Multidisciplinary Inspirations for the LIS Classroom

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Abstract

The article discusses how the author has applied various concepts from speech communication, psychology, military science and martial arts in teaching LIS. The author also shows that the choice of the tools of the trade is still a personal choice in the exercise of academic freedom

From my father I learned Chalk Talk. From my mother I learned Diplomacy. From them I learned that everything you do must be your masterpiece. They were both educators. I always knew I would be an educator myself, it was just a question of when. When the time came, the discipline of choice was Library and Information Science (LIS).

Paul Vunak, in the preface of his book "Jeet Kune Do: Its Concepts and Philosophies," quoted a small placard given him by one of his students:

> It is not a question of developing what has already been developed, but of recovering what has been left behind. These things [JKD Concepts] have always been with us… *in us… all the time.* And have never been lost or distorted except by our misguided manipulation of them.
>
> - Bruce Lee

The above serves as a fitting introduction too to the concepts mentioned in this article. Some are familiar, others not. Most are old, some forgotten. They are from varying disciplines that range from those that are in some way connected to LIS, like Speech Communication and Editorial Work, to those that are quite distant, like Military Science and Martial Arts.

One can argue that the following adapted concepts can be used elsewhere and during other circumstances. They were used in an LIS classroom by an LIS teacher. It is a case of life lessons applied inside that LIS classroom with relatively effective results. It is worthwhile to point out, however, that the author believes that the choice of the tools of the trade is still a personal choice in the exercise of academic freedom.

It's All About Communication

Information, the cornerstone of LIS, does not serve its purpose if it is not communicated properly. Stueart and Moran (2007) point out that "communication" is the lifeblood of knowledge organizations such as libraries and information centers. David Berlo's SMCR (1960) as well as Shannon and Weaver's Models of Communication (1964) provide valuable springboards for teaching this concept in any LIS subject.

In Berlo's Model, the Source sends a Message via Channels to a Receiver (see Fig. 1). In teaching LIS, the teacher (Source) is not effective if the lesson (Message) is not conveyed (Channels) properly to the student (Receiver). It would be a serious catastrophe if Library and Information Professionals cannot properly convey information to LIC users. Even in the area of collection management, specifically in the evaluation of materials for inclusion in collections, those that can convey information more effectively are chosen above those that cannot.
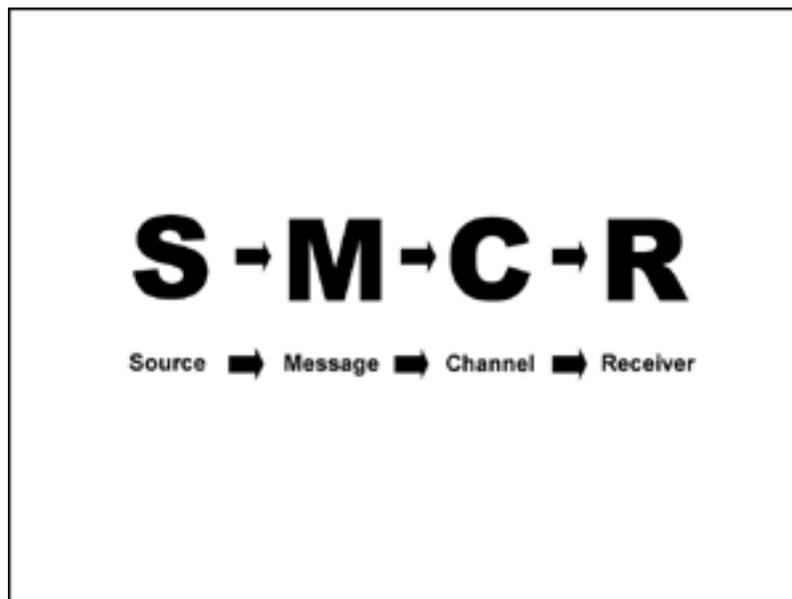

Fig. 1. David Berlo's SMCR Model of Communication

Shannon and Weaver's Model of Communication (see Fig. 2), which denotes the parties involved as Sender and Receiver with a Message also being communicated via Channels, expands Berlo's model even further

with the inclusion of Noise and Feedback in the equation. Noise being anything interfering with the transport of the Message and Feedback being the response of the Receiver.
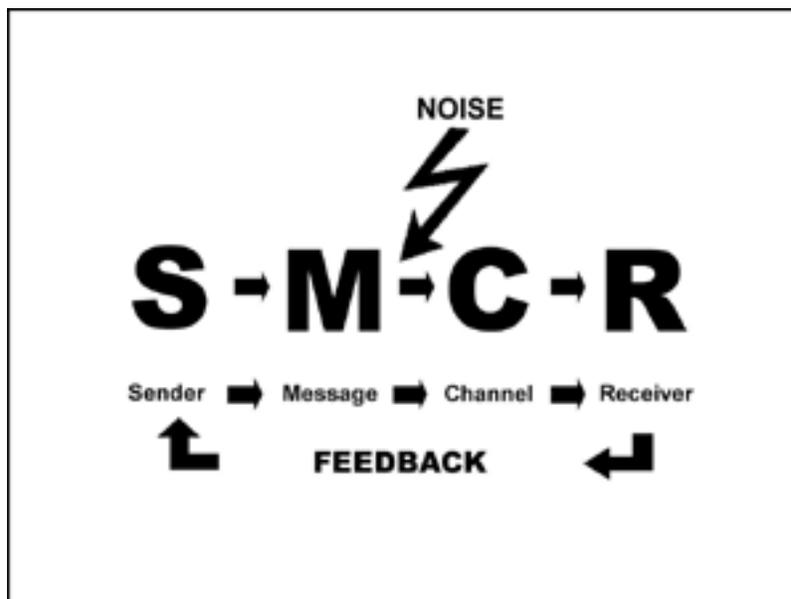

Fig. 2. Shannon – Weaver Model of Communication

These models serve their purpose both in content and in application. At present, libraries are into the use of Web technologies in order to adapt to current users' information seeking behavior. Even this venture into non-traditional library practice will not succeed if messages don't reach the intended audience. The same goes for teaching in any field, including the teaching of future librarians and information professionals. A high level of noise in the process degrades the information traveling from educator to student. To name a few examples of "Noise producing" teaching practices, talking to the whiteboard or the slide presentation with one's back to the students does not make the message travel effectively.

Minimizing Noise in the LIS Classroom

Unwanted Noise is one of the destructive disturbances in the LIS classroom. Noise takes on a multitude of forms and is not limited to those which can be heard. One rotten tomato in the form of a bothered student has

unwanted effects not only on individual teacher-student and student-student relationships but also on classroom ambiance in general. It is this study's position that the teacher must create a classroom atmosphere that will eliminate or, at least, minimize this unwanted Noise.

Thomas Harris, in I'm OK, You're Okay, outlined Four Life Positions:

1. I'm Not OK, You're OK
2. I'm Not OK, You're Not OK
3. I'm OK, You're Not OK
4. I'm OK, You're OK

Any of the Life Positions with a "Not" on either side may stir up the pot a bit, but in excess this can create an atmosphere not conducive for learning. Learning is fun, so an "I'm OK, You're OK" scenario proves ideal.

Thomas Harris (1969) also provides valuable insight regarding Transactional Analysis inside the LIS classroom with his Parent, Adult, Child (P-A-C) Model (see Fig. 3). The model illustrates how we take on the Mental / Ego State of either a Parent, Adult or Child in any transaction / conversation.
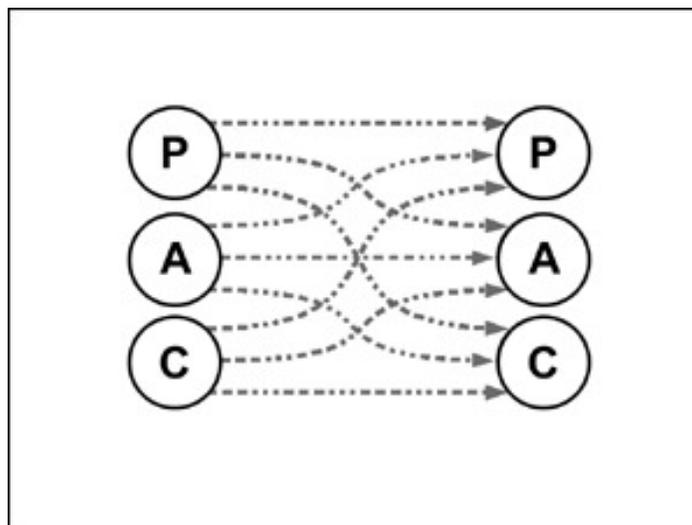

Fig. 3. Thomas Harris' Parent, Adult, Child Model

Some say that always taking the role of Parent would portray you as very controlling while always taking the role of Child makes you

immature. Additionally, some would point out that an Adult-Adult transaction is the most fruitful, logical, mature solution. In a contemporary LIS classroom, or the workplace for that matter, a free-flowing and healthy mix would probably be more appropriate given the nature of current parties involved as well as the circumstances of the profession.

The Parent–Child transaction in the LIS classroom, and in others as well, may require some monitoring. Intentions may be misconstrued when a situation similar to those encountered by protagonists in legal and medical TV dramas occur. Given hardships encountered in the classroom, some students may harbor resentment toward their teachers in a working environment. Maybe a clarifying statement like "Those were not meant to kick you out of school but actually keep you in," might be necessary at times. In other words, students must not feel "left behind".

No Man Left Behind

Web 2.0 preaches about an environment based on "Radical Trust". Maybe that could be applied inside an LIS classroom together with a concept of "Radical Responsibility". Several world leaders and initiatives have similar versions / interpretations of this ideal. Some of them, like "No Child Left Behind", are rooted in education. But what is more striking than these educational endeavors are the military roots of this phrase.

"Leave no man behind", "No man left behind", etc. have been used as credos of infantry, ranger, marine and other military units, as per the International Military Forums. It is both a pledge by the soldier that he will fight till the end and a promise of the unit that everyone, alive, dead or wounded, gets to return home. These may probably be traced to the Spartan "Return with your shield, or on it," as pointed out by T. Scott Randolph (n.d.) in "Are U.S. Marines the modern version of ancient Spartans?" In an LIS classroom, it might be appropriate nowadays to consider such a Spartan approach so that, in a way, each student will know that whatever happens, he or she is not alone.

The first time this author made mention of this teaching philosophy in an activity-intensive IT class, it elicited several gasps and stares of disbelief. Apparently, it was something alien to students during their life in the university where they had learned to fend for themselves most of the time.

"This is a ride, hopefully you'll be with me till the end. I practice a 'No Man Left Behind' policy. This means that if

one of your classmates is falling behind, I will, at any point, ask you to help him or her out. The ideal is for everyone to make it to the end."

Truth be told, though it does well for individual and class morale, there are still some, unavoidably, who do not make it to the end. At least they knew that they were not alone during the ordeal and that they live to fight another day. This also bodes well for a concept Dr. Juan C. Buenrostro, Jr. introduced to this author in one of his early undergraduate LIS introductory classes: the Invisible College. Since the students will become LIS professionals, they will already be prepared for the informal free transfer of thought practiced outside the walls of the classroom and after graduation.

One other military practice which can be translated to LIS education would be the "multiplying factor". In a nutshell, as the UP Corps of Officers / Vanguard passed down to members of the defunct Special Forces / Scout Rangers (SF/SR) company, one thing that would differentiate the SF/SR (particularly the Scout Ranger side) from other units was the ability of its members to transfer their military knowledge to other people in times of war. This has implications in Information Literacy / Reference and Information Sources and Services education. Teachers have to be able to teach LIS students not just to find the right information but be able to teach the student how to effectively teach their users how to do it themselves once they start working in libraries and information centers.

Proxemics and the Art of Social Distance

In psychology, students are taught that everyone has his or her own personal bubble (see Fig. 4). As illustrated in Edward T. Hall's Proxemics (1966), there are different measurements of individual space:

Intimate distance = 6 to 18 inches
Personal distance = 1.5 to 4 feet
Social distance = 4 to 12 feet
Public distance = 12 to 25 feet

Intimate distance is for embracing, touching or whispering and is reserved for the closest of relations. Personal distance is for interactions among good friends, Social distance is for interactions among acquaintances, and Public distance is used for public speaking. Personal and Social distance, those indicative of friends and acquaintances, would prove to be ideal in
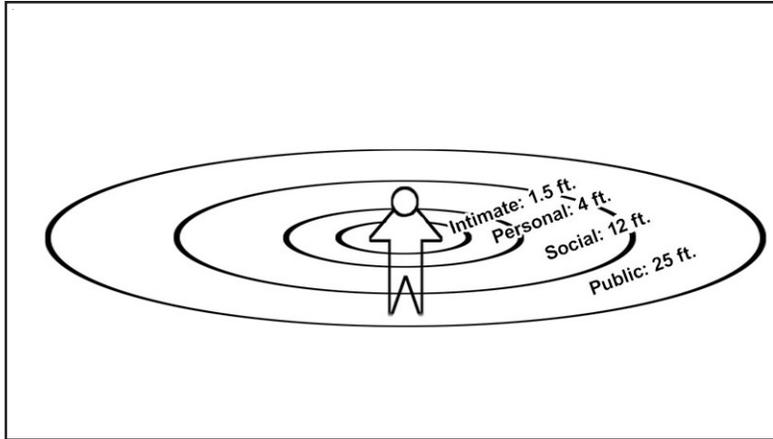
Fig. 4. Edward T. Hall's Personal Reaction Bubbles

an LIS classroom. Public is just too impersonal, Intimate is too intimate, the Message degrades with the distance.

Teaching methods and the tools for teaching either make or break down communication barriers. The teaching tools discussed in this paper may be used to break down barriers in the LIS classroom or workplace in order to achieve an "I'm OK, You're OK" scenario.

Emphasize

The author's foray into an editorial bullpen opened his eyes to a different world, the world on the other side of printed materials and web content. In the development of copy, a design element commonly used is the "pull quote".

A pull quote is usually a block of textual content from the material which is highlighted via larger typeface and positioned in a way to break design monotony. It's a way to sell, promote or emphasize content. Drawing from this, a similar method / technique can be used in the classroom. This may be illustrated as follows:
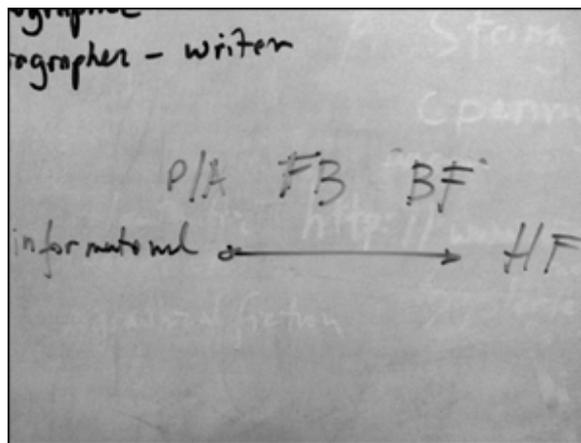

Fig. 5. Chalk Talk Emphasis Sample

Given an important diagram of a class reporter using a slideshow presentation, i.e. the difference between Pure / Authentic Biography, Fictionalized Biography and Biographical Fiction in the discussion of Biography and Historical Fiction, the teacher can stop the report and "Pull" by asking the reporter to repeat that particular portion. Further emphasis can be made by the teacher by echoing what the reporter said and by making a similar diagram on the whiteboard. One Pulled Message, four different Channels for emphasis, IT plus Chalk Talk, concept burned into the students' memory.

Another way to emphasize would be taking Chalk Talk to another level via Drawing. In tracing the suggestions for classroom presentations, it has gone from less-lined overhead transparencies to bulleted slides to g r a p h i c presentations. Simple drawings (i.e. icons, cartoons) of discussed content give students graphic and visual anchors which are easier to comprehend and remember.
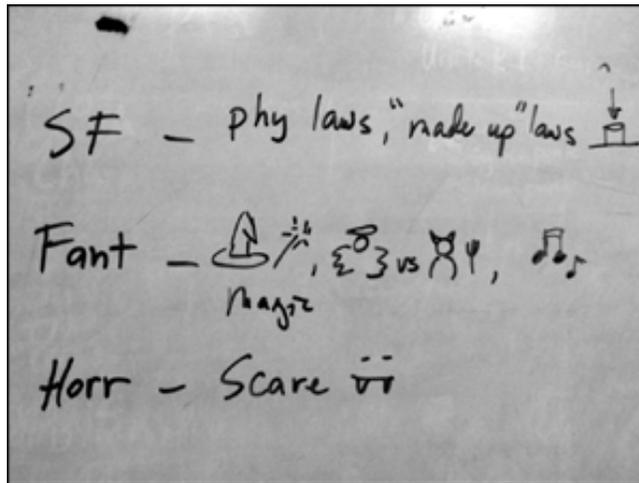

Fig. 6. Chalk Talk Drawing Sample

In a discussion on Young Adult literature about differentiating Science Fiction from Fantasy, for example, it's "pushing a button" versus "singing a magical chant" to make something happen. Simple drawings of a button and musical notes help drive the point.

One other lesson learned from the bullpen would be a "Let Go! Principle" Given a very minor stumbling block versus a major deadline, i.e. a typographical error versus a printing schedule, a "letting go" may be the best solution. As observed in some students, a minor stumbling block, i.e. an item in the middle of an exam they can't answer, versus a major deadline, i.e. turning in papers at the end of the examination period

situation, some would take up all their time trying to answer the question before going to the next item thus ending up not finishing the examination and not answering all the questions. One must learn how to let go.

Martial Matters: What Works

LIS has evolved into a multidisciplinary field of study. In a way, we can apply lessons learned from other similar multidisciplinary endeavors and apply them inside and outside the LIS classroom.

Bruce Lee's *Jeet Kune Do* is a constantly evolving and involving art which drew inspiration from 26 other martial arts. This was started in the '60s, way before the current crop of hybrid / mixed martial arts practiced today. All in all, these syncretic / eclectic arts use cross-training, retain what is useful and disregard what is useless. A sampling of Bruce Lee's thoughts on his and other arts, as compiled in Jeet Kune Do: Bruce Lee's Commentaries on the Martial Way (Bruce Lee Library), The Tao of Jeet Kune Do and in TV interviews, include but are not limited to:

1. Using no way as way, no limitation as limitation.
2. The highest art is no art. The best form is no form.
3. Style concludes. Man grows. Man, who is constantly growing, when bound by a set pattern or Way of doing things stops growing.
4. Sparring: Requires individuality rather than imitative repetition.
5. Sparring: Simplicity of expression rather than complexity of form.
6. Converge with all that is.
7. Do not seek it for it will come when least expected.
8. The usefulness of a cup is its emptiness.
9. Empty your mind. Be formless, shapeless like water. Now you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle. You put it into a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now, water can flow, or it can crash! Be water, my friend.

"Converge with all that is". "Convergence" is now being practiced in and out of the LIS classroom with the use of the Internet. Web 2.0 technologies, social networks, etc. are evolving as valuable information dissemination tools

in LIS education, Current Awareness Service (CAS), etc.

"Being like a cup" can be likened to an LIS student or a library and information center client, the Receiver, seeking knowledge. Pouring too little results in dissatisfaction, pouring too much causes information overload. "Individuality" in JKD means what works for one in both training and application may not work for another. Specialized / customized instruction might be the order of the day. "Simplicity" can be interpreted as breaking the Message down into basics, a deconstruction of the Message for easier understanding. It would be good for educators to remember these concepts when dealing with students.

"Being like water" (adaptability) and having no form as form (unpredictability), both probably loosely based on part of Musashi Miyamoto's martial discourse *Book of Five Rings* (ca. 1645), can both be also used in the classroom. This goes beyond surprise quizzes. It could mean modifying teaching methods, schedules and topics mid-term or mid-discussion for a better reception of the Message. It keeps everyone on their toes. All in all, in JKD, students end up involved and not just like "sponges merely repeating stuff without thought or purpose". That's something an LIS classroom could make use of.

A foray into mixed martial arts led the author to a local hybrid grappling art called *Pasukuan Labanan*. Designed to test an individual mentally and physically, sessions involve non-stop exercises and sparring bouts. Upon seeing some of us disheartened after losing a couple of bouts, our instructors told us something which stuck in our minds. *"Matalo na kayo dito sa loob, wag lang sa labas."* Loosely translated, it means that it is acceptable for one to lose inside the *dojo* (martial arts training facility), but not outside during real fights. The author echoed this phrase, reinforcing the No-Man-Left-Behind policy, to some IT, Children's Literature and Young Adult students when their faces fell upon seeing the results of their exams. It does well for individual, class and institutional morale. Classrooms are like dojos, you learn, you win, you lose. Whatever happens, you are not alone, you'll live to fight another day.

Beyond the Comfort Zone

One thing that might prove beneficial to LIS educators is the ancient practice of *"Musha Shugyô"* or "warrior pilgrimage" by samurai, as chronicled in Stephen Turnbull's The Samurai Sourcebook (1998). *"Kengô"* or "master

swordsmen" like Musashi Miyamoto, Tsukahara Bokuden and Yagyû Jûbei Mitsuyoshi have all gone on warrior pilgrimages. This involved leaving their established lives behind to travel from place to place in order to improve their skills. Leaving one's comfort zone helps educators, they have to be able to practice what they preach. Being able to test one's self outside the confines of academe is a must. It further adds to *"street cred"* in the eyes of students.

Walk On

Some discussions in introductory courses in LIS revolve around the obsolescence of a profession. A mark of a true professional is when he or she seeks the obsolescence of his or her profession. Doctors, though illness is their bread and butter, wish for the cessation of sickness. Lawyers should wish for cessation of conflicts that lead to courts and the breakup of society and the social order. Though these professional scenarios may be far off, LIS included, this must be the goal. Steps must be taken, tools must be developed, methodologies must be refined to reach that goal.

The Bruce Lee Foundation tells a story of one of the hardest times in Bruce Lee's life. He took one of his business cards and scribbled a phrase, a mantra, on the back. He bought a stand just for that card and displayed it on his desk, the mantra serving as a reminder to keep moving forward. The mantra? Two words: "Walk On!"

As LIS professionals, we all have to learn to "Walk On!"

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