AN EMERGENT PEDAGOGY OF PRESENCE AND CARE:
Addressing Affect in Information Literacy Instruction

Liz Chenevey*

> *"To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin." – bell hooks*[1]

Our students are struggling. According to Lipson et al., from 2007 to 2017 students seeking mental health support increased from 19% to 34%.[2] It remains largely unclear, whether this increase is from a rise in mental health problems or due to a decrease in help-seeking stigma. However, even with more students receiving professional help for their mental well-being, it is important to note that students of color are still less likely to seek treatment.[3] And the COVID-19 pandemic has surely intensified these concerns with 63% of students claiming their emotional health is worse than before the pandemic began.[4] Students are struggling with their mental wellness, whether they have clinical diagnoses or not. These struggles carry over into all aspects of their life, including their academic performance.

As this trend has continued, there has been an influx of think pieces about what faculty can do to support student mental wellness. This paper is not to argue that staff and faculty should be acting as counselors; this is far beyond our scope as educators. It is imperative that students are referred appropriately to professional mental health resources either on campus or in their broader community. However, students may not be fully aware of what resources exist. This is where faculty and staff can serve as a bridge for students to resources. Faculty see students more regularly than colleagues in student affairs; therefore, they have more opportunities to cultivate relationships that nourish students' emotional health and to then identify students who are struggling and encourage them to seek support.

There is also an opportunity to address students' emotional health through pedagogical means. As library workers, we often see students in a different context, one in which they are stressed about assignments, research, and deadlines. While we may not always have the same long-term relationships as teaching faculty do, we still have the opportunity in our instruction and reference work to connect with our students and sow the seeds of relationship. Small changes in our interactions with students in their learning environments, grounded in an ethic of care and a basic understanding of affect and

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* Liz Chenevey, Psychology Librarian, James Madison University, chenevet@jmu.edu

mental wellness, could have the potential to have a large impact on our students and their emotional health, as well as our own.

AFFECT AND THE LIBRARY

For the purposes of this paper, affect simply refers broadly to aspects of emotions, moods, motivations, and attitudes. Two of the foundational works regarding affect in the library literature are Constance Mellon's 1986 concept of library anxiety and Carol Kuhlthau's 1991 Information Search Process (ISP) model.

Library anxiety boils down to a feeling of inadequacy in research skills, especially compared to one's peers, that may prevent students from approaching a library worker and asking questions, for fear this inadequacy is then made public.[5]

While library anxiety tends to manifest in a student's interaction with the library as an institution, Kuhlthaus' ISP model discusses affect in regards to a student's research process, which provides an engaging "in" for instruction librarians to address affect in the classroom. The six stage ISP model not only accounts for the cognitive or behavioral aspects of the search process, such as keyword development, database searching, etc, but specified affective factors as well. At the start of the process, the researcher likely experiences doubt, anxiety, confusion, or overwhelm, moving towards optimism as they begin to select a topic. However, as they move more into the Exploration phase, feelings from the first stage may return as they attempt to make sense of the information they're finding. Eventually confidence returns as they work through the challenges of the exploration phase and feel a sense of relief upon completion of the search task.[6] As an instruction librarian, opportunities for intervention often occur during the Initiation and Exploration phases, meaning we are often working with students who are feeling a variety of emotions, many of which are of a more negative affect.

Since Mellon and Kuhlthau, affect has continued to be an important area of study in the library literature. And recent work highlights the social and systemic causes of our students' anxieties and emotional unwellness.

Erin McAfee extends the discussion of library anxiety, arguing that shame is its basis anxiety and that shame often has social causes and ramifications. "Library service interactions are a stimulus for shame…A severe shame state such as library anxiety is a collective experience. Whether it is through avoidance, contribution, reaction, reputation, or denial, the librarian and library are integrated into the emotional experience of the student."[7] Shame is isolating and something one feels compelled to keep hidden, and institutional policies or individual behaviors can inadvertently intensify shame. McAfee concludes that institutional behaviors can perpetuate shame and those behaviors must be identified and shame acknowledged and normalized to mitigate its destructive effects.[8]

However, library anxiety is not the only kind of anxiety library instructors should be cognizant of. Al Bernardo's 2019 paper on anxious students analyzes anxiety through a structural lens. Anxiety is not solely an individual issue but has sociocultural roots—we live in a culture that prioritizes individualism, competition, and leaves little space for authentic connection.[9] Bernardo explores the use of critical pedagogies to examine these structural problems and resist contributing to them, and concludes "Perhaps the most important step that we can take in the short-term is simply integrating into our practice the knowledge that there are likely students suffering from symptoms of anxiety in any given classroom."[10] It is past time for library workers to move beyond conversations simply of library anxiety and acknowledge the varied mental health experiences of the students in our learning spaces.

Veronica Arellano Douglas has long been writing about teaching from a place of care for our students. She has written on the discomfort students may feel with guest instructors,[11] how our questions both in the classroom and in the reference interview may elicit shame and anxiety responses in our students,[12,13] and most recently on assessment as care.[14] A common theme throughout her work is that care work is messy, we as instructors often mess up in how we aim to practice care towards our students. But we learn from those experiences to constantly aim to improve as instructors and grow towards connection and relationship with our students.

Much of this work stems from the same place—our students are complex people, experiencing the world in unique ways, causing a wide range of emotions that then influence their behaviors, both in and out of the learning environment. They have existing feelings about the library, library workers, our presence in their classrooms,

and the research process itself. These feelings are then compounded by the state of their emotional health, as well as past experiences in these settings or by other co-existing experiences happening in other classes, on campus, in their living situations, and in the community at large. Those of us interested in inclusive pedagogies must ask, how might our students' emotional health be affecting their learning?

AFFECT AND THE CLASSROOM

When we think of domains that impact the classroom environment and student learning we often think of cognition and behaviors—what are students learning and how are they demonstrating they have learned it? However, as Sara Rose Cavanagh has written, the affective domain is an important part of teaching and learning processes that can impact both cognition and learning behaviors.

Student Learning

There are three major areas in which the affective domain plays a role in our students' learning: attention, memory, and motivation. Instructional strategies are often geared towards capturing and maintaining attention, activating long-term memory and recall, and encouraging motivation. But do we always understand the influence emotions can have in these tasks.

Cavanagh discusses the importance of emotions as being either a help or a hindrance when gaining attention.[15] Our attention is often limited and our emotions provide a pull to what we focus on in a given moment, and what is taking the most emotional energy is likely where our attention is going. "…a good portion of your limited attention is directed inward rather than outward, further constricting the amount of information you are taking in from the world; second, what is competing for your attention is all emotional (the mood-matching song, the infuriating colleague, your beloved), and all self-relevant."[16] As instructors we are competing for students' attention with a myriad of other stimuli, much of which is internal. If our students are struggling in other aspects of their life, they are unlikely to care much about how to find the best peer-reviewed source or navigate the library website. That information, while relevant to their course needs, does not seem self-relevant to them. Therefore, we must find ways to make it more relevant to them and acknowledge that they may have affective blocks limiting their focus.

How and where we pay attention can also influence memory. We know that both working memory and long-term memory play a role in the learning process, and emotions can affect how memories function. Our working memory is often balancing multiple stimuli and tasks at a time, further tasking our cognitive load. Cognitive Load Theory tells us how there is only so much at a time we can focus on and retain and we must consider this limited memory when designing instruction.[17] However, Huk and Ludwig demonstrate that working memory can be improved there is affective support alongside cognitive support. "While affective support increases readiness to use working-memory capacity for learning, cognitive support directs learners to think in the right direction by engaging in learning processes that are beneficial in the construction of appropriate mental models."[18] We cannot ignore the affective domain and solely focus on cognitive outcomes, we must find a way for them to work in tandem.

Similarly, emotions play a role in memory consolidation which leads to a long-term recall. "One of the bet predictors of whether an event or information will be remembered is how emotional it is."[19] By addressing emotions and cultivating some kind of emotional response in our classrooms, we can up the odds that this information will be retained longer.

Finally, mood can have an effect on our motivation. Both positive and negative moods play a role here, with positive moods leading to more creativity and knowledge organization while negative moods lead to a higher attention to detail and careful responses.[20] Therefore we are not necessarily trying to encourage all positive emotions in the classroom. Kuhlthau's work showed this by highlighting the importance of those initial feelings of confusion and doubt in the information search process as a means to better direct one's search strategy.[21] It is just as important to acknowledge negative emotions as it is to celebrate positive ones. Instruction librarians should be cognizant of the role emotions can play and the emotional support our students may need to thrive in the learning environment.

Instructor Presence

Our emotions as instructors too are important to consider in the classroom in how they affect our students. Emotions can be contagious; an emotion may read on someone's face, in their body language, and others in that interaction pick up on those emotions and will often mirror them back. Cavanagh discusses this phenomenon known as "emotional contagion" as being "likely at play in your classroom."[22] This contagion has been observed in work on library anxiety—sometimes library workers reflect a students' discomfort back on them, which exacerbates their feelings of discomfort with the library.[23] We want to aim for a positive emotional contagion in our interactions with students, if only to facilitate a feeling of welcome and comfort. However, this contagion then can actually influence both instructor and student behavior through a process known as affective crossover. Our emotions, as the instructor, influence our behavior, which in turn can change the students value perceptions or feelings of control which then impacts learning.[24]

Much of the research on affect in the learning environment focuses on the traditional classroom; semester long classes in which there is time to build relationships and draw connections. How might this relate to library workers who may only teach one-shot sessions or interact with students in one-off reference consultations? There is evidence that first impressions are actually very important in creating lasting impressions[25], so having an understanding of our own emotions and their effects on behavior in the classroom is important. These interactions can leave a lasting impression on a student which can influence their affective domains in regards to their confidence in their skills and how likely they are to seek help.

Having a better understanding of where both our students and ourselves are feeling in the classroom and how these emotions can affect learning is the first step in how we can enact pedagogical changes to provide support and cultivate more inclusive learning environments that treat our students as whole people worthy of care and connection.

EMERGENT STRATEGY

Emergent Strategy is a concept developed by adrienne maree brown. Aspects of emergence can be seen everywhere and it provides an exciting and engaging approach to instruction that embraces students' emotions.

Emergent Strategy (ES) is based on the concept of emergence, defined by Nick Obolensky as "the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of simple interactions."[26] Examples of this are most often seen in nature and ecology, for example, the design of a fractal, the synchronized way in which birds flock together, or how a simple dandelion seed can proliferate into a field of hard to uproot plants. Emergent Strategy is how to be in relationship with one another to create change in our systems through simple interactions. "Emergent Strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for."[27]

There are nine principles of emergent strategy that can be used to guide us in this work. These principles are as follows:

1. Small is good, small is all (the large is a reflection of the small)
2. Change is constant (be like water)
3. There is always enough time for the right work
4. There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.
5. Never a failure, always a lesson
6. Trust the people (if you trust the people they become trustworthy)
7. Move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass
8. Less prep, more presence
9. What you pay attention to grows[28]

It is these principles that have guided and influenced what I am calling a pedagogy of presence and care that allows library instructors space to build relationships with students in an effort to address their emotional health.

A PEDAGOGY OF PRESENCE AND CARE

There are many pedagogical practices that encourage instructors to navigate the classroom space in a way that acknowledges students' as whole people, affected by the structures within which they live and operate. Critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, engaged pedagogy, inclusive pedagogy, etc. While each of these approaches has their own unique approach, they are all similar in that they require the instructor to be intimately present in the learning environment and to practice an ethic of care towards their students. By naming simply a pedagogy of presence and care, I aim to embody principles of ES, grounding my practice in simple interactions, that can reverberate into larger, more profound changes in student learning and wellbeing, demonstrating that pedagogical changes can be small and iterative.

Affective Outcomes

Writing cognitive and behavioral goals is commonplace for many instructors; they are relatively easy to measure. Affective outcomes can be much harder, as these deal with emotions and other intrinsic qualities and they often overlap with the other types of outcomes. "Even though the realm of affect deals with internal states (feelings, attitudes, and values), the way affective outcomes are assessed is often based on students' *behaviors.*"[29] However, while they are difficult to measure, they are crucially important in a process that embraces affect and align with the ES principles of "Focus on critical connections" and "Less prep, more presence."

These outcomes can be as simple as "students will feel confident going into their research project or reaching out to a librarian." Instruction sessions provide an opportunity for students to connect with a librarian who can support them across classes throughout their time on campus. This is a critical connection for our students, as well as for ourselves, and we must foster this connection in the hopes that students feel supported and comfortable reaching out in the future. Affective outcomes also provide instructors the space to be flexible and present to best meet students expressed needs. If a main goal of a session is to connect with students, it may be more important for the instructor to be present in the moment, as opposed to having such a detailed lesson plan that it is difficult to pivot when necessary, to meet students' needs.

Normalizing Emotions

Relating back to McAfee's work on shame and the effort library workers must put in to normalize students' feelings of discomfort, shame, and anxiety, in an effort to disrupt the harmful effects of those feelings. This process of normalization depends on the ES principles of "Small is good, small is all" and "Trust the people."

When we allow our students the opportunity in a session to share their feelings around research, we provide them an outlet for those feelings and the opportunity to see that they are not alone. This can be done in two ways, both of which are simple and don't take much time. The library instructor can disclose their own discomforts or anxieties around research, or as the students' professor to reflect on their own emotions around research. As discussed earlier, emotions are contagious, and instructor modeling can be influential in students' perceptions. These kinds of disclosures depend on us as instructors trusting our students, who then in return can begin to build trust in us.

This trust is essential for students to also begin to share their emotions around research, their assignment, or even just how they feel today. This small activity can be a grounding activity from which the rest of class stems that builds trust and connection by normalizing their emotions. This can be done with a Padlet site or any other anonymous, synchronous reporting tool that can then be displayed to the class. This way, they have a safe and anonymous outlet and can see everyone else's responses and can then have an authentic discussion that stems from this place of connection. This is an excellent place to also include referral resources to mental health services on campus to continue to destigmatize mental health help seeking should they need it.

Let Students Lead

In their article on developing affective outcomes for library instruction, Ellysa Cahoy and Robert Schroeder write, "In some respects, listening to students' feedback, and basing the focus of the class around students' artic-

ulated needs (rather than what the librarian feels they 'need' to learn) may indeed be the most important concept in affective-focused teaching."[30] As we develop our affective instructional competencies, we must be willing to let students lead us. We must be guided by the ES principles of "There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it." and "There is always enough time for the right work."

Sometimes this may require improvisation on our part; many instruction librarians have likely experienced a session in which they arrived to find out the students needed something different than either they or the professor had anticipated and planned for. These situations require us to listen to the students, find that conversation they need to have, and be flexible in meeting those needs.

We may also need to be more intentional in how we plan for lessons, preemptively asking students what they need using ungraded surveys or anonymous questions to guide the planning. As Arellano Douglas states, "we need to talk to students…it is an act of listening, validating, and appreciating the vulnerability and openness that students may show in these situations."[31] Students should also be invited to set their own learning goals for the session or a project.[32] While this can require more work on behalf of the library instructor, it is the right work. Goal setting makes the information more self-relevant, which will help focus their attention. And knowing where are students are and what they need is invaluable for us as affective-focused instructors.

Reflective Practice

Guided by the ES principles of "Change is constant" and "Never a failure, always a lesson," critical reflection is important both for the students, from both a metacognitive perspective[33] and for transfer learning[34], but also for the instructor as a way to refine our own practices.

Students should be encouraged to reflect throughout a session.[35] What is working, what is not, how can you adjust your approach? These can be simple verbal prompts or formalized on a worksheet. At the end of the session, student can reflect anonymously on both the content of the session and on their affective domain. How are they now feeling? Are they more likely to see a librarian? Again, a Padlet or some other anonymous synchronous tool is helpful here; while students reflect on their own, they can again see where their peers are, which can help normalize anything they may still be or are newly feeling at the end of the session.

Instructors too should reflect following the session—how was I feeling? What surprised me? How did I practice care? Where could I be more present? These reflection questions are not solely about the content or the mechanics of the instruction, but instead they should push us to continue to grow in connection to our teaching and our students. As McCartin and Dineen write, "Reflection is not just about improving teaching methods, it is also essential to understanding ourselves as teachers."[36]

What You Pay Attention to Grows

All of this work is grounded in the ES principle of "What you pay attention to grows." Our students' emotional health matters and this work matters. As we pay attention to the emotional needs of our students and ourselves, and weave this attention into our pedagogy, we can spin a wider web of change to create more liberatory classrooms in which students feel supported and safe to learn.

CONCLUSION

To address affect in the classroom is not easy or clear work. But what is clear is that our students, as well as ourselves, need connection in the learning environment in order to thrive. A pedagogy of presence and care can provide a framework within which library instructors can cultivate connection with our students. adrienne maree brown writes "relationships are everything."[37] As demonstrated earlier, so much of our affect is determined by social connections and relationships. Caring for our students and creating authentic relationships is just one small way we can support their emotional health and wellbeing, as well as our own, that may lead to larger changes in the educational landscape.

NOTES

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