**Love (and Teaching) in the Time of Coronavirus:**

**Magical Realism in the Classroom**

Jane D. Parent

Professor of Management

Merrimack College

North Andover, MA

[parentj@merrimack.edu](mailto:parentj@merrimack.edu)

Kathi J. Lovelace

Professor of Management

Menlo College

Atherton, CA

[kathi.lovelace@menlo.edu](mailto:kathi.lovelace@menlo.edu)

**2021 M-OBTC**

**Proceedings**

**Roundtable Session Description**

While the pandemic has caused much anxiety and the need for change in the ways we teach, this Roundtable Discussion will focus on combining magical realism and positive psychology to frame the magical and positive outcomes that came about due to adopting new ways of remote and multi-modal teaching. The facilitators will first discuss magical realism and positive psychology and provide examples from their teaching experiences. Participants will then co-create a set of best practices for creating magical realism in the classroom focusing on themes such as pedagogy, technology, and student motivation.

**Keywords:** Pandemic Pedagogy, Magical Realism, Multi-modal teaching

**Love (and Teaching) in the Time of Coronavirus:**

**Magical Realism in the Classroom**

There is no doubt that teaching during the pandemic has been challenging. We have experienced unprecedented teaching demands from both our college administration and our students. While the pandemic has caused much anxiety and the need for change in the ways we teach, this Roundtable Discussion will focus on combining magical realism and positive psychology to frame the magical and positive outcomes that came about due to remote and multi-modal teaching. It was incredibly complicated; however, we not only survived our new and different teaching experiences, but also thrived in these new learning environments.

Therefore, addressing the conference theme of Tradition Meets Technology: Finding Ways Forward, our intended outcomes for the Roundtable Discussion are to explore the following issues/questions and co-create a set of best practices for creating magical realism in the classroom.

1. Briefly discuss magical realism as a literary genre and outline a framework for applying this genre to the management classroom.
2. Provide examples of magical realism within the framework and generate discussion and input from participants on their experiences.
3. Co-create a set of best practices that heeds magical realism and positive psychology moving forward both during remote learning and when we return to face-to-face teaching.

The intended audience for this Roundtable Discussion is any educator who is interested in discussing the occurrence of magical realism in the classroom, especially within the context of the more to remote and multi modal learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This session is also applicable to management educators interested in the using a positive approach for managing change to improve student motivation, learning, and well-being.

**Theoretical Foundations and Teaching Implications**

Below we draw on magical realism and positive psychology and integrate teaching examples and implications from our experiences.

***Magical Realism***

For our purposes, we consider Magical Realism as a literary genre that combines realism and the fantastic so that “marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them” (Faris, 2004). When reading in this genre, the reader is grounded in the real world, but there are always undercurrents of magic present. An example can be found in the novel “Like Water for Chocolate” by Laura Esquivel (1993). In preparing a cake for her sister’s wedding, a jealous and sad Tita cries into the cake batter. Subsequently, everyone at the wedding gets sad and sick from eating the cake. Another example, in Love in the Time of Cholera (the book for which this MOBTS conference session is titled!), by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1988), is when Fermina has a lifelong memory of a mule journey her father made five years before she was born. At the time, Fermina Daza is on her own journey of discovery and the parallels to her father’s journey create that blurred magical experience for her (D’Ambra, n.d.).

Faris (2004) provides a framework for the characteristics of magical realism, which we use as a heuristic to provide examples from our teaching efforts over the past several months. We address five elements. The first element is that there must be ***“the irreducible element of magic”***. One example of this element of magic always circles back to classroom technology. In our experiences, it is simply magical when, with the help of wonderful student assistants, all the technology works exactly the way we imagine it. The second element is that there should be ***a strong presence in the phenomenal world***. For example, think about the times in your classes where perhaps every breakout group had great ideas for the case analysis or project. This can translate to that strong “presence in the phenomenal world”.

The third element of magical realism provides ***“unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory events”***. Consider this example: the main contradictory events for educators and students alike were navigating a worldwide pandemic and finding ways to continue educating students. We continue to reconcile class attendance, financial hardships, and required learning outcomes. The fourth element is that a magically realistic narrative ***merges different realms.*** In our experiences, we merged both the online realm and the in-person realm by teaching classes in dual modalities. Technology enabled us to project our zoom boxes in class while our student in class participated in discussion at the same time. Finally, the fifth element of magical realism is ***disturbs received ideas about time, space and identity***. COVID and the pandemic flipped time, space and our identities upside down. In pre-COVID times, we balanced teaching, research, and service in efficient ways. When we all had to leave our classrooms during the beginning of lockdown, our teaching preparation ***time*** quadrupled, we were teaching from ***spaces*** such as our dining rooms, home offices, or other non-classroom locations, and our ***identities*** as teachers certainly shifted in many different ways. As we reflect on the past year, looking at our experiences through the lens of magical realism, we find that quite magically, we have had much success.

***Magical Realism and Positive Psychology***

Magical realism and positive psychology are natural partners. The magical elements outlined above suggest a state of bliss and contentment. In connection, positive psychology encompasses such topics as flow, gratitude, resilience, empathy, and mindfulness (Froh and Parks, 2013), which are associated with positive emotions, health, and well-being. These *magical* states not only promote student learning but also increase engagement in the classroom. In addition, positive/magical experiences prepare us emotionally, physically, and cognitively to experience more positive experiences. For example, research based on Fredrickson’s (1998, 2001) “broaden and build” theory supports the claim that positive emotions improve health, creativity, and learning (e.g., Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006; Dutton, 2003; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

Below we outline teaching experiences with the purpose of examining the conference theme – illustrating where Tradition meet Technology and how we found our way forward.

**Student Management/Motivation/Engagement:**

* Adaptation to classroom policies such as attendance and late assignment. Given different time zones students are given the opportunity to view recorded classes instead of attending the synchronous class. We found that in all our courses, physical attendance was up. Very few students skipped the synchronous Zoom class and instead reported viewing the recording in addition to being present to better understand course concepts and study for assignments.
* Similarly, policies related to accepting late work from students was relaxed. However, we found that students did not take advantage of this leniency. Even in situations where students contracted the virus or were working long hours in essential serviced, very few missed deadlines and if they did, they made up the work very soon after it was due.

**Pedagogy:**

* Flexibility around team assignments. In courses that are team-based or require team assignment we found that we had to modify activities and assignment while still achieving learning outcomes. Hybrid/hyflex classrooms where some students are online and others are present in the classroom made it difficult to rely on traditional teaching techniques. Being flexible by allowing students to complete assignments individually and creating new ways of building community in the classroom, such as regular use of the chat function in Zoom or other technologies (e.g., Kahoot!, Socrative, Zoom Polls) increase engagement. Students commented positively on the flexibility to complete projects independently and to gain skills in leading discussions within the remote learning environment.
* Gaining new teaching skills and techniques. The pandemic has necessitated the development of new teaching approaches. Trainings on teaching effectively in remote learning environments helped us learn new technologies and approaches to course design. We tried new web-based simulations, polling and engagement technologies, and became more aware of how to positively affect mental health.

**Technology:**

* Open to learning new technologies. Adding the extra dimension of Zoom teaching tested our positivity. Yet, technology and technology support were there at exactly the right moment - it was magical! Even when mistakenly pressing the “end meeting for all” button and magically within seconds all the students reentered the classroom. Likewise, helpful students guiding you when needed and sharing Zoom and technology tips to the class. Students and teachers were able to come together and enjoy the learning process in a new environment.

The take-aways from our session are that you CAN achieve your course learning outcomes in different ways. We are reminded to look for and appreciate the magic in your day-to-day planning and teaching. Remember to practice self-compassion and do not be hard on yourself. Indeed, we ask our students to continually step out of their comfort zones; it was necessary for us to do this, too, giving us more empathy for the student experience.

**Session Description – Timeline: Roundtable Discussion – 60 minutes**

**0-20 minutes:** Introductions and brief overview of session. Introduce magical realism and the five heuristic elements. Create the connection to positive psychology.

**21-40 minutes:** Discuss magical realism in the classroom. What was magical and surprising about your pandemic teaching? What was unexpected in a positive way? How did you deal with technology in a positive way? What changes did you make to the way you achieved your learning outcomes?

**41-50 minutes**: Co-create a set of best practices for where tradition meets technology and finding ways to move forward. Which practices stem from core teaching philosophies and are effective regardless of whether teaching is remote or in-person? What will you do differently going forward?

**51-60 minutes:** Summarize session and identify strategies and techniques that may be useful for your existing teaching practices.

**References**

Boyatzis, R. E., Smith, M. L., & Blaize, N. (2006). Developing sustainable leaders through coaching and compassion. *Academy of Management Learning and Education, 5*(1), 8-24.

D’Ambra, A. (n.d.). Reading Notes on Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s Love in the Time of Cholera, https:/[www.englishliteratureteacher.worldpress.com](http://www.englishliteratureteacher.worldpress.com)/

Dutton, J. E. (2003). *Energize your workplace: How to create and sustain high-quality connections at work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Esquivel, L. (1993). *Like water for chocolate*. Black Swan.

Faris, W. B. (2004). *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Fredrickson, B.L. (1998). What good are positive emotions? *Review of General Psychology*, *2(3),* 300-319.

Fredrickson, B.L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist, 56,* 218-226.

Fredrickson, B. L., & Branigan, C. (2005). Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention and thought-action repertoires. *Cognition and Emotion, 19(3),* 313-332.

Froh, J. & Parks, A. (2013) *Activities for Teaching Positive Psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

García Márquez, G. (1988). *Love in the time of cholera*. 1st American ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.