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PERFECTION ISN'T THE GOAL, RIGHT? REFLECTIONS FROM EARLY-CAREER LIBRARIANS ON ADAPTING THE ONE-SHOT TO AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

LEAH FREEMON, CHRISSY O'GRADY AND MARIA SCLAFANI

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the way we teach and learn. It has forced our institutions to shift to online learning, close our libraries, work from home, and limit our in-person interactions. On a more personal level, it has caused us to experience loss, pain, isolation, and blurred the lines between work and home responsibilities. This life altering experience has caused us to expand our pedagogical approaches to focus on a sense of care for ourselves, our students, and our colleagues.

This paper is based on an interactive presentation at the LOEX 2021 conference that reflected on the experiences of three early-career librarians from different universities as they pivoted from in-person to online one-shot instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper will discuss how adapting our instruction to online environments developed and expanded our pedagogical toolkits by embracing a pedagogy of care for online education, the importance of student-centered instruction, and opportunities for critical growth through reflective practices. Attendees were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences through a series of questions using Google Jamboard.

PEDAGOGY OF CARE IN THEORY

Although the panelists have been practicing a pedagogy of care for many years, the way we practice caring in our teaching changed in response to the pandemic. As Mehrotra (2021) observes, “though as educators we often make a clear distinction between our own experiences and that of our students, COVID-19 blurred those lines as we were all part of a collective experience” (p.539). As we adapted to unfamiliar ways of teaching, learning, living, and working—all of which impacted our well-being—the importance and value of caring pedagogy became increasingly clear. We revisited the early scholarship on ethics and pedagogies of care, and were surprised by how fully it resonated with our current experiences. For the purposes of this paper, a ‘pedagogy of care’ and ‘caring pedagogy’ are synonymous terms understood to involve the practice of an ethic of care in a teaching context. Based on our review of the scholarship, we have identified three core principles of a pedagogy of care: care and student engagement are prioritized, care is relational, and caring requires a holistic approach to education.

The first principle requires the act of caring itself be prioritized. As Noddings (2003) observes, “the primary aim of every educational institution and of every educational effort must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring” (p.172). Likewise, the teacher must prioritize engaging with the student:

when a teacher asks a question in class and a student responds, she receives not just the ‘response’ but the student...She is not seeking the answer but the involvement of the [student]...The student is infinitely more important than the subject matter. (Noddings, 2003, p.176)

Although this principle seems simple, our educational institutions, for the most part, do not prioritize caring, and often we are not taught to practice a pedagogy of care, if we receive any instructional training at all.

The second principle refers to the nature of care as fundamentally relational, meaning that it involves interaction between two or more people. The developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan (1993) explains that an ethic of care, “which reflects a cumulative knowledge of human relationships, evolves around a central insight, that self and other are interdependent” (p.74). Furthermore, the relationship between self and other is necessarily reciprocal: “care becomes a medium of, ideally, mutual exchange, whereby self-interest is blended with the interests of others. By investing in the personhood of others, one’s own personhood is advanced” (Traschel, 1995, p.33).

The third principle requires a holistic approach to education, which takes into account the whole personhood of both student and teacher. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) argues that “progressive, holistic education, ‘engaged pedagogy’...emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (p.15). We, as educators, must take care of ourselves first before we can take care of our students. We must, as Maria Accardi (2013) says, “secure our own oxygen mask before helping others secure theirs” (p. 93). If we neglect our own well-being, we risk burnout and creating an imbalance in the classroom where we require more of our students than we do of ourselves (hooks, 1994, p.21). The importance of this principle was thrown into sharp relief by the pandemic.

At LOEX 2021, after reviewing these principles, attendees were then asked to use Google Jamboard to engage with the questions “Which core principles of caring pedagogy resonate most with you? Why?”

PEDAGOGY OF CARE IN LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

A number of librarians have engaged in bringing pedagogy of care into library instruction. Accardi (2013) cites Thayer-Bacon and Bacon to define a caring teacher:

a caring teacher is personal, takes the time to get to know students, treats students as valued participants and collaborations in the learning environment, helps students learn to believe in themselves, is affirming and nurturing, fosters a safe and kind learning environment, and develops a respectful trusting relationship with students. (p. 45)

The idea that students are participants and collaborators can be a challenge in library instruction with limited time and little relationship building between instructor and students. Many librarians interact with students for only one session and are not involved in curriculum planning or research assignment design. Noddings (1984) asserts that a pedagogy of care doesn’t require creating a long-lasting relationship with all students, but rather being “totally and nonselectively present to the student—to each student-as he addresses me” (p. 180), which we can do in a one-shot session. We are also often tasked with teaching far more content than we have time for. Although one-shots can feel like a race to get through content, we have to remember to prioritize engaging with the student over covering all the content. It is also easy to fall back on a point-and-click pedagogy that designates us as experts and students as consumers. Pedagogy of care challenges us to do better and bring our students into the learning process through student centered instruction strategies.

Pedagogy of care is challenging to implement successfully in a face-to-face classroom setting, but is even harder to achieve in an online environment. As educator Colette Rabin (2021) notes, “interactive opportunities are limited for practicing caring, particularly authentic caring” (p. 40). The difficulty of creating relationships with students in a one-shot is even further hampered by an online environment. However, research indicates a number of instructor strategies for bringing care into an online classroom, such as “instructor vulnerability, promptness, humor, and eagerness [which] contributed to increased student interactions, motivation, engagement, and better learning outcomes” (Rabin, 2021, p. 40). Additionally, there are a number of activities that have been identified as caring, such as “synchronous activities; peer-to-peer support through groupwork; projects drawing on students’ interests; options for representing learning; solicitation of student feedback; and, relevant and simplified resources” (Rabin, 2021, p. 42). Librarians tasked with online instruction due to the pandemic drew on this and other research to create synchronous and asynchronous content that showed care towards students.

How We Put Pedagogy of Care into Practice

At one panelist’s institution, asynchronous online instruction has been highly encouraged as a more accessible approach to the online environment. This approach considers students’ personal lives and mental health during a pandemic. Many students’ home situations may not allow for stable internet access or dedicated class time, so the asynchronous material allows for more flexible engagement. The activities presented in research modules were relevant to the assignments students were being asked to complete. This respects students’ time by not asking them to engage in activities that are not productive to the goals of the course. They can clearly see the benefits of the assignments. These asynchronous activities were also mutual learning opportunities. The students were asked to engage with each other in peer learning, and the librarians were able to learn more about the students’ research process and strategies than from a traditional in-person class. This exemplifies the care is relational principle of caring pedagogy by demonstrating that we can and should learn from each other.

At another panelist's institution, a pedagogy of care approach was focused primarily on teaching librarians. The teaching librarians group, consisting of 10 librarians, decided to only offer remote instruction starting in Fall 2020. The format of the instruction was left up to the librarian, providing flexibility based on online teaching comfort and capacity. Drop-in sessions were established for teaching librarians throughout the fall semester to provide a space for discussions, idea sharing, and reflection. A topic often discussed in these drop-in sessions and in informal conversations were how to quickly establish rapport with students in online instruction sessions. One approach some librarians embraced was a quick and fun opening prompt. An example of a prompt is "what was your favorite cereal growing up?" These prompts were answered by the librarian, students, and the instructor in the chat feature of a synchronous session and provided an opportunity to establish connection before jumping into a lesson.

At the third panelists' institution, the flexibility faculty were given to select a course delivery format resulted in a mixture of in-person, synchronous and asynchronous classes. This created a lot of confusion for instruction librarians, who received requests for all three formats in Fall 2020. The confusion and stress caused by figuring out how to provide instruction in a safe and manageable way prompted librarians to reconsider how they practiced caring pedagogy. After some uncomfortable conversations and experiences, they learned to only offer remote instruction and emphasize the importance of advance notice in campus email digests. The third panelist primarily provided synchronous instruction, so she focused on developing strategies for engaging with students. She discovered building a variety of activities into her lesson plan allowed her to pick and choose which ones to use in the session based on students' responses. Forms, surveys, tutorials, and other activities were designed to be easily modified and reused, so the amount of prep required for sessions decreased over the course of the semester. Activities ranged from brief mindfulness exercises to asking students to answer questions about their research and then following up with students or the instructor after the session.

After this overview of each panelist's institutional response, attendees were then asked to engage via Google Jamboard with the question "How have you implemented student-centered instruction online?"

REFLECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICES

We've experienced unprecedented change in our personal and professional lives due to COVID-19. By embracing reflective practices, librarians and library workers can grow from our experiences over the past year and expand our pedagogical toolkits as educators. As Nicole Cooke (2020) articulated well, "when we examine ourselves and commit to learning and growing in new ways, we are better for it, and our pedagogy can improve and expand as a result" (p. 89).

Reflective practices can be a means for growth and development for librarians who teach, especially when a pedagogy of care is utilized. Hibajene Shandomo (2010) describes reflective practice as "a process of self-examination and self-evaluation in which effective educators regularly engage to improve their professional practices" (p. 103). As Saunders and Wong (2020) describe, we probably already engage in some form of reflection, but there is a difference between casual and formal reflection. A casual reflective practice can include taking a moment after a teaching session to identify when students were confused or disinterested. The goal of more formal reflection should be "intentional and analytic, and we must apply what we learn from our reflection to inform our practice" (Saunders and Wong, 2020, p. 248).

Educators have taken the basic definition of reflective practice and expanded it to incorporate critical theory. Brookfield (2017) defines critical reflection as "the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions" (p. 3). Brookfield argues that our assumptions can be viewed through four lenses: students; colleagues; personal experience; and theory. The way reflection becomes critical is when we focus on understanding power and hegemony (Brookfield, 2017, p. 9). Librarians and library workers can benefit from incorporating critical reflective practices alongside a pedagogy of care into our librarianship practice. Nicole Cooke (2020) described her own journey with critical self-reflection by describing it as a process "that facilitated the strengthening and deepening of my critical library instruction and pedagogy" (p. 86).

Reflective practice is useful and beneficial regardless of what approach to teaching you take or how much teaching you do. It can help us think and learn from a teaching experience, an interaction with a colleague or student, and even determine our capacity to do something. Saunders and Wong (2020) outline a four-step process introduced by York-Barr et al. in 2006 as a way to develop a systematic reflective practice. Step one involves thinking about "what happened?" before moving onto step two, which is the "Why?" After the why, comes step three the "So what?" and step four the "Now what?" As Saunders and Wong (2020) articulated so well, this four-step process "encourages us to reflect on our actions and to use reflection as a step toward taking action" (p. 248).

After this overview of key tenets of reflective practice, attendees of the LOEX session were then guided through two reflective questions using Google Jamboard, keeping in mind the four-step process that Saunders and Wong outlined, and the pedagogy of care practices explored earlier in the session. Attendees were asked "be honest with yourself, how has this year been for you? How has it affected your teaching?" The purpose of this question was to highlight the importance of self-care during a time of uncertainty and acknowledge how it impacted our roles as teaching librarians. Attendees were then asked "please share a time when an instruction session or instruction activity has not gone as planned and how you used (or plan to use) that experience to further develop your instructional practice." The purpose of this question was to collectively practice critical reflection to

demonstrate that “good reflectors move beyond description of an experience and begin to identify problems or questions, gather information to address the questions, study the issues and the gathered information, and make sound decisions for further action based [on] this act of studying” (Goodsett, 2014, p 12).

CONCLUSION

We have found that adapting our instruction to online environments due to COVID-19 developed and expanded our pedagogical toolkits. By embracing a pedagogy of care, we have a better understanding of our own needs, and the needs of our colleagues and students. By focusing on student centered instruction, we develop relevant learning activities regardless of mode of instruction. Lastly, by embracing critical reflection, we use experiences and assumptions to grow and enact changes in our instructional practices.

To end the LOEX 2021 session, attendees were asked one last question: “We made all these changes because of the pandemic, but what are we going to keep when we ‘return to normal’? How are we going to shift from emergency instruction changes to long term changes to our instructional design and practice?”

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