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Perspective-Taking and Perspectival Expansions: A Reflection and an Invitation

Andrea Baer, Rowan University

Abstract

Over the past two+ years, many of us have been recalibrating our views on teaching and learning, our approaches to information literacy education, and our orientations to everyday life in and outside of work. As I imagine how I want my own engagement in teaching and learning to continue unfolding, I've also been reflecting on what I value about *Communication in Information Literacy's* (CIL) Perspectives section and what I hope for it as the journal, information literacy, and education continue to evolve. In this short essay, I consider different ways of thinking about the term *perspectives*; reflect on Perspectives as a space for exploring questions, issues, and experiences from new vantage points; and invite members of the information literacy community to share through CIL's Perspectives their unique ways of seeing.

Keywords: critical reflective practice, perspective-taking

Perspectives

edited by Andrea Baer

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Perspective-Taking and Perspectival Expansions: A Reflection and an Invitation

Last fall I transitioned into the role of Perspectives editor for *Communications in Information Literacy (CIL)*, and this is the first issue of the journal for which I am the sole editor. My move into this new role at *CIL* has occurred at the same time that we've all been adjusting to a more manageable stage of the pandemic. Over the past two+ years, many of us have also been recalibrating our views on teaching and learning, our approaches to information literacy education, and our orientations to everyday life in and outside of work. As I imagine how I want my own engagement in teaching and learning to continue unfolding, I've also been reflecting on what I value about *CIL*'s Perspectives section and what I hope for it as the journal, information literacy, and education continue to evolve. In this short essay, I consider different ways of thinking about the term *perspectives*; reflect on Perspectives as a space for exploring questions, issues, and experiences from new vantage points; and invite members of the information literacy community to share through *CIL*'s Perspectives their unique ways of seeing.

Unpacking the different ways that the term perspective is often used or interpreted can generate further thinking about what the Perspectives section is, and what it might be, as it continues to serve as a space for inquiry and reflection. Often perspective is what becomes visible when a person or a group steps back and takes a wider view of a scene, or when they get some critical distance from a situation. We also talk about "losing perspective" when we are overwhelmed and frustrated, and later "regaining" it. Without perspective, we feel disoriented and may become consumed by a problem that feels paralyzing. When we (re)gain perspective, we are able to look at a challenging or confusing situation in a fresh way, or to see it in relation to a larger whole.

We can also think of perspectives in terms of perspective-taking, or "the act of perceiving a situation or understanding a concept from an alternative point of view, such as that of another individual" ("Perspective-taking," 2022). By looking at something from a different vantage point, we may notice ideas, people, voices, or experiences that were previously outside of our perception. Sometimes we might recognize beliefs or assumptions that we've been carrying without our conscious awareness, and we might reexamine those assumptions as we continue to look at a given situation, argument, or idea from different angles.

To draw on Stephen Brookfield's work on reflective teaching practice, we also gain perspective as we investigate our assumptions and intentionally view experiences through different lenses. (For Brookfield, those lenses include: our own experiences and autobiographies; the experiences and views of peers or colleagues; the experiences and views of students; and theory, research, and literature [Brookfield, 1998; Brookfield, 2017].) While we often think of reflection as an individual, private activity, as Brookfield points out, unearthing previously hidden assumptions that can stand in the way of seeing things in new ways is often impossible to do alone. We need community, and we need diversity and belonging in community, in order to gain new perspectives and vantage points that are simply not possible when we operate in isolation.

This particular moment in time, in history, and in the library and information literacy community, seems to me one in which we especially need time and space for hearing and generating fresh perspectives, which often occur along with perspective-taking and perspectival shifts and expansions. In the past two years, the global pandemic has demonstrated both the interconnectedness of humanity and the rifts that separate individuals and groups. The pandemic has at once underscored and exacerbated social and racial inequities and injustices, social isolation, and political polarization. Moreover, the increased pace of climate change has amplified the impact of these problems in many communities. At the same time, we see everyday examples of the very real harms that can result from the spread of mis- and dis-information, surveillance capitalism, and algorithmic injustice.

The unpredictability and challenges of the past two years have asked, and often demanded, that we approach problems and everyday life from different angles, and that we consider what might be possible if we let go of unhelpful assumptions that we may not have known we held. While many aspects of life appear to be returning closer to a pre-pandemic "normal," I share with many others the hope that the past two+ years of rethinking, sometimes radically, how we show up in the world does not end with a "return to normal." I hope instead that the uncertainty we've experienced, and in many ways continue to experience, opens up new ways of looking, seeing, showing up, and teaching and learning, as we practice and ethics of care and a commitment to inclusion and appreciation of difference.

We've gotten a lot more practice over the past two years with recognizing that what has often been viewed as "normal," or as "just how things are," makes less sense when looked at

from another angle. We've gotten more practice with perspective-taking: looking in new directions and seeing things that were previously out of our individual and collective lines of vision. So have fellow educators, students, and other community members. With that practice, many of us have likely connected on deeper levels with what we love and care about, and how we want to be in the world and in relationship with others.

Much as we create opportunities for students to practice viewing an issue, an argument, or an experience from another vantage point, we can also continue to grow this practice for ourselves, including in the work we do to foster learning. As Brookfield stated, "Although critical reflection often begins alone, it is ultimately a collective endeavor. We need colleagues to help us know what our assumptions are and to help us change the structures of power so that democratic actions and values are rewarded, both within and outside our institutions" (Brookfield, 1998, p. 200).

We need spaces for this community, and for community building, sharing, and reflection. I hope that this Perspectives section can serve as one such space. I and my fellow *CIL* editors invite both individuals and groups in the widening information literacy community to contribute to the ongoing creation and remaking of that space.

To propose a contribution to Perspectives, please contact the section editor, Andrea Baer, at baera@rowan.edu.

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