

Title: Addressing Student Emotions: Overcoming Hurdles to Classroom Conversations about GenAI

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Why Am I Here?

- School of Journalism, Writing and Media
 - Teach WRDS 150/151: Writing and Research in the Disciplines
- We're only human (WOH) TLEF Project

Session Outline

- My experiences integrating GenAI into my writing classes
 - Goals and Expectations
 - Observations
- Research on Writing and Emotion
- What do Students Say?
- Looking Forward

How Have I integrated GenAI into my writing classrooms?

- Inviting my students early in the first week of the term to anonymously reflect on their use of GenAI in academic work.
- Updating my policy on GenAI:
 - Clearly outlines permitted AI use
 - Grounds decisions about GenAI use in course LOs
- Work with students at each stage of the process where my students have been invited to use GenAI:
 - How to use GenAI with a sensitivity to concerns such as those relating to privacy, data security, hallucinations, copyright violation and others
 - How to use GenAI in ways that preserve scholarly expectations of originality and transparency.

My Observations

Why Emotions Matter

- Emotions aren't hard-wired—they're produced through engagement with the world (Stenberg, 2011).
- Emotions are relational and are connected to people's interactions with others (Micciche, 2007).
- Lived experiences = informal writing "curricula" imbued with emotion (Alexander et al., 2020).

Emotions as Knowledge

- Emotions can help writers navigate complex contexts (Alexander et al,2020).
- "Emotion can become a source of knowledge in pedagogical sites" (Stenberg 2011, 362). Ask students to sit with emotions—acknowledge them, understand them

How Students Actually Feel

- 40% uncomfortable discussing GenAI use with professor (even when permitted) – compare: 5% for library resources and 20% for writing centre
- 43% uncomfortable in class discussions
- 66% agree it feels difficult to discuss openly, even when permitted

My Student's Concerns

- Top feelings (% listing in top 3)*:
 - 66% - Feeling like I took a shortcut
 - 66% - Feeling inauthentic or less original
 - 55% - Feeling judged by others
- Compare:
 - 15% - Feeling curious about others' experiences
 - 6% - Feeling proud of my approach

My Student's Concerns

- “There are numerous pre-conceived judgements surrounding AI and so I am unsure if my professor would support or penalize me for my usage (even if it follows the AI rules of that class).”
- “Again, we've been told that AI is really bad and forbidden for so long that using it feels like cheating even if it's allowed.”
- “I feel this way because people still have biases related to AI that could manifest as harsher grading.”

My Student's Concerns

- “Even when GenAI use is permitted in class, it can still feel difficult to discuss openly. I’m not always sure if other students are being honest about their own AI use, so it makes me unsure how much I should share. This uncertainty creates pressure, because I don’t want to seem like the only person relying on AI or to be judged for using it...”
- "Although genAI can be extremely helpful in polishing work or brainstorming research questions, some people do not use it at all. So when I use it, I always feel like my intellectual abilities are less than since I had gotten some help from genAI."

Relational Nature of Emotions

- Emotions are tied to lived experiences
- Emotions are relational—they connect to:
 - Power dynamics (relationship to professor)
 - Self-worth (relationship to other students)
 - Environment (relationship to non-human world)
- How might these emotions become learning moments in our discussions of AI in the classroom?
- Can the relational dynamic of these emotions be an opening for responding to them?

Hopeful Examples

- Four student reflections on their GenAI decisions:
 - "If it's a topic I'm passionate about, I wouldn't use GenAI"
 - "To turn to AI after years of pride in my ability to write is a disservice to my younger self and future goals"
 - "For this assignment, I did use AI, but very sparingly... AI felt much more like an extra obstacle I wanted to avoid than a beneficial resource"
 - "Only humans can be scholars, not robots... I like to have complete control over what I say as a novice researcher"

Looking Forward

- How might I work with my students to recognize, acknowledge and understand their emotions around GenAI?
- How might this work inform my students' engagement with GenAI in this class?
- How can I build flexibility into my teaching of GenAI so that there is room for my students' emotions to operate as a source of knowledge about the technology and its place in academic writing?

The Problem with "Just a Tool"

- GenAI Is Not Neutral
- I presented GenAI as "a tool among others" (library resources, peer review, etc.)
- My students' emotions remind us: it is NOT just another tool
- McKnight & Shipp (2023): Calling GenAI a "tool" ignores how it's situated within complex social, ecological, political, and power relations

References List

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