

Failing to Deliver: Education and Its Art in the Current Post-truth Situation

Lecture performance

Nadine M. Kalin¹ & Daniel T. Barney²

¹University of North Texas, Nadine.Kalin@unt.edu

²Brigham Young University

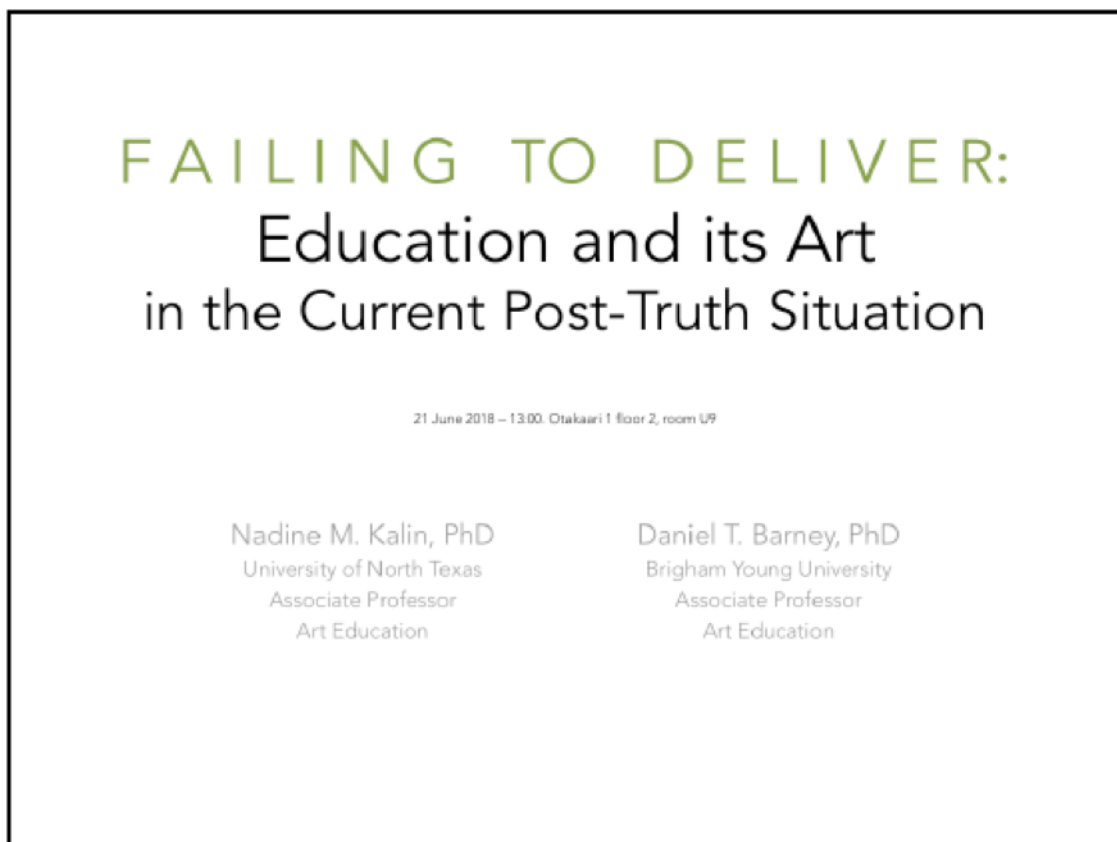
Abstract

This paper is presented as a script, along with stage notes, describing a performance lecture given at the InSEA Congress 2018 in Finland at Aalto University. The authors describe various research dissemination forms within the field of art education and how the authors have previously engaged with these in playful, critical, and catastrophic ways. The original presentation was staged as a typical presentation in many ways with a formal PowerPoint presentation, scholarly citations that contextualize the concepts, and a rich description of data; however, the authors also included the addition of an informal meta-analysis running through the presentation with snarky comments between the presenters that challenge truth claims, the knitting of a red cap of liberty, and innuendos directed toward the audience as critical friends.

Keywords

Performance lecture, research dissemination, art education, critical play, ABER.

Stage Action: On the stage, we find a typical college lecture hall setup. A podium is off-centre, stage right, and a rectangular table with a chair set length-wide against the podium finds Nadine seated at the end. Daniel who is standing at the podium to her right. Behind both is a large screen with their first Powerpoint slide projecting the title of their presentation and respective names, titles, and affiliations. Nadine busies herself with knitting needles and red yarn, knitting a cap, while also balancing an ipad that is displaying her parts of the lecture performance. Daniel works his laptop computer to advance the slides and read the paper. Nadine knits throughout the performance with her head down, turned toward Daniel, as she nervously and slowly knits. On the other hand, Daniel assumes the position of professional and confident lecturer, standing tall, arms extended, with hands holding the sides of a podium, and his body squarely facing the audience while reading the paper on his laptop.



Character 1, Daniel & Character 2, Nadine

Together, we have been playing with the formats within research dissemination sites, largely, at conferences, for the past several years.

Daniel

For example, we have explored the forms of the poster session, the lecture, and the roundtable by using contemporary art and philosophical concepts as a method of analysis. The content of our newly conceptualized poster session, lecture, or roundtable was not exceptionally radical in these sanctioned events, however, the actual forms of work shifted as they failed to deliver in interesting ways.

Nadine

We are going to tell you things you don't necessarily want to hear.

Daniel

Poster sessions, for example, collapse but become something extraordinary when the rules of engagement, such as clarity, facts, convention, and transferability are reimagined through social and embodied art practices. Likewise, a lecture that doesn't rely on facts or aim to convince, but instead turns to the audience for its content and skepticism—asking for the expertise to come from the audience in actions or feelings—functions quite differently as an emergent artist performance.

Nadine

Instead of performance, I'd prefer you use 'presentational gesture', please.

Daniel

The poster and the lecture are transformed in these moments through a deliberate severing of default roles and modes of knowledge transfer associated with traditional dissemination.

[Powerpoint slide changes.]

Daniel

This year's InSEA Finland call (Aalto University, n.d.)...

Nadine

Which was pretty great by the way!

Daniel

...included potential forms of engagement such as round tables, brainstorming sessions, poster sessions, short visual presentations, workshops, and a curated art exhibition. The call (Aalto University, n.d.)also offered an academic paper described as a traditional format within the congress, and yet, the content could “still be mindblowing.”

[Nadine uses her right hand to create the firework hand-symbol at the exact time that Daniel says “mindblowing”.]

Nadine

It is intriguing that the format is belittled as traditional, whereas content is elevated to something that might be 'mind blowing', like content is allowed to succumb to the pressures of edutainment, but the format must adhere to tradition.

Daniel

The general call for submissions goes on to state, “The Congress organizing team’s passion is to create a forum for fruitful discussions, dialogical encounters, and interventions to astonish” (Aalto University, n.d., n.p.). While a worthy goal perhaps, astonishment may be hard to plan for.

[Powerpoint slide changes]

Daniel

Oxford English Dictionaries (2016)...

Nadine

Make sure you tell the truth here!

Daniel

... selected the term ‘post-truth’ as both the UK and the US word of the year for 2016. Post-truth denotes circumstances in which facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than statements created to appeal to our emotions and already-formed personal beliefs. Our current political culture (in the US and elsewhere) positions emotion and personal belief before facts and expert opinions. One technique that is used in post-truth politics is the ‘talking point,’ which is a succinct statement that is crafted to lend support to one side of an argument without a deep examination of issues. In this presentation, we offer our talking points and counterpoints within the academic paper as a lecture performance.

Nadine

Other techniques are 'whataboutism', 'redefining' or coopting of words, counternarratives of events, and being 'proof proof' as presented on HBO's Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, June 10, 2018 (Carvell, Oliver, Stanton, Taylor, & Thoday, 2018).

[Powerpoint slide changes.]

Daniel

Joshua Sofaer ("The Audience of Contemporary Performance", n.d.), an artist who focuses his work using various modes of collaboration and participation, explores social sculpture, performance, installation, exhibitions, and publication states, "Across a range of artistic disciplines, artists are dealing with audiences in innovative and creative ways, placing the audience at the heart of their work. Contemporary culture is marked by the emancipation of the spectator and the transformation of the audience from passive recipient to active participant" (n.p.).

Nadine

This statement contradicts itself. The spectator doesn't need emancipation as they are always active, not passive or ignorant, right?

Daniel

Today, we ask what this might look like in academic venues like this very congress.

Nadine

Mindblowing!

[Nadine uses her right hand to create the firework hand-symbol at the exact time that she says "mindblowing".]

[Powerpoint slide changes.]

Daniel

The lecture performance is a discursive format and creative platform with roots in 1960s performance and conceptual art along with institutional critique, social sculpture, and teaching-as-art.

Nadine

But neither of us have formal training in performance art, but we've been teaching since we were teenagers.

Daniel

Throughout the ensuing decades, artists have activated the aesthetic format of lecture performance as a “set of radical potentials for circulating knowledge in the present” (Firunts, 2016, p. 19) both within and outside of the academy and its frameworks.

As the name suggests, this is a hybrid practice between art and academia that may include visual art, performative techniques, or sound art, among many other varieties. Like an academic lecture, a lecture performance involves a lecturer, the audience, and some form of encounter.

Nadine

We don't ask for consent from the audience, but maybe we should. Would you have liked to know before coming in here today that you would be subjected to this?

Daniel

According to Gordon Hall (2014), director of the Center for Experimental Lectures, experimental lectures require that artists not just give a lecture about their work, but that the lecture is the

work in a vital way.

Nadine

As such, the format interweaves instruction with art as the lecturing becomes art. Like most presentations, this form retains didacticism and representational characteristics with many opportunities for truth bending.

Daniel

Lecture performances are institutionally bound in the academic format of the lecture and typically in the site it is being relayed. Therefore, these specific social relations, structures, and conditions work as a social field in conjunction with a specific site similar to institutional critique. But lecture performance is also engaging with an audience and in the case of academic venues the audience may be made up of artistic or academic peers that are integral to the process and product.

Nadine

We couldn't do this without you!

[Nadine puts down her knitting to look at the audience while saying the above before returning to her knitting.]

Daniel

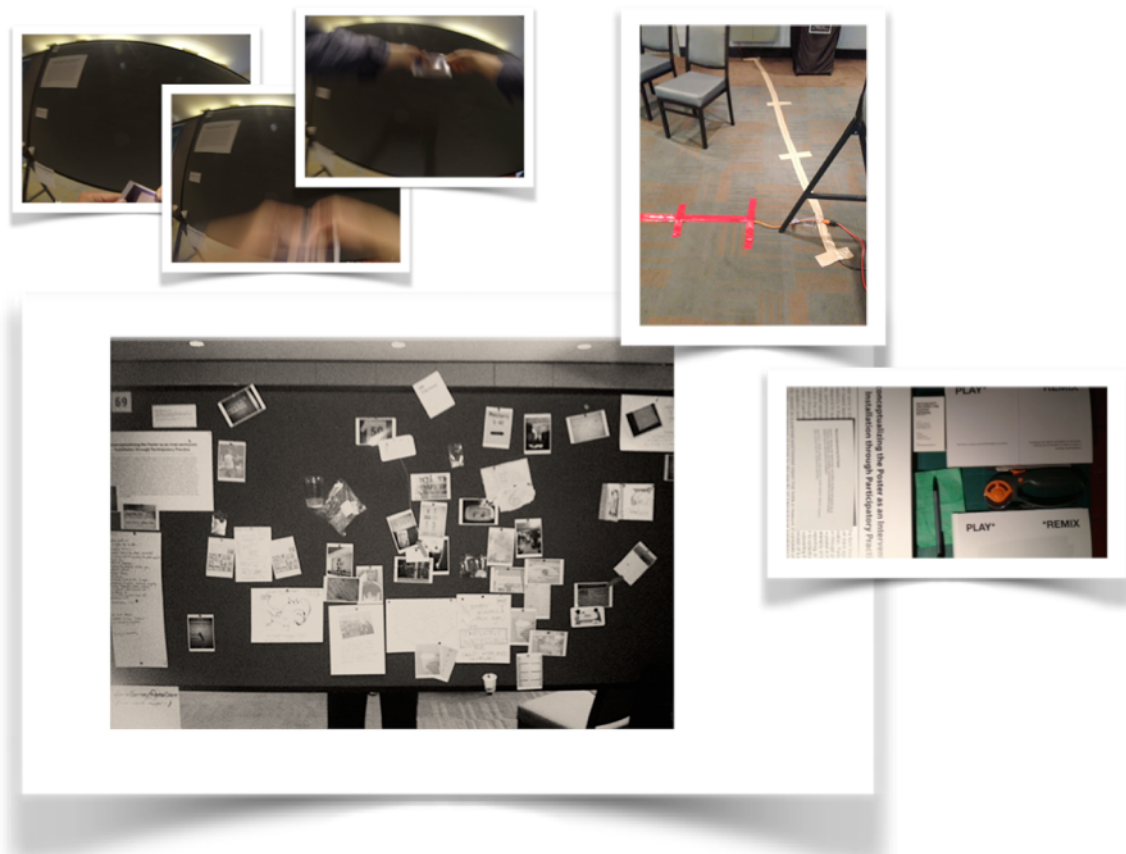
These peers may also represent the institutionalized context for the lecture performance. Lecture performances may also work off of the situated knowledge they assume the context and audience will be operating under, such as the domain of activity apparent in an institution like InSEA. In our case, the lecture performance is mobilized as a pedagogy used to critique and toy

with the institution within which it is given a platform—such as the institution of the academic conference and associated societies.

Nadine

All dissemination has some truthiness in it—glossing over, highlighting, blocking out, summarizing, etc. all bend experience for re-presentation.

[Powerpoint slide changes.]



Daniel

For example, one of our past projects was a re-conceptualised poster session at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in San Francisco (Barney & Kalin, 2014). At that

time, the poster session guidelines were incredibly specific about the formatting of the poster as a didactic instrument.

Nadine

It is always a conundrum to read generative calls for participation and then be faced with such strict rules.

[Nadine shakes her head while saying the above.]

Daniel

The poster as such, was to be made as self-explanatory as possible according to the guidelines. Each dictated point within the poster was to provide clear take-aways for the audience.

Nadine

We have been threatened to be ‘written up’ for violating rules at conferences.

[Powerpoint slide changes.]

Daniel

Our reconceptualized poster session was accepted through the traditional academic peer-review process...

Nadine

By the way, we often refashion our content to get into conferences.

Daniel

...but instead of conceptualising the audience as passive receivers of knowledge, the artists/researchers set up the conditions so that knowledge was formed through its making. We co-opted the format of the poster, turning it into an experiential and collaborative artwork, or an interactive installation.

Nadine

Speaking of co-option, we assume aspects of our projects will be co-opted by others including those in power and they have become more mainstream over the years. In part, that is why we keep morphing forms.

[Powerpoint slide changes.]

Nadine

Oh, for your information, we often restage our photos and results for occasions such as this.

Daniel

The audience members were asked to participate in the making of the poster as an art installation instead of a responding to it as a complete and static object that represented knowledge that was already finished before the conference began. They all received a toolkit...

Nadine

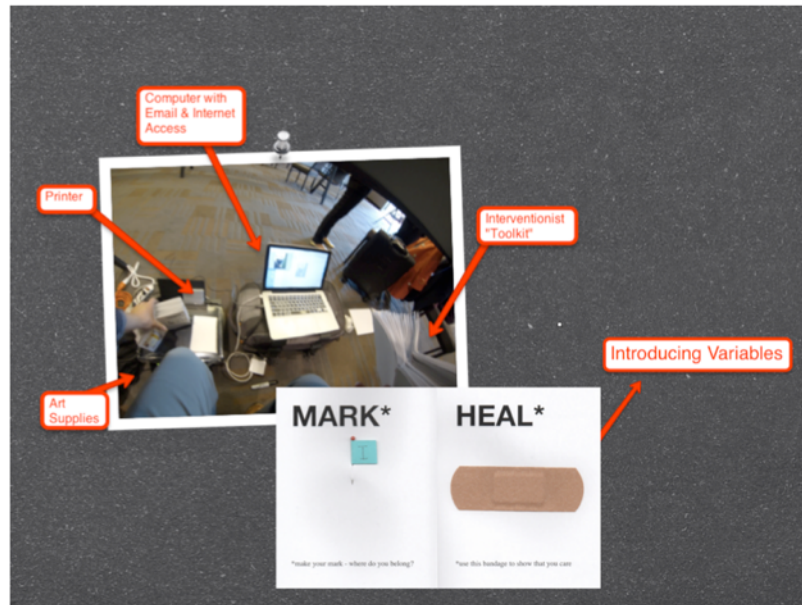
Dan? Can you help me with this? I don't know what to do.

[Nadine says this while ceasing to knit and holding up her unfinished cap so that Dan can assist with the next stitch.]

Daniel

...booklet that included open-ended prompts that invited participation with the entire poster session, including dozens of traditional posters. Prompts like the one shown here on this slide, which has an attached bandage, suggesting the viewer as a participant to “use this bandage to show that you care” somewhere or somehow within this poster session space and time.

[Powerpoint slide changes.]



Daniel

Another page within the interventionist toolkit provoked participants to “make your mark, to show where you belong” somewhere within this poster session. It included a pin with a small

paper flag labeled with the word “I.” A printer and art materials, such as paper, glue, markers, pencils, and scissors, were also available for the participants use.

Nadine

Cheap tricks, superficial participation.

[Nadine says the above almost beneath her breath, never looking up from her knitting.]

Daniel

All who attended the session created this poster-in-the-making through action, dialogue, and artistic response, right there and right then.

Nadine

You are likely undergoing an evaluation of our trustworthiness right now. It is only common sense. You likely trust one of us over the other as you pick your poison.

[Powerpoint slide changes.]

Daniel

In our failure to deliver the expected outcomes of the traditional poster session in the 2013 AERA poster session, new connections and possibilities emerged. One particular connection was to Dr. Wade Tillet, a math educator and architect with a curriculum research focus. Our reconceptualized poster session at AERA could not have been realized as it was without participating colleagues such as Wade.

Nadine

In actual fact, we tend to stack the deck by inviting specific participants to these sessions because we are insecure. We NEED participants for our ‘postering’ projects. Some of you were enthusiastically invited to support us today.

Daniel

Wade could not be here today to describe his involvement, but the next year, we worked together to create another poster-in-the-making playing with the rules of the poster session as directed by the AERA guidelines (Tillett, Barney, Kalin, & TBD participants, 2014). This slide shows Wade’s notes and ideas in an early stage of this second re-conceptualized poster.

Nadine

Wade seems to have invented a white cube around a poster space in his diagram on this slide.

[Nadine states the above while turning her head to consider the image on the slide.]

[Power point slide changes.]

Daniel

Ultimately, we designed a poster that listed all the rules of the poster session. It was a poster about the poster as a rule-heavy didactic object. We also generated memo booklets with “official rule change forms” in which conference goers could submit alternate rules of engagement during the poster session.

Nadine

At such events, many would be participants tell us they don’t get it. Some tell us they do get it. Some that do get it, but don’t want to be a part of it.

Daniel

Many of the suggested changes were as ridiculous as the original rules directed by AERA. For example, AERA suggests that the abstract be placed in the upper left of the poster, with a conclusion in the lower right hand.

Nadine

We grapple with how we might be using or fooling our collaborator/participants.

[Powerpoint slide changes]

Nadine

We need people to trust us in order to confront them.

Daniel

One participant asked, in her “official rule change form,” that one of us three presenters should duck under our panel with her, to have a conversation about whatever poster was being presented on the other side of our own. The disruption of entering into a poster space from below was a shock to the presenter of that particular poster, but it was also a vulnerable act for the two who just ducked under the large panel without knowing anything about that particular poster or the presenter.

Nadine

Dan, I hope they are getting this.

[Nadine looks up at Daniel while saying the above, while Daniel ignores her.]

Daniel

It became an opportunity to discuss the presenter's topic and interests in an unscripted way and actually gave rise to some debate that wouldn't have occurred had we not entered unexpectedly from that direction.

Nadine

Truth be told, many would-be participants turn away from participating with just a smirk or disbelief that we were authentically accepted into the conferences.

[Powerpoint slide changes.]

Daniel

At the 2016 AERA conference (Kalin, Barney, & TBD participants, 2016), we explored knowledge dissemination within the convention as a police order that defines what is considered common sense—what is sayable, doable, thinkable, heard, and seen by whom and where. We played with the concept of a joke as a political strategy that might open a gap in the sensible towards the nonsensible to temporarily de-stabilize the order of educational research dissemination so that political potential might be explored. In particular, we undermined the role of author/expert while pushing the function of audience to its nonsensible limits through acts of disidentification.

Nadine

Is this unethical? All of this participation becomes our content.

Daniel

Here, we created several Mad Lib forms to construct abstracts for educational research. This one was created from a real research abstract with various words removed.

[Powerpoint slide changes.]

MAD LIBS®

To create your own hilarious MAD LIBS® fill in the blank spaces of the following research abstract with your chosen words.

A Research Abstract

This research examined the influence of contrasting instructional approaches on children's _____ competence. A total of _____ fifth graders, mostly African Americans and Hispanic Americans, from 36 classrooms in eight _____ schools serving children from low-income families completed a six-week unit on _____ management, using either _____ or _____. Analysis of children's _____ on a topic unrelated to _____ revealed that students who participated in _____ but not students who received _____ acquired _____ strategies and transferred them to the novel task. Students in _____

Daniel

In offering the invitation to complete parts of the abstract through a collaborative Mad Libs process, we attempted to suspend and reconfigure the typical roles of research spectator/consumer, expert/author, passive/active through engaging in alternative modes of co-creation where we were generating the content of knowledge together in the moment and then jointly re-performing knowledge dissemination. Here the common sense of research roles and dissemination—what is sayable, doable, thinkable, heard, and seen by whom and where in relation to the research conference—were opened up towards the nonsensical that temporarily de-stabilized the order of educational research dissemination.

Nadine

These claims seem to be reaching.

Daniel

In these ways, experts' and audience members' positions are pushed to the nonsensical and made unclear as they are invited to thwart and unsettle the default of audience as unknowing and expert as all-knowing. This might begin to make knowledge transfer and representation visible as contingent, contested, contradictory, and dependent on whoever shows up to participate.

Nadine

At any given time, we could have no participants to 200 collaborators.

Daniel

The stultified modes of research dissemination within educational conferences are also, as philosopher Paulo Virno (2008) proposes, the tools that we can use to rupture any fixed order toward reshaping it radically. Virno embraces the creative innovation of jokes that apply rules in an unexpected way so as to open any given norm to multiple and absurd meanings. This throws the rules and their roles and application into doubt and possible alternative futures from what, for example, education, research, and its dissemination, along with research conventions have become.

Nadine

I told you this might not be ethical, that you might not like this.

[Nadine turns to the audience to state the above.]

Daniel

Here, the joke is not intended to be on the audience, but on the distribution of the sensible at conferences that demand research and knowledge in particularly fixed ways that incite consumption and stultification. Our roles in this session exhibit an underdetermination, a reservoir of potentiality—something whose incompleteness can only be given fixed form by the still-more-indeterminate, and still-more-open-to-potentiality, power of language. For Virno (2008), this is where social innovation takes place. Jokes are the simplest example of such a process of change: one in which an openly fallacious conjecture reveals in a flash a different way of applying the rules of the game, and thereby changes the nature of the game altogether, even to absurdity, or allows us to stop playing one game and to play a different one instead. In our practice, we are reaching towards what is nonsensical to point out the limits of what we are caught up in, for example, in the form of an academic paper session.

Nadine

At the same time, the more participatory we are, the more we became entertainment and critical or political potentials might get lost.

[Powerpoint slide changes.]

Daniel

Thank you for listening. The next portion of our academic performance paper is a Q & A, Question (from the audience) and Answer (from us as presenters), but since we are exploring the limits and affordances of this academic paper format, along with the standard Q & A portion, we are adding presenter questions to the audience for answers following the standard question and then answer from us.

THANK YOU!



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS & QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Nadine M. Kalin, PhD
University of North Texas
Associate Professor
Art Education
Nadine.Kalin@unt.edu

Daniel T. Barney, PhD
Brigham Young University
Associate Professor
Art Education
daniel_barney@byu.edu

[Nadine puts down her knitting and turns her body to face the audience as the Q & A portion begins.]

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