrical elements might be just as vital. Arresting images, for example, are a key to most successful theatrical experiences. Librarians, of course, have limited means of visual expression: they are often limited to a projected computer screen and whiteboard or blackboard. Of course, it is important to remember a scenic designer in the theater also faces tremendous limitations: "There is probably no field of creative work in which the artists faces more limitations and restrictions than he does in scenic design" (Gillette, 1967, p. 6); this is due in part to the requirements of the script, the limitations of space, the input of collaborators, and budgetary concerns. This isn't necessarily a bad thing:

design expert Garr Reynolds (2010) notes that “constraints can be inspiring and liberating — it all depends on your point of view” (p. 16). Like scenic designers, therefore, librarians must be creative with the materials they have.

Publications on visuals in relation to library instruction have been frequent in recent years, perhaps because much of what librarians are trying to teach is essentially visual itself. Especially during a one-shot session, it is often imperative a teaching librarian shows the students how to access the library catalog, subscription databases, and possibly even physical areas of the library as well. Librarians can find editorial articles as well as traditional research that promote a more learner-friendly approach to creating presentations for information literacy sessions (Hamilton, 2013; C. Harris, 2009; Jones, 2006; Thomas, 2012). These authors’ advice will be familiar to those who have seen a Steve Jobs or Al Gore presentation: evocative images, a limit of a few words per slide, judicious use of animation. Furthermore, developing technologies have expanded the possibilities of presentation; a number of articles may help librarians looking to add visual pizzazz with tools such as Wordle, Prezi, Jing, Tagxedo, Camtasia, and others (Cooke, 2009; C. Harris, 2009; Huisman *et al.*, 2011; Jensen and Tunon, 2012; Whicker *et al.*, 2012). Even with numerous publications on the subject, this is an area in need of further discussion, particularly given the ever-expanding list of user tools available. Additionally, further research is needed to ascertain the pervasiveness of these tools in library instruction.

Many books and articles have discussed optimizing the visual potential of a presentation; these publications are generally written for the broader business audience (Duarte, 2008; Kosslyn, 2011; L. Russell and Munter, 2011; Weinschenk, 2012). A vast

number of helpful tips can be found here, encompassing everything from background color to font size to choosing photographs. Much of this advice is explicitly focused on making a presentation as theatrical as possible: Kosslyn, for example, notes that well-placed visuals on a slide have the power to evoke certain emotions in addition to their utility in direct an audience's attention (p. 61-62). Duarte (2008) notes that placing items on a PowerPoint slide is akin to placing actors on a stage: "In the theatre, directors position actors on stage in support of the story... Each placement takes on meaning, even without context or knowledge of the narrative of which they might be a part" (p. 105). Placing related items (for example, a librarian might show graphical representations of various types of periodical) in careful proximity to each other can convey a variety of concepts: subjects placed in the center of a slide are perceived as closely related, while isolated subjects carry more visual weight than grouped subjects. Reynolds (2010) recommended using subtly angled text or unusual placement to command attention: "It may imply motion, informality, nonconformity, power, change, and so on" (p. 49). It is important to keep in mind, however, that for teaching librarians creating a visually stimulating presentation is possible only to a degree, when talking about the research process in the abstract (what the library offers, what you can find in library databases as opposed to the open web, and so on). Eventually, the students will need to see the advanced search boxes and dropdown menus of the catalogs and databases they'll be using. Still, literature on visuals certainly indicates it is possible to create a more dynamic visual element to an information literacy instruction session.

Finally, beyond maximizing the potential of a space, creating a lesson plan, and preparing a visually interesting presentation, there is one more key aspect of setting the

stage for our instructional performance: preparing ourselves for the role. The next section of this article will discuss teaching as performing in a broader sense, and will enumerate some performance techniques we might use in the class, but how might we best prepare ourselves beforehand? Recommendations on preparatory activities can be found by looking at advice from theater practitioners as well as public speaking coaches. Self-preparation for any performance, they say, involves physical as well as mental elements. Schreiber (2005) argues that preparatory physical exercises should be undertaken even before acting lessons (p. 30). Suggested exercises include practicing pantomime, breathing, gesturing, diction, and even jaw stretching. Further recommendations can be found in nearly any book on acting; the common thread among all of these exercises is that all caution against skipping them or merely reading about these exercises without incorporating them: “Don’t read through the description... and say to yourself ‘I get it,’ and go on. Only your intellectual understanding has increased at that point; your performance ability has hardly been touched” (Flacks and Rasberry, 1982, p. 10).

Preparation suggestions for actors also go beyond the physical: a number of mental preparatory techniques can be found in acting and public speaking literature. It would be impossible to provide an exhaustive list of acting literature on how best to prepare mentally for a performance, but a few specific tactics are particularly interesting for library instructors. Benedetti (2009), an acting teacher, argues that relaxation and meditation exercises are a key tool to help actors who “are driven to excessive effort by their fear of failure or their desire to please their audience” (p. 29), a description which may speak to librarian instructors as well. Flacks and Rasberry (1982) advise

developing the ability to split focus by doing a number of activities (practicing a speech out loud, for example, while also washing dishes) and simultaneously visualizing an audience (pp. 12-14). This, they argue, helps presenters learn to juggle the many concerns of a speaker presenting to an audience. For librarians, who must often speak to a class while simultaneously performing a live search, this sort of practice might prove helpful.

After these kinds of physical and mental exercises, one final element of self-preparation can be considered: getting into the right frame of mind immediately before a class. Many publications advocate for taking a few moments before class to relax and warm up (Lowman, 1995; Timpson and Tobin, 1982). Going over lines before going onstage, for example, is also a technique often used by actors; this tactic might be incorporated by a librarian reviewing the course outline before a class. Timpson and Tobin argue that what exactly a teacher decides to do moments before entering the classroom is less important than the act of creating a pre-class ritual: "These exercises may sound like more trouble than they are worth, but actors swear by them and depend on them" (p. 22).

Finding Our Role

Pick up a book on teaching effectively and it's likely to have a few tips in common with a book on acting methods. The parallels are evident: a captive audience, a stagelike area, a solo performer. The pickings are slimmer, however, for those who restrict their search to publications about acting techniques in instruction written by and for librarians. Antonelli *et al.* (2000) outline a number of practical suggestions (such as voice, movement, costume and props) for librarians looking to enliven their

presentations; Franco and Cauilan (2012) examine the effectiveness of incorporating theatrical techniques as well as games into a library instruction session. Other researchers have studied the connection between library instruction and theatrical performance on a deeper level. Julien and Pecoskie (2009) examine relationships between librarians and teaching faculty in a higher education institution through ethnographer Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework of human interaction, which argued that self-presentation in social contexts is inherently theatrical. Polkinghorne (2012) focuses specifically on instruction, arguing that Goffman's framework as well as the acting/non-acting matrix of Michael Kirby might offer meaningful application in the library context. Several scholars have expanded Goffman's dramaturgical framework to the library context at large — including reference and circulation services (Cherry and Calvert, 2012; Quinn, 2007). However, these are not specifically focused on library instruction.

Given the scarcity of library-related literature specifically devoted to teaching as performance, it is useful to look at a broader cross-section of pedagogical literature, particularly that which focuses on higher education. Again, a preponderance of authors endorse the acting/teaching parallel. As Timpson and Tobin (1982) note, both acting and teaching "are involved in the difficult process of communicating with an audience, and they both have mind, body, and voice at their disposal" (vii). It is no surprise, therefore, that scholars and teaching practitioners have found much to learn from using acting techniques in the classroom. One can find literature discussing any number of acting skills in the classroom: voice, movement, warm-ups, and even student interaction. These experts do not for the most part focus on only one of these

techniques, but offer a catchall roundup of the many weapons in the actor's arsenal. These publications are often, though not always, full of actionable techniques. For example, vocal skills for teachers — including projection, diction, and expression — are promoted in several books and articles (R. Harris, 1977; Martin and Darnley, 2004; Lowman, 1995; Stern, 1980; Tauber *et al.*, 1993); suggestions often overlap with the preparatory techniques already discussed in this paper and range from breathing practices to singing lessons.

Preparation is just one of several categories of acting techniques for teachers described by director and professor Morris Burns (Timpson and Tobin, 1982). Other categories include the ability to read and interact with an audience (for helpful articles on this subject, see Kraemer, 1997; Reilich and Hlavsa, 2006; Waack, 1977), creating a character or persona (see R. Harris, 1977; Özmen, 2011; Rubin, 1985) and adding appropriate movement or blocking (see Lowman, 1995; Rubin, 1985; Timpson and Tobin, 1982). In fact, teaching librarians may find the number and variety of practical suggestions on acting in the classroom overwhelming.

Others who write on acting in relation to teaching take a deeper view, exploring the transformative possibilities of the teaching/acting metaphor. Horning (1979) unpacks the many angles of the teacher-as-performer metaphor, including setting, structure, accessibility, style and content. Some scholars have examined the metaphor from a political angle, arguing that innovation and impact is possible through educational reform and a more performance-focused teacher training nationwide (Sarason, 1999; Whatman, 1997). Dawe (2004) goes further, advocating for the dissolution of education schools and the development of teaching studios modeled on those created for actors.

Griggs (2001) likens the preparation Method actors take in creating a role (by putting himself or herself in a character's shoes) to the 'narrative inquiry'-based training for teacher development, which involves extending experience through self-research.

Gregory (2006) discusses the benefits teachers can reap from acting classes, including becoming enmeshed in "a tradition of acting pedagogy that goes back three thousand years" (p. 315). These analyses have varying applicability for teaching librarians; though few of us will incorporate a Method-like preparation, the emphasis on the importance of training and teacher development may resonate.

A competing school of thought expresses a great deal of hesitation about the acting/teaching analogy. These authors argue that the metaphor is problematic because of its inherent shallowness: "To equate instructional communication with presentational style grossly devalues the intellectual work of teaching" (Pineau, 1994, p.7). Other problems with the analogy, these scholars argue, include a potential increase in teacher self-consciousness, an overly cosmetic view of teaching skills, and a troublesome shift of emphasis from student learning to teacher acrobatics (Prendergast, 2008; Sprague, 1992; Smith, 1979). As Smith argues, "In short, teaching is difficult enough; the demand that it be acting as well seems excessive" (p. 32). Pineau (1994) and Prendergast (2008) advocate for an alternative to the teacher-as-actor metaphor: one that focuses on the interconnectivity between performance studies and instruction. These scholars argue that performance studies — a burgeoning area of study that fuses drama, anthropology, and other disciplines — offers deeper resonance to the teacher-as-performer metaphor. Pineau's model, which may be of particular interest to librarians, is based on the scholarship of ethnographer Dwight Conquergood (1989). Conquergood

defined performance research in terms of four key words: poetics, play, process and power. Pineau relates each of these key concepts to the educational paradigm “in order to frame some of the performance issues, questions, and methods that one might bring to bear upon education” (p. 10). Her oft-cited article has engendered a great deal of discussion on performance and its relation to instruction, particularly in the area of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy has become an increasing focus in library science, as well, with many articles and even volumes published on critical information literacy (Accardi *et al.*, 2010; Elmborg, 2006; Jacobs, 2008; Swanson, 2004).

Other scholars contend that acting is an imperfect metaphor for teaching, because this image focuses too strongly on the teacher, and other performance-related metaphors might prove more useful. Several argue, for example, that teachers should consider themselves disciplined improvisors who adapt their approaches, techniques, and interactions to the particular needs of the student class. These scholars generally recommend teachers not only integrate the processes of improvisational theater themselves, but also promote group exercises incorporating improvisation in the classroom (Berk and Trieber, 2009; O’Neill, 1995; Sandoval and Mino, 2013; Sawyer, 2004). A library instruction session, which often features real-time searches and fosters student interaction based on these search results, already likely incorporates some elements of improvisation into the lesson, but this does not do full justice to the improvisation analogy. Further research on improvisation in the library classroom would help illuminate this correlation further.

Educational literature also contains a number of other in-depth discussions on specific performance metaphors related to teaching (Hovet, 2006; Mills, 2010; Shrout,

2009). These publications propose a specific metaphor for teachers (teacher as film exhibitor; teacher as jazz musician; teacher as vaudevillian) and argue for their value as a lens through which teachers can better understand their roles and perhaps find more success and satisfaction with their classroom experiences. Each of these metaphors offers a unique (and often highly personal) point of view. These articles rarely offer practical, applicable processes, but nevertheless may be valuable for librarians in the particular issues they highlight. For example, Hovet (2006), a film studies professor, likens his role to an early 20th century film exhibitor, who would design the venue, shape content, comment on the proceedings and make personal connections between the film and its local audience (p. 327). The specificity of Hovet's image carries parallels to the library session: The metaphor emphasizes the artistry involved in 'curating' a library session, as well as underlining the interactive nature of the class itself. Like Hovet's film exhibitors, we as librarians act as mediators between the library resources being illustrated on the projector and the students in the classroom.

Examined together, these scholars emphasize just how resonant the performance metaphor is for so many teachers. In fact, recent studies of teachers who were asked to define their roles metaphorically have revealed a number of performance-related metaphors: entertainer, magician, cheerleader, bandleader, tour guide, trapeze artist, pop star (Crawford and Patchen, 2011; Thomas and Beauchamp, 2011). Library literature currently lacks an examination of the role of metaphor in library instructors' view of themselves, however.

One particular performance metaphor might prove especially meaningful for librarians: teacher as clown. Though it may seem an unlikely juxtaposition, clowning and

pedagogy have a meaningful relationship for many scholars. For some, clowning is simply a method of entertaining students. Schutzman (2002) recounts the experience of acting as a clown to maintain student engagement: "To keep students' attention I had to 'entertain'... I had become a guru clown, a ringmaster who simulates countless pratfalls to keep education amusing at all costs" (p. 64). Others see a deeper meaning: Lutzker (2007), for example, argues that the nature of clowning addresses complex pedagogical challenges, leading to greater awareness, openness, flexibility and presence for the teacher (p. 88). Clowning is an extremely physical, highly developed skill; Lutzker reports great success for those teachers who attend clowning workshops. For those of us unable to attend a clown workshop, Simon (2009) details a number of steps one can take to find an inner clown, such as performing physical exercises, practicing improvisation, recording results on worksheets, and working with partners. For the teaching librarian, perhaps the most salient connection between clowning and teaching would be the notion of failure. Weitz (2012) notes that clowns, and their perennial failures, hold real meaning for the watching audience: "Clowns with resilient dedication invite us to laugh at their failures...They remind us however, not to become ensnared by rigid thinking and rote response" (p. 87). Clowning, for the teaching librarian, might be one way of reminding students that failure is an essential part of the research process. In my own experience, a well-placed goofy (and futile) search can do much to explain Boolean operators.

The clown metaphor is a relatively narrow one, but introduces a far broader area of scholarly inquiry: humor in the library classroom. Indeed, humor is one performance area where librarian instructors can find a number of relevant publications written by

and for librarians. Publications on humor written directly from the librarian's perspective can be broadly categorized in two ways: scholarship on humor in higher education and its place in a library instruction context, and publications which offer practical suggestions for librarians. To begin with the former: MacAdam (1985) was one of the first to apply research on humor to the library instruction session, paying particular attention to the risks of humor. MacAdam finds student reactions vary depending on the style of humor (for example, hostile, nonhostile, or self-disparaging) as well as the gender of the humorist. In the years since MacAdam's publication, the connection between humor and information literacy has been further explored by a several researchers. Most notably, Vossler and Sheidlower's (2008) book-length discussion of the topic combines research with practical suggestions. As these authors demonstrate, the scholarly communication on humor in academics has been extensive since initial empirical research on the subject was initially published in the 1970s. Researchers have focused on everything from theory of humor in education, to types of humor, to humor's effectiveness in the classroom. As Banas *et al.* (2011) note in a broad and very helpful overview of research on humor in education, the vast majority of research about this topic has focused on its positive aspects, offering many reasons as to why an instructor may want to incorporate humor into the classroom. Perhaps the most salient reason is that through jokes in the classroom, students may learn to associate humor's positive personal response with learning (Martin, 2007; Sprague, 1992). Research performed by Wanzer *et al.* (2006) on humor in the classroom categorizes appropriate humor into four general areas: humor related to course materials, humor unrelated to course materials, self-disparaging humor, and unintentional humor. Research-oriented library literature on

humor in the classroom tends toward literature reviews and analyses of extant research; however, the discussion could use more recent empirical information on library instruction and humor. Studies and surveys on student views of humorous elements of library instruction might prove valuable additions to the discourse.

Some librarians may find the second brand of library literature on humor more applicable to their work. These articles offer concrete ideas and practical suggestions for library instructors looking to incorporate humor into the one-shot session. Suggestions in this type of article range from attending a stand-up comedy workshop (Trefts and Blakeslee, 2000), to using personal anecdotes or poking fun at oneself (Fulton, 1985; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Walker, 2006), to incorporating pop-culture or other irreverent search examples (Fulton, 1985; Trefts and Blakeslee, 2000) to adding humorous props, images, or even costumes (Arnsan, 2000). The importance of avoiding disparaging humor has been strongly emphasized in the library literature (Arnsan, 2000; MacAdam, 1985; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998; Vossler and Sheidlower, 2008). Further suggestions can also be found in Sheidlower and Vossler's (2008) volume. These authors liken library instruction sessions to stand-up comedy routines, which must be performed many times over and always to a new audience. This particular metaphor speaks to a challenge articulated in the introduction to this article: how to cope with the repetition inherent in library instruction; this subject will be further explored in the next chapter of this article. Vossler and Sheidlower also include a number of first-person narratives from academic librarians, each of which contains ideas for how a librarian might approach a learning moment (such as showing students how to evaluate sources) into something memorable and funny.

It is clear from perusing the literature on performing as it relates to teaching that many, many roles are available to those librarians interested in developing their stage presence. From the serious (librarian as agent of change in a critical literacy context, librarian as facilitator of improvisational interactions) to the sophomoric (librarian as jokester, librarian as clown), the concept can be developed in many directions. Furthermore, the role we play can also be malleable from moment to moment, depending on the interactions between teacher and student: “Such a view of classroom interactions implies that teachers and students are engaged in a constant mutual influence process with each simultaneously affecting how the other communicates” (Galvin, 1990, p. 196). In this light the notion of roles seems infinitely adaptable to various audiences as well as to each librarian’s particular strengths and teaching style. How a particular librarian would interpret their own role is a matter up for discussion, and continuing area of inquiry for each librarian on a personal basis.

The Show Must Go On (And On and On)

A theater director’s job may end on opening night, but for actors, stagehands, front-of-house staff, and other theater practitioners, the real work then begins: weeks, months, or even years of the same performance, night after night — and always to a new crowd. Librarian instructors face similar challenges: the development of a successful information literacy instruction session is just the beginning. The introductory nature of many instruction sessions often means that various elements of a session (and often, an entire session altogether) must be repeated over and over again. Of course, librarians are not alone in this regard: teaching faculty also are tasked with repeating classes semester after semester. However, librarians don’t experience the

long-term rewards that teaching faculty do: “Librarians may never see the results nor receive any feedback from the classes they teach” (McKillop and Ramage, 2005, p. 2). It is unsurprising, therefore, that research indicates significant levels of burnout in academic librarianship (Affleck, 1996; Harwell, 2013). It is outside the purview of this review to recount all coping strategies that can be found in library literature, but it is useful to note that some suggestions are performance-related. Sheesley (2001) argues for dynamic instruction sessions to combat sameness and notes that a bit of clowning might engage instructors just as much as students, as will “controlled spontaneity” (p. 449) — a phrasing which has striking similarity to “disciplined improvisation,” discussed in the previous chapter. In this view, librarians can fight burnout merely by implementing the theatrical techniques discussed throughout this article. An interesting, if circular, solution in the context of this paper.

Tubesing and Tubesing (1982), burnout and stress management practitioners, caution against finding a single cure-all for burnout: “We believe there is no single antidote or prophylactic for burnout...The popular literature would have us believe otherwise” (p. 157). Instead they offer a number of strategies: physical, intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual and environmental. Maslach (2003), who has examined burnout in teaching and other caring professions and is considered an expert in the area, also advises a number of coping tactics. First among them is creating specific, tangible signposts toward larger goals: “If the ideal is not to be a source of frustration and failure, it must be accompanied by concrete subgoals that are clearly possible to achieve” (p. 149). In a library instruction context, this might be implemented by setting practical goals such as finding new images for a presentation, practicing breathing

techniques, and implementing a warm-up routine, rather than the broad and unwieldy goal of simply adding more pizzazz to a lesson plan. Maslach also advises finding ways to do the same thing differently, incorporating short (as well as long) breaks, leaving work at work to avoid reliving it at home, and creating positive experiences outside of work that provide balance to negativity or sameness.

Other scholars emphasize the importance of in-service professional training. This could refer to conferences, but perhaps most interesting in relation to this paper is the efficacy of performance workshops: Lutzker (2007), in an examination of clowning workshops for foreign language teachers, found the workshop experience “to have played a valuable role in helping teachers in the middle of their professional lives experience a new sense of personal and professional growth” (p. 185); Lutzker also discusses alternative workshop and retreat experiences (such as Parker Palmer’s *Courage to Teach* retreats) that offer similar rejuvenation for teachers.

Another performance-related strategy to deal with repetition comes from professional literature on service and other similar industries. Experts in these areas have examined burnout in relation to the concept of emotional labor, a term identified by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983). Emotional labor might refer to surface acting (merely pretending to feel a certain way) or deep acting (making an effort to change the way one feels) in a service encounter. “Feelings do not erupt spontaneously or automatically in either deep acting or surface acting. In both cases the actor has learned to intervene — either in creating the inner shape of a feeling or in shaping the outward experience of one” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 36). Little research has been performed on the concept of emotional labor and its consequences in library literature, though Julien and Genuis

(2009) explored librarians' feelings toward their instructional roles using this vocabulary. Interestingly enough, deep acting techniques have been examined in the service sector as a response to burnout. Though one might suppose a greater effort to change feelings during a service encounter would lead to even greater emotional exhaustion, Grandey (2003) did not find this to be the case. "It seems that the payoffs of deep acting — reduced emotional dissonance and positive reactions from customers — may restore an employee's emotional resources in a way that surface acting cannot" (p. 93). If these findings can be extrapolated to the field of library instruction — and as Matteson and Miller (2012) argued, further research is needed to determine if this is the case — Grandey's research would have interesting implications for the library instructor. Those who feel the pangs of burnout may find succor, conversely enough, by working harder at developing techniques from the Stanislavski method of acting and making even more of an effort to identify with their students.

In dealing with repetition, some librarians might find it most helpful to glean wisdom directly from the theater itself: performers and directors have much to say on the best way to cope with the repetitive nature of a theatrical performance. As actress Jessica Tandy said: "Long runs are a challenge. Sustaining a performance is one of the most difficult things in the world for an actor to do" (Brown, 1999, p. 162). Suggestions include learning to forget how an audience responds to a comment (Daley, 1982), creating pre-show and in-show rituals (Glaser, 1997), keeping professionally active outside the show (Carmello, 2010), focusing on a different aspect of a performance every day (Healey, 2011), or having a colleague or supervisor come to watch: "One of the most effective means of inspiring a cast is simply for the directors to come see the

show” (Daley, 1982, p. D20). Even making changes simply for the sake of variety often adds value: “The changes are not necessarily improvements, they are often done simply for the sake of change” (Daley, 1982, p. D1). It isn’t difficult to see how several of these suggestions could be useful for teaching librarians: inviting colleagues to observe, attending conferences and workshops, constantly trying out new teaching strategies — even when the old ones are working just fine — and developing rituals might all help combat boredom and stagnation.

On the other hand, a repetitive task also comes with many benefits, as actress Catherine Russell (a leading performer in Off-Broadway’s *Perfect Crime* for over 25 years) argues: “I’ll bet that people with repetitive jobs will tell you that they grow with the work if they’ve done it for a long time... These types of jobs allow you — or perhaps even force you — to use different parts of your brain. I think employees are happiest when they can do that.” (C. Russell 2011, p. BU12).

Conclusion

Many librarians with a heavy workload might find incorporating theatrical techniques to be a daunting prospect. However, many of those new to teaching will find value in the conversation, if not in the techniques themselves. To bring the discussion back around to the three instructional challenges proposed in the introduction (the importance of preparation, the necessity of effective one-shot performance, the role of repetition): How do the many connections between library instruction and performance help librarians solve these problems? The answer most likely depends on the librarian. Some librarians may be more drawn to practical techniques; others might find resonance in the metaphor itself; still others may find the theoretical implications of this analogy most

valuable. The broad nature of this discussion means that many of these relationships might be further researched, analyzed and discussed.

For myself, what I find most helpful is the notion of the roles we have to play, and the space that we create. Start with the library classroom. If the library computer lab (where most of our classes take place) is a performance space, what role exactly should this space play? I would hope the students come away from the classroom with the notion of the library as a space of work, yes, but also as a space of access, a space where the questions are encouraged, a space of logical order and organized information, and a space of sanctuary from the often loud corridors of the college. Then there's the role I hope the students will play: that of patient, persistent, curious, and independent learners. Finally, there is my own role. And this is perhaps most important, as this is really the only role I have complete control over. I take much of my image of the role I'd like to play from the metaphors described earlier: a creative, interactive, collaborative, knowledgeable, and approachable figure.

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