Facilitating Student Co-Authored Papers in LIS Education Research: A Case Study from the LIS Classroom

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Abstract

This article describes the process and tools used to facilitate a collaborative student co-authored paper that was recently published as a short communication in the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* (*JELIS*). This article is written by the instructor of the course and provides direction to other LIS instructors on how to successfully facilitate publishable quality student co-authored papers as an in-class activity using online collaborative teaching tools. It is especially relevant to courses or projects that include social justice topics.

1. Introduction

This article describes the process and tools used to facilitate a collaborative student co-authored paper that was recently published as a short communication in the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* (*JELIS*). "Education for the Common Good: A Student Perspective on Including Social Justice in LIS Education" (2018) was written by a group of sixteen Masters of Library and Information Science (LIS) students as part of an in-class activity that was designed to give students the opportunity to contribute to LIS scholarship on teaching and learning (SoTL). This article is written by the instructor of the course and provides direction to other LIS instructors on how to successfully facilitate publishable quality student co-authored papers as an in-class activity using online collaborative teaching tools. It is especially relevant to courses or projects that include social justice topics.

2. Literature Review

Student co-authored papers as in-class activities are a form of *authentic learning*, a pedagogy that encourages students to engage with real-world problems or projects and to create tangible, polished products that are immediately useful within the contexts relevant to their education (Hung, 2014; Zheng & Sang, 2013). Student co-authored papers can help prepare future LIS professionals for their careers by contributing to professional development, supporting their role as community change-agents, and familiarizing them with the professional writing and publishing process.

Student co-authored papers are also important for advancements and research in LIS education, particularly in regards to the topic of social justice. Best-practices for SoTL projects already include student participation as a major principle (Felten, 2013). Student participation in SoTL, and therefore future curriculum design, can lead to diverse perspectives on learning that can improve both teaching and student learning (Brooman, Darwent, & Pimor, 2015; Cook-Sather, 2014). This type of project is also especially appropriate for social justice oriented pedagogy,

which often highlights action and collaboration as key to empowering both student researchers and the subjects of their research (Forbes & Bowers 2018; Adams & Zúñiga, 2016).

Research into the use of online collaborative teaching tools, such as Google Drive, shows that having students work collaboratively in an online environment to create their own content can enhance communication, alter the power dynamics found in a traditional classroom setting, and also promote more critical perspectives on knowledge and authority (Cotugno, 2014; George, Dreibelbis & Aumiller, 2013; Rowe, Bozalek, & Frantz, 2013). These tools, which allow for simultaneous use, also accelerate and streamline the process of writing a collaborative paper by allowing content to be aggregated, analyzed, summarized, and edited efficiently with a relatively low time commitment for each individual. The use of Google Drive and Survey Monkey were critical to both the timeline of the paper project and ensuring that all students had an opportunity to contribute equally to the paper.

3. Process and Tools for the Student Co-Authored Paper Project

Motivation for Student Co-Authored Paper

This project was created to provide students enrolled in a Social Justice in LIS course the opportunity to apply classroom-based knowledge to real-world social change efforts. Based on feedback from a mid-term evaluation, my observation was that the students in the class wanted to extend their knowledge and practice beyond the classroom to gain practical change-making skills that they could use later in their careers. With the limited remaining time that we had in the course, I pitched to the class that we do a communications project: publishing a scholarly paper in LIS to motivate change in the LIS community.

Student Co-Authored Paper Project Design

There were three stages of this project that were run as in-class activities ranging from 30-90 minutes each. The fourth stage was volunteer editing and the fifth stage was done by the instructor after the class had finished.

> #### *Stage 1: Choosing a Topic and Scope*
>
> An initial brainstorm was conducted with the class to select a topic for the paper. For this class, the topic of addressing social justice in all LIS courses was an issue that we often discussed and many students felt passionate about. This topic can also be viewed as action-oriented as the paper ultimately seeks to bring increased awareness of the relevance of this topic into the classroom and library work.
>
> At this stage, we also looked at journals that would be appropriate for this topic, were friendly towards student authored papers, and had a manageable length requirement necessary for this type of project. *JELIS* was chosen because of its scope, credibility, and Short Communication option for publication. This option is peer-reviewed but allows for

"opinion" style pieces, welcomes student submissions, and has a shorter length requirement of 2,000 words.

Stage 2: Content Creation with Survey Monkey

After the topic was decided, the next challenge was to find a way to combine all students' thoughts on the topic and organize the content in a way that would be manageable to write into paper form. Themed responses were appropriate for this paper and I suggested a set of five very general guiding questions based on our class discussions that would facilitate content creation for different sections of the paper. Through an additional class discussion, the questions were reviewed, changed, and added to by the students as needed. The questions were centered on the following topics and were organized to provide content and structure for an academic paper:

Introduction: Why is incorporating social justice in LIS education important?
Body 1: What are your suggestions for how social justice can be incorporated into the LIS curriculum?
Body 2: What social justice topics are important to LIS?
Body 3: What actions can librarians take to create change in their communities?
Conclusion: How can librarians support each other within the LIS community?

I added the questions to a Survey Monkey framework with text boxes, functioning as a tool to record and organize student responses. Students filled out the survey anonymously with their responses to the questions. There was also an open-ended question where students provided additional thoughts that were not covered by the questions.

Stage 3: Real-Time Collaboration with Google Drive

When the surveys were completed, the next stage was to combine each student's responses together into paper format. To do this, the class was divided into groups and each group was assigned a Google Drive documents file that contained the responses to one of the five survey questions. In real-time together, they analyzed the responses for themes and then summarized their findings, similar to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process ensured that each student's responses were considered and included. Each group then wrote their findings into sections and paragraphs that correspond to each section in the published paper. Writing collaboratively in real-time on a platform like Google Drive meant that group members could simultaneously view, write, discuss, and edit one sentence, paragraph, or document all at the same time. As observed by me, each group did both the analysis and writing in a recursive fashion by reading the survey responses together, agreeing upon the common themes, and writing simultaneously.

Stage 4: Editing (up to 4 weeks outside of class)

In this class, editing was done by a smaller group of three students and the instructor after the course was finished. If possible, this should be done by volunteers outside of class

time before the course ends. Students were assigned to finish writing, proofreading, and editing where necessary. In this case, I edited for consistency and quality across the overall paper to ensure adequate flow and that it was well-written enough to be accepted for publication.

Stage 5: Publishing (6+ months after course)

Since publication can take a considerable amount of time, the instructor was responsible for submitting the paper for publication, communicating with publisher, making revisions/organizing student revisers, and contacting students for publisher requested tasks. Students were updated at each step via email.

Ethical Considerations

Since all students are co-inquirers and not subjects, full ethics approval is not needed for this type of project. However, consult your institution's ethics guidelines for research in the classroom. The project was also set up as an ungraded in-class activity and students could contribute as much or as little as they wanted at each stage of the project, creating a low-risk platform for students to work from. All sixteen students in the class participated, all had final say on the content of the paper, and all agreed to publication in *JELIS*. Although publication was a final goal for the project, the process of the project and what is learned during that process should be the focus for both students and instructor (Mauer, 2017). Overall learning outcomes will vary based on the topic of the paper, but need to be evaluated independent of publication.

Deciding author order is one of the major ethical considerations for collaborate student research (Barretta-Herman & Garrett, 2000; Mauer, 2017). The class agreed to author order based on amount of work contributed, including the instructor. Since students were relatively equal in skill, those who worked on the paper post-course were listed first in alphabetical order followed by those who only contributed during class time.

The Role of the Instructor

The instructor's role is largely as facilitator and editor. Although I was a PhD in LIS student at the time, I made all efforts to remove my influence on the content of the paper and the ideas expressed by the students. However, to a certain extent it does include my viewpoints and language as the creator and facilitator of both the course and the project. As the logical person to see the project successfully through publication, this project did require a considerable amount of time, organization, and editing work during and after the course. The decisions made for the project at each step were based on my personal research experience, teaching style, creative thinking, and the consideration of the dynamics of the class. Hands-on facilitation to provide students with direction, frameworks, and tools for a large-group, voluntary, collaborative work is necessary for the success of this type of project. This article describes one way to successfully complete a project such as this using the processes and tools described, but this project should be

viewed as contextually based and needs to be enlivened by the individual instructor based on their context.

4. Discussion

The value of this project is that the benefits to students extend beyond the classroom in tangible ways. Unlike most project-based assignments assigned to students during their MLIS, this project resulted in a product that was evaluated and recognized by the greater professional community. This is a project that can be added to a student's curriculum vitae as a professional document and may inspire them to publish again in the future. The project as a whole was also an important invitation for students to add their voice to their education, a task that is typically reserved for faculty.

The main challenge with this project was organizing students and contacting them after the course had finished. For this type of project, students are not obligated to contribute to the paper after the course finishes, and so the instructor must rely upon a few volunteers or do tasks themselves as necessary. It is critical that each student supply a current e-mail address so that they can receive updates or take action when needed. Likewise, if the instructor commits to seeing the project through, they must honour that commitment.

Although the published paper is relatively new and in short communication format, it has had some measurable impact. This paper has been used in at least two MLIS courses, including a required introduction to LIS theory course, to guide students in social justice work. It has also been cited in *The Reference Librarian* (Roy & Long, 2019)*, IFLA Journal* (Schachter, 2020), and included in a research planning and review report from the *Association of College and Research Libraries* (ACRL, 2020). These inclusions are evidence that the project was successful in its aim to create awareness and to contribute to change through the education of future LIS professionals.

5. Conclusion

Facilitating student co-authored papers in the LIS classroom has benefits for student learning, professional development, and advancements in LIS education. With the addition of online teaching tools such as Google Drive and Survey Monkey, these projects can be feasible and experientially rich as in-class activities. Student co-authored papers also have an important place in research on LIS education as one way to include the student voice in the curriculum that guides their careers.

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