

2023 AAPT-APA Teaching Hub CFPs – Teaching Narratives and Narrative Teaching

Proposal

Show and Tell Pedagogies: A Story Assignment

In this workshop, I will tell participants a story about rehabilitating a failed assignment in the context of a third-year university philosophy course before offering two interactive exercises. Telling this story enables two things. First, it suggests the importance of pedagogies based on showing rather than telling, even in a language-based discipline like philosophy. Second, it introduces workshop participants to a potential assignment that they may wish to adapt for their own courses.

Part 1: Telling and Showing (8-10 minutes)

I will begin by introducing participants to a “Story Assignment” given in a course titled “Social Ontology/Social Construction of Institutions” This group project asks students to locate a story about a social or political issue. Groups then analyze their story to see either what social ontology it uses *or* what the story itself helps to socially construct. The assignment concludes when groups present their findings to the class for discussion.

This assignment was initially a flop. Students were used to writing essays based on academic articles. Because I did not sufficiently prepare them, they were unsure about how to complete the assignment. They chose stories that were too simple or obvious to reveal anything interesting. Missing the point of the exercise, they described what their story said rather than what it did. They repeated the content of the story instead of trying to identify what that content helped to create in the world.

Instead of changing the assignment or instructions, I responded by changing our syllabus/course readings and by showing rather than telling students how to proceed. This “showing” based pedagogy involved both demonstration and in-class practice. Student’s story choices and analyses improved dramatically. Before moving to the interactive portion of the workshop, I will describe and demonstrate both the process of showing students how to complete the assignment and the changes in their work. Participants will then be able to ask questions or share feedback.

Part 2: Doing (8-10 minutes)

Participants in the workshop will now have the opportunity to form smaller groups and either:

1. Explore the possibility of adapting the story assignment for use in their own classes.
2. Discuss ways to (further) incorporate a pedagogy of showing into their teaching.

For those who chose the first option, the following questions may be helpful: Do stories, broadly understood, play a role in or influence the creation of the theories that you teach in your

courses? If so, in what ways and why might you want your students to be aware of this influence? What might the benefits and drawbacks be to requiring this sort of assignment?

Those who chose the second option may want to ask: Are there areas where my students typically struggle, whether with assignments or comprehension? How could I show rather than tell them how to proceed? Am I already “showing” in ways that I could use elsewhere or more often?

I will circulate between groups and, only if needed, offer discussion prompts or answer questions. For option one, the prompt would be an example of a story that influenced theorizing in Philosophy of Science (Martin, 1991), Political Philosophy (Hobbes, 1651), Ethics (Jarvis Thompson, 1971), Philosophy of Mind (Overall, 1998), etc. For option two, the prompt would be a brief example of teaching-by-showing that I used in a third-year course on “Embodiment.” The example would be a physical object (embroidered napkins or an osage orange) or a student reflection on one of our many physical activities (e.g. walking to the woods). These examples imply a close relation between showing and doing which would be interesting to think about further.

Wrap-Up: (2 minutes)

To close, I will poll the room about whether or not people might use the assignment or try to use a pedagogy of showing more often. If we have time, I will then ask for one skeptical and one receptive evaluation of these ideas before thanking everyone for participating.

Reference List

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