

Proposal for CARLI Research Funding Program

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Project Title:

Caring for the Library Outsider: A Pedagogy of Care for Academic Librarians

Description of the Research Project

A pedagogy of care posits that care should be a primary focus of education (Noddings 2005). Teachers and librarians are called to exhibit care for students and to help them learn to be more caring. A pedagogy of care has been developed for a number of contexts, including K-12 education, public libraries, and higher education. However, a pedagogy of care has not yet been applied to academic librarians. In this qualitative research project, twenty-five academic librarians will be interviewed to explore their views, experiences, and processes related to providing care to students.

“Library outsiders” are in particular need of the care of librarians. Library outsiders can be defined as anyone who does not feel like they belong in the library. For these students, the library and academia feel like a foreign country, with cultural norms and expectations that are unfamiliar to them. First-generation students, minority students, and students with disabilities, among others, may be less confident in facing the challenges of navigating academia. Libraries can be an ideal place on campus for outsiders to experience care and learn to be comfortable in higher education.

There are a variety of ways that librarians can show care for students, including through library space, collections, services, and information literacy instruction. In addition, librarians can foster opportunities for students to care for each other, including through social learning and transformative learning. This study will explore specific ways that librarians approach caring for students and fostering care in students.

The COVID-19 crisis provides unique opportunities and challenges for librarians to care well. Students can be in greater need of care as they struggle to adapt to a new learning environment. The greater physical distance between librarians and students means librarians need to be more creative about how they can meet student needs and care for them. Although

COVID-19 is not a major focus of this study, it is hoped that ideas and reflections related to caring during a crisis will emerge from the study.

This investigation will be conducted as a basic qualitative study. Qualitative research looks at how individuals construct reality (Merriam 2016, 24). This study will look at what meaning librarians give to the idea of care in their work. Qualitative research is also inductive and theories and interpretations are developed out of the research (Creswell 2009, 4). Thus, ideas about the role of care in academic libraries will develop based on the research results. In this study, interviews will be used to elicit librarians' words and stories, which will then be analyzed for themes.

Work Plan

Following approval for this research project, twenty-five librarians will be selected to interview. All of these librarians will come from academic libraries, and a variety of types of academic libraries will be included, such as large public universities, small private colleges, community colleges, and specialized schools such as seminaries or nursing schools.

Librarians to be interviewed will be found using "snowball sampling" (Merriam 2016). This method uses the recommendations of people to find additional people to interview, and in turn these people are asked to recommend others. Recommendations will be based on the librarian being known to be particularly caring in how they approach their work. Ideally, they will be librarians who are intentional and visionary about improving care in the library.

These twenty-five librarians will be interviewed over the 2020-21 academic year using Zoom or in-person interviews. The possibility of doing in-person interviews may be more limited due to the COVID-19 situation. If safety and best practices allow, however, it would be helpful to observe at least some of the librarians in their environment to gain more information by observation.

The interviews will then be transcribed and the resulting data will be coded and analyzed to ascertain themes. A presentation on the research findings will be proposed for the Illinois Library Association conference in fall 2021. The proceedings from the conference will be submitted to CARLI as a deliverable. The findings will also be written in a dissertation, hopefully to be completed by June 2022. Options for publishing an article will also be explored. However, this is likely to happen after the end of the timeframe for this research project.

Projected Outcomes

This research project thus supports two of CARLI's strategic initiatives. First, I hope to enhance collaboration among libraries by encouraging conversations on caring. Second, I hope to encourage innovation in services and programs by helping librarians consider how to improve care in their services.

The greatest hoped-for outcome is to generate reflection and conversations among librarians about care. The goal is to discover how librarians approach caring, and to encourage librarians to be intentional about incorporating that caring approach into all aspects of their work. Specific activities and initiatives to foster care may also be suggested out of the interviews.

Brookfield (1995) suggests that teachers (and librarians) should be reflective about how they care for students. This involves stepping back and thinking intentionally about what we are doing and the ensuing results. As he says, "good intentions do not necessarily mean good practice" (Brookfield 1995, 1). Librarians may have good intentions to care for students, but their actions may not result in good care. A couple ways to foster this reflection is through reading literature and having critical conversations with peers, both of which this study plans to provide. This study will expand the literature on care pedagogy for academic libraries through a dissertation and possibly an article. In addition, I hope to generate conversations through the interviews and a conference presentation, as well as sharing my results in the venue of library associations such as CARLI and LIBRAS.

Although libraries' responses to COVID-19 is not a stated focus of my study, I am expecting and hoping that interviewees will share examples of how they cared well for students well during the COVID-19 pandemic. This can be a model for how librarians can care well for students during times of crisis and stress.

Evaluation Plan

Qualitative research is evaluated differently than quantitative research. Merriam (2016, 242) suggests that qualitative research should be evaluated based on internal validity, reliability and external validity. Internal validity looks at whether the findings match reality. Triangulation is one way to do this, which uses a variety of methods to gain information. For example, in-person interviews would allow the interviewer to observe the library setting and other people to see if their observations support what the interviewee is saying. Another method of ascertaining

internal validity is through member checks which confirm if the researcher's understanding of the interviews is consistent with the perceptions of the participants. This study will ask the participants to review the descriptions and conclusions reached by the research to determine if the ideas resonate with their views.

Reliability would investigate if the results are consistent with the data collected, or if others would agree with the conclusions given the same data. Conversations will be held with librarians at the Illinois Library Association conference, library association meetings, and other informal conversations. The conversations will be used to see if the interview findings resonate with the understandings of other librarians.

Finally, external validity looks at transferability, if the results can be applied to other situations. The reader ought to be able to derive ideas from the research they can apply to their own situation. Through conversations and review of the final written product, other librarians will give feedback on whether the results could be applied to their situations.

Literature Review

This study will be an introductory study on how care pedagogy is applied in academic libraries, which has not been done. It will ideally provide a grounding in ways that librarians show care, which can then lead to further studies. Follow-up studies could include examining how students experience the care of librarians, specific aspects of care (such as cultural responsiveness), and the study of different types of academic libraries. This study will also expand the literature on care pedagogy in general, which is limited at this point. Hopefully it will contribute to a growing interest in the topic, and encourage further work to be done on care pedagogy.

A Pedagogy of Care

A few authors have been foundational in developing the ideas of pedagogical caring, including Mayeroff (1971), Hult (1979), and Noddings (2005). Mayeroff (1971) emphasizes the importance of growth in the definition of care, saying "to care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself" (Mayeroff 1971, 1). Hult (1979) differentiated between "caring about" and "caring for." "Caring about" describes a state of mind and emotions. For example, if someone feels empathy and concern for someone, they are "caring about" them. In contrast, "caring for" involves taking action. He says that "caring about" precedes "caring for" and empathy and the desire to care are the catalyst for taking action.

Nel Noddings, as a philosophy and education professor, applied principles of feminist care ethics to education. Instead of the primary focus being on intellectual skills, she suggests that the goal of education should be the development of caring individuals. More specifically her aim is the “growth of competent, caring, loving and lovable people” (Noddings 2005, xxvi). Caring here means that students learn to care “for themselves, for other human beings, for the natural and human-made worlds, and for the world of ideas” (Noddings 2005, xiii). This definition of care can encompass most of what education involves. Caring about ideas that one reads about in books is a form of caring. Caring for ideas can also lead to actions to care for the world or for other people.

It is often thought that education should focus on competency and intellectual development. And indeed, these are important aspects of care. However, Noddings (2005, 10) argues that intellectual aims should not be the only (or the primary) objective of education. Rather, education should be holistic and “promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people.”

Noddings built on John Dewey’s idea that education should be about growth. Dewey (1959, 29) believed that education should be judged on how it enables students to be better able to grow in the future. Noddings (2005, 10) said that more specifically, education should help students grow as “healthy, competent, moral people,” in addition to intellectual growth. Teachers care for students by helping them grow holistically, and they also are helping them to grow as caring people themselves.

In a pedagogy of care, educators create space for students to both experience and practice caring relationships. The teachers use modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation to teach care (Noddings 2005, 22). Students observe the teacher modeling caring through the teacher’s own care for the students. Teachers and students have open-ended dialogue, where there is no foregone conclusion, and both therefore are open to understanding the other. In addition to experiencing care themselves, students also practice it with others. Although students may vary in their abilities to show care, teachers should help them to increase their “capacity for caring” (Noddings 2005, 23). Finally, teachers encourage students by using confirmation, which affirms the best in others. Even if the student behaves negatively, the teacher looks for what is positive in the student and their motivations.

Helping Students Learn to Care

In addition to providing care to students to help them learn, a goal of a pedagogy of care is to help students develop as caring individuals themselves. One of the primary ways that teachers and librarians can help students learn to care is through the use of modeling. The teacher demonstrates “desirable ways of interacting with people. Such teachers treat students with respect and consideration and encourage them to treat each other in a similar fashion. They use teaching moments as caring occasions” (Noddings 1988, 223).

In addition to modeling, one of the central components of Noddings’ pedagogy of care is practice, where the students are encouraged to show care for each other. Utilizing social learning is a way for teachers to create a setting for students to practice care with others. Social learning has been an area of heightened interest among academic librarians in recent years. Rather than just being stereotypically quiet sanctuaries, there is more space in most library buildings for social interactions. This space can provide opportunities for students to connect with other students and demonstrate care for them. Libraries have historically been seen as serious, quiet, and formal places. Elmborg (2006) interprets this as perpetuating a sense of suppression. In contrast, Bakhtin recommends laughter as the “surest antidote for an atmosphere controlled by fear and power” (Elmborg 2006, 63). Wenger (1998) developed the idea of “communities of practice,” which are groups that are focused on common learning goals. He argues that knowledge is both social and individual, and therefore interacting with others is an important aspect of the learning process.

Finally, transformative learning can also be a method for helping foster care in students. Learning to care involves a kind of transformation, where one begins to see oneself and others differently, and as a result interacts differently. The library building can be a space for students to experience transformation through interacting with others. Elmborg (2006) described “contact zones” in the library, which are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (56). A typical example would involve students from minority cultures who are struggling with figuring out how their culture of origin compares with the culture of academia. Libraries can be a place for students to gain support as they learn how to preserve their own identity even while they fit into the culture of academia. The library can be a place where different cultures and voices are valued. Elmborg encourages the creation of space that will welcome diverse viewpoints.

Caring for Outsiders in Academic Libraries

Libraries play a unique role in higher education. In many ways, they can be an ideal place on campus for outsiders to learn to be comfortable in higher education. Libraries are often a central place on campus for student learning outside of the classroom. Students may spend a good portion of their study time in the library, and there are opportunities for interactions and cooperative learning among students. Arch and Gilman (2019, 996) say that as the “central hub for academic support and peer collaboration on many campuses,” libraries have a unique role to play in supporting students who need help academically. The library is therefore a good place to exhibit care for the outsiders and enable them to succeed in higher education.

There are a variety of ways that a library can care for students, including via physical spaces, collections, services, and information literacy instruction. The library building can provide an environment where students, including outsiders, can feel comfortable and are better prepared to learn. This can include a variety of aspects of the space, including the how the library is structured, physical amenities, and the overall atmosphere. Ideally, the library building will be welcoming to all those who enter it. Librarians should consider subtle aspects that could be discouraging or forbidding to different groups of students. For example, enforcing strict quiet throughout the library could be uninviting to some students, while other students may want quiet to be able to study comfortably. As much as possible, librarians should consider how to make different types of students feel welcome in the library.

Librarians have many opportunities to meet student needs through the services the library provides, including helping with research, checking out books, teaching information literacy, and providing access to resources, including resources online and from other schools. These services meet the student’s needs and they are an opportunity for librarians to tangibly demonstrate their care for students.

Giving students the tools they need to do lifelong research can help them to continue learning for the rest of their lives which can impact the quality of their lives (Ward 2006). Information literacy instruction is thus both a way to care for students and to equip them with the tools they will need to care for others. Many students find the library intimidating. Mellon (2015, 281) suggests that the primary goal of library instruction should shift from trying to fit as much information into the time as possible, to seeing the session as a “warmth seminar,” with the goal

of helping students feel comfortable with the library and research. A standard for evaluating instruction programs could be if the sessions lessen library anxiety.

Summary

In summary, librarians ought to be intentional about the ways they provide care to students, particularly those outsiders who struggle on the fringes. Incorporating a pedagogy of care can provide a framework for prioritizing care in academic library work.

The care that is extended to library outsiders also has the potential to benefit all students. As they are intentional about addressing the unique needs of certain groups of students, librarians can be making positive changes that can also benefit the majority of students. All students can benefit from the safe and welcoming environment and services that are particularly needed by library outsiders.

Benefit to Illinois Libraries & Profession

An aim for this study is to help librarians pay attention to the role care plays in their work. As they make policies, interact with students, and do essential job functions, librarians will ideally have a focus that the ultimate goal of this work is to provide care for students. This study will encourage them to become more intentional about care, including how and why they are doing things. This has the potential to change the way their work is done.

Most librarians have also probably never considered how they can assist students in developing as caring individuals. Helping students research and learn is part of a bigger goal of preparing students holistically. I anticipate that this study will encourage librarians to consider ways they could create settings and opportunities for students to learn to care. For example, they can create an environment and activities that encourage healthy social learning and safe transformative learning. I expect that this study will provide inspiration of further ideas for how librarians can help students learn to be caring.

The conversations that result from this study, particularly among Illinois librarians, will ideally continue to be generative as librarians discuss the ideas of care with other librarians. In addition, it is also hoped that librarians can become influencers on their campuses to encourage a greater focus on care throughout the academy.

Dissemination Plan

It is hoped that the ideas from this research project will be disseminated via a variety of methods. A primary goal will be to present at the Illinois Library Association Conference in Peoria, IL in October, 2021. This will give the opportunity to share the results of this study with other librarians. It will also hopefully lead to further generative conversation on the topic. A poster session was previously held at the Illinois Library Association in the fall of 2019 entitled, "Exploring the Customer Care Experiences of TIU Library Student Workers." It covered the results of a preliminary study on this topic.

In addition, one hoped-for result of this study is that it would generate conversation among librarians on care. It is helpful for librarians to have the opportunity to talk with other librarians about their practices and consider ways to improve. It is hoped that my participation in library associations such as CARLI and LIBRAS will lead to informal conversations on this topic. I also hope that the interviews themselves will cause the participants to think more about the topic and discuss it with co-workers and librarians at other schools. They may also have the opportunity to influence others on their campus, such as faculty and administration, toward being more caring.

After my dissertation is complete, I would also like to explore publishing an article on this topic. However, this will probably occur after the time limits of this research grant.

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Support Statement

As the director of the Roling Library at Trinity International University, I believe that this research has the potential to benefit both our work and the work of other librarians that we know. The research and conversations that have been generated have already helped influence the conversations between me and my staff about decisions and initiatives in the library to improve student care.

Budget

Year 1 (interviews):

Zoom premium software – 1-year subscription.....	\$180
Mileage to interview around 10 Illinois librarians (if possible) ¹	\$460
Average 80 miles roundtrip travel each, 800 miles total	
2020 IRS mileage rate of \$.575 per mile	
Travel to interview 2 out-of-state librarians (if possible) ¹	
Airfare (\$300 each trip)	\$600
Hotel for 2 nights each trip (\$75 per night)	\$300
Rental car for 2 days each trip (\$35 per day)	\$140
Meals for 2 days each trip (\$40 per diem)	\$160
Total.....	\$1,200
Transcription services (\$1.25 per audio minute x 25 hours)	\$1,875

Year 2 (writing and presentation):

Illinois Library Association Conference in Peoria, IL October 12-14, 2021	
Registration.....	\$300
Mileage (360 miles roundtrip).....	\$208
Hotel for 2 nights (\$75 per night).....	\$150
Meals (\$40 per diem)	\$120
Total.....	\$778
 <i>Total budget</i>	 \$4,493

¹ If travel or visits to other libraries are not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions, the funds for these activities will not be needed.

Abstract

A pedagogy of care posits that care should be a primary focus of education. Teachers and librarians are called to exhibit care for students and to help them learn to be more caring. In particular need of care are "library outsiders," those who feel like outsiders to library culture and academia. The purpose of this study is to explore how academic librarians reflectively practice a pedagogy of care in their work with students, particularly "library outsiders."

Timeline

Year 1

July 2020

Defend dissertation proposal. Submit Research Protocol for Protection of Human Rights.

August-September 2020

Collect list of potential interviewees and contact them

October 2020 – April 2021

Interview 25 participants via zoom and in-person (if possible)

Transcribe interviews using transcription service

Benchmark goal: completed interviews with transcripts

Year 2

May-October 2021

Analyze interviews and write up results. Create conference presentation

October 12-14, 2021 - Present at Illinois Library Association Conference

Deliverable: ILA Conference Proceedings

November-June 2022

Write dissertation. Look at options for publishing an article.

Deliverable: Draft of dissertation

References

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