

iConference 2019 Submission: Session for Interaction and Engagement

Title:

iStories: Reimagining the narratives of information research

Organizers

iStories Lab@UBC iSchool, University of British Columbia

Michelle Kaczmarek, Bonnie Tulloch, Saguna Shankar, Andrea Hoff & Lisa Nathan

Abstract:

What are the narratives our research tells and how do they connect? For decades, the language used by the institutions, professions, markets and industries concerned with the treatment of information have influenced and constructed the ways we define, study and value information (Buckland, 2017; Day, 2001). In this 90-minute interactive session, we invite information scholars to consider and discuss their role as storytellers describing the information field. Through group discussion and art-based activities, we draw attention to the diverse ways that our research speaks to the larger meta-narratives of information research and question the stories that are told and untold. By reimagining researchers as storytellers, this session is designed to highlight the diversity and possibility within the interdisciplinary iSchool community, imagining new ways of using our research to inform, include, and inspire others within and beyond the field.

Description:

“The scientist and the novelist use the same capacities of reasoning and imagination in their attempts to understand different aspects of the same reality” (Theodore Brown, 2003).

Purpose, Intended Audience, and Relevance to the iConference:

The aim of this interactive session is to explore scholars’ “capacities of reasoning and imagination” as they are represented in information research. This interactive session will support attendees in reflecting on the ways in which information research is constructed and communicated as a form of storytelling. During this session, we will support attendees in contemplating their roles as engaged listeners, participants, and storytellers in the field, while providing the opportunity for attendees to share their practices of storytelling in their own research initiatives.

Extending Brown’s work, we invite information scholars to 1) reflect on the implicit and explicit narratives created through their research; and 2) consider how these narratives speak to the different realities of other work taking place within the field. Bruner (1986) notes that “the object of understanding human events is to sense the alternativeness of human possibility” (p. 53). By asking scholars to reflect on their role as storytellers of their own research, this session is designed to highlight the possibilities to be found within the iSchool community. A deeper understanding of research as story allows us to explore the ways our work contributes to larger meta-narratives of information research. In our examination of the diverse narratives to be found in this interdisciplinary community, we hope to imagine innovative ways of using our research to inform, include, and inspire others within and outside of the field. Intersections

found within our different stories will provide opportunities through which we can achieve more effective collaborations and communication between information scholars, practitioners, and the communities with whom we engage.

Through its exploration of the researcher as storyteller, our proposed interactive session encourages participants to consider the role language plays in a variety of processes, such as “the sanction of modes of knowledge accumulation and transmission, the exclusion and inclusion of social groups, the enactment of institutional routines, the perpetration of social roles, etc” (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 382). Participants will be asked to reflect on the role language plays in the creation and dissemination of their research narratives and will also be invited to consider the possible benefits alternative modes of communication hold for knowledge translation within and outside of the field. In addition to exploring the narratives that researchers construct in communicating their own and others’ work, the means by which particular narratives are developed may be a further area of discussion (e.g., metatheoretical perspectives or methodological approaches as a means of story-crafting).

The session builds on and will share emerging reflections from research conducted during the iStories Lab workshop “iWords: Exploring the interdisciplinary vocabularies of information research” at the 2018 iConference <<https://www.istories.info/iwords>>. The proposed interactive session offers opportunities to build interdisciplinary connections among iSchool scholars and further informs our inquiry into interdisciplinary vocabularies in information research. We will strengthen and expand connections made during the 2018 session by sharing themes and insights through our website and publications. We anticipate that the session will also generate new opportunities to continue the conversation at future iSchool venues. Please see our website for further details about the iStories Lab: <<https://www.istories.info/>>

Format:

Developing an interactive and conversational format is crucial for approaching the reflective and reflexive nature of our topic. Beginning with "story prompts" to seed discussion, participants will be guided through a progression of interactive creative activities to identify and share narrative components within their research. Through interactive play, participants will have the opportunity to reconstruct and reorder the narratives implicit in their research, combining and juxtaposing them with those of others in the session. Through a range of discussion and arts-based activities, participants will be prompted to consider how their role as storyteller has the potential to connect and expand the existing narratives within information research and to develop influential stories within and beyond our community.

Event Agenda:

- Welcome (5 minutes)
- Brief introductions (10 minutes)
- Interactive Arts-Based Activity (45 minutes - small groups)
 - Narrative prompts: Researcher as storyteller and identifying the story arch structure
 - “Anatomies of information research”: Sharing and connecting narratives in our research
 - “Cross-pollination storytelling”: imagining new paradigms
- Discussion (15 minutes - whole group)
 - How are the stories researchers generate powerful, influencing the ways in which the field develops?
 - How do scholars illustrate the value of information research through the stories they tell?

- In what ways do researchers feel that they are working with and/or against dominant narratives about people, information, and technologies?
- What stories are missing from our research?
- Wrap-up (5 minutes)

Duration: 90 minutes

Special Requirements: No special requirements

References:

Brown, T. (2003). *Making truth: Metaphor in science*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Buckland, M. K. (2017). *Information and society*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Day, R. E. (2001). *The modern invention of information: discourse, history, and power*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2008). Analysing narratives as practices. *Qualitative Research*, 8(3), 379-387.