

Convergence in Library and Museum Studies Education: Playing Around with Curriculum?

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Introduction

In the case of libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs), the concept of convergence has become commonplace in recent time. Convergence addresses both physical spaces and the services provided. But how new is this concept? What is currently known as convergence within these institutions, should perhaps more accurately be described as reconvergence, as “in the late 1800s and early 1900s, libraries and museums shared space, resources, and personnel” (Given & McTavish, 2010). Later, as the physical locales were separated, so was the service provided by each. Yet now, research—especially about children's play—necessitates a fresh look at convergence in services provided by libraries and museums. This, in turn, asks for a reconsideration of training of museum and library professionals.

In this short communication, we consider the changing nature of training professionals in both libraries and museums within this emerging reconvergence of the LAMs. We use the concept of play as a central point of focus—a conceptual converging point where both museums and libraries intersect—to help us explore the possibilities for both training professionals and informing their future practice. First we provide a theoretical framework

for our project. We then discuss current research that shows the shifts in focus around the notion of play, specifically in youth services in museums and libraries. Finally, we introduce the beginnings of a project we plan to conduct in tandem with this research.

Curriculum Theory: Training Professionals

In the second decade of the 21st century, we find ourselves—in LIS education and its cognate disciplines—grappling with the complexities of both curriculum content and the way we teach it. According to Marcia Bates (2015) LIS should be considered a meta-discipline—a field that cuts across the entire spectrum of traditional disciplines such as the arts, humanities, social and behavioral sciences, natural sciences, and math. LIS can be seen as organizing itself around a particular social purpose or interest and thus providing a lens through which *every subject matter* can be viewed. A meta-field looks through that lens in order to address practical and professional concerns as well as those that are more theoretical. Reconvergence of the LAMs reflects both a shift in the way we see the landscape of our field, but also a reflection of wider change in LAM organizations and values that underpin them.

One such shifting value is the emphasis on play and its role in both library and museum programming.

When dealing with any program in LIS, we are referring to two parallel issues that occur simultaneously. First, complexity in the field, and second, complexity in teaching about our field. In the late 20th century, we saw the increasing development and understanding of complex systems in the world (both natural and cultural) (Doll *et al.*, 2005; Gleick, 1987; Hayles, 1991).

At the same time, the field of curriculum theory has questioned the traditional pedagogical approach. This traditional approach is linear and hierarchical. It has the assumption of a simple routine order, dichotomous structures, and predictive principles. (Doll, 2012). This traditional approach, according to Doll (2012), constricts creative and human thinking.

In reconsidering LIS education, and giving new emphasis to play, it makes sense to “move abductively”, as both Charles Peirce and Gregory Bateson assert (Doll 2012). We need to consider that human thinking moves sideways, across, diagonally, and, indeed, skipping from node to node and idea to idea. This way of thinking correlates with how people play or seek information. Bates’ cognitive model of information retrieval (2015) alludes to how people learn and is informative to our premise for the need for change in LIS curricula and teaching practice. Students still need essential LIS skills and knowledge but they also should be equipped to handle higher levels of mental complexity and adaptability needed to manage these (Yukawa, 2015). Like many entities in the world, learning and thinking are neither linear, nor dichotomous, but rather they are structurally intertwined, emergent and self-organizing (Capra & Luisi, 2014). Rather than continuing to teach using a model that fights the natural way humans learn, seek information (and grow intellectually and socially) why not embrace natural processes of development, meaning-making, and learning.

Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997) (TLT) also offers useful principles and theoretical teeth for dealing with the complexities of LIS, its multiple fields, and the training of LAM professionals. Questioning assumptions and playing around with the possible is at the heart of TLT. Using this model learning is understood as a process, done through experience, dialogue, and critical reflection, which, in turn, leads to self-transformation (Yukawa, 2015).

What this investigation into conceptual foundations tells us—both LIS scholars and educators from seemingly different subfields—is that there is indeed a foundation upon which our meta-discipline rests. The coming together of people and information from these different LAM environments should be treated as a complex system. Within this complexity the training of professionals working in these disciplines should involve teaching an awareness of process, complexity, adaptability, and reflection, that best meet the needs of the new reconvergence.

Curriculum Theory: Libraries and Museums Supporting Education

Libraries and museums are important third spaces for supporting holistic development of learning in ways that complement what schools and families provide. The *Every Child Ready to Read* (ECRR2) program, a joint effort between the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) and the Public Library Association (PLA), identifies five practices which are crucial to children’s early literacy development. These are talking, singing, reading, writing, and *playing*. Of these, *play* is the most controversial. Seemingly unimportant and often taken for granted, research has shown that children’s access to free play is an important component of learning. According to Nespeca (2012), play should not be considered a break from learning. ECRR2 identifies play as important for children’s emerging skills,

including language and literacy, symbolic thinking, oral language and building narrative (ECRR2, p 46). Soft skills, such as cooperation, collaboration, sharing, and social skills, are also acquired through free play.

The United Nations identifies play as being so critical to children's development that it considers play to be a fundamental right. According to Article 31 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), play and the right to participate in cultural life and the arts, are recognized as rights for all children.

Yet despite the research that informs otherwise, play is threatened in the United States. According to Diamant-Cohen, Prendergast, Estrovitz, Banks, and van der Veen (2012), children overall face less play time. Children of lower socioeconomic status (SES) may live in areas where, for reasons of safety, they are unable to play outside, and those of higher SES status may be overscheduled. Across SES levels, children suffer from less play time as schools emphasize instruction over recess.

Nespeca's (2012) White Paper for the American Library Association identifies the correlation between play and early literacy, and advocates that children's libraries incorporate play spaces. While library programming for young people has historically included play, from puppet stories to reader's theater, recent research has shown that play provides important connections not only to early literacy, but also to Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) learning. Nespeca describes how Johnson's (1996) work on learning with blocks identifies seven stages of block building, from carrying blocks, to making representational structures. As such, play in libraries is moving from literature-based play to hands-on play, with increased opportunities for making, tinkering, and free play. One such example is the IMLS-Award winning Rancho Cucamonga Public Library (RCPL).

Their LSTA grant-funded *Play and Learn Islands*, (RCPL, n.d.) provide a multi-sensory, portable play experience that can be used inside and out.

This sort of research from libraries also translates to museum programming. Increasingly, reconvergence within the fields of youth services librarianship and museum education for young people is centering upon play ("Boston," 2015; Grenier, 2010; Mostov, 2014). As a library leader, RCPL is adding a children's museum space on the second floor of one of its branches to expand upon opportunities for imaginative play. Children's museums, such as the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, have a large focus on purposeful play—especially around making, tinkering, and hacking (Brahms & Wardrip, 2014). With minimal instruction, parents and children are encouraged to work and play together for a co-learning experience (Brahms & Wardrip, 2014). Further demonstrating convergence, the Children's Museum in Pittsburgh has two children's librarians conducting story times as part of the maker activities.

Conclusion: Explorations for the Future

This work, presented first as a poster at ALISE '16, then expanded into this short, work-in-progress article, is being further developed into a full-length article. In addition, Martens and Latham are co-developing a course on play for future library and museum professionals at Kent State University's School of Library and Information Science. This course will begin with the foundational philosophies presented here. It will playfully navigate the larger university structures to forge a space for integration, meta-disciplinary approaches, co-creation, co-teaching, and collaborative learning.

In order to start a conversation about our project, we have started a Facebook group called "Library-Museum Sandbox: A Focus on Play" (Library-Museum Sandbox,

2015), where we will add articles and other information. We welcome your thoughts, comments, and playful participation!

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