Derailing Anxiety in Academic Library Instruction

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Derailing Anxiety in Academic Library Instruction:
A Study of Teaching Anxiety in Academic Librarians

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What We’ll Cover

• What is Teaching Anxiety?
• Why study Teaching Anxiety (TA)?
• Methodology and details of the study
• Results of the study
• Emerging solutions to TA in librarians
• Discussion: your experiences & comments
Teacher Anxiety: Defined?

• 1) conflicting values between teachers & students (Joseph, 1975);

• 2) trepidation with audience interaction (Gardner and Leak, 1994);

• 3) a response rooted in biological disposition, learned behaviors from previous anxiety-inducing occurrences, and exposure to threatening classroom situations (Walton, 1981)
Why this study?

• Librarians have increasingly active teaching roles
  - Move towards IL = more content-based courses (ERIC; 2002)

• TA studies only cover traditional teachers (Coates and Thoresen, 1976; Johns, 1992, etc.)

• What are librarians’ TA symptoms? How do librarians cope?
Why this study?

- Effect of internal and external perceptions on TA
Survey Details

• 35-item questionnaire
• Zoomerang Web-based survey tool (www.zoomerang.com)
• Participants requested through ILI-Listserv
• Total of 687 participants; 657 completed surveys; 382 viable responses
• A variety of participants
The Participants: Demographics

- 84% female
- 90% Caucasian
- 35% are between 31-40
- 66% only have the MLS or its equivalent
- All areas of academic librarianship represented
The Participants: Demographics

- 29% working professionally at least ten years
- 59% have faculty status
  - 22% on non-tenure track
- 70% affiliated with 4-year liberal arts colleges and universities
Some Q’s, Your A’s

- Why did you choose librarianship?
- What is your perception of librarianship?
- How do you think others perceive librarianship?
Career Choice & Perceptions

Librarians are…

• **Content** - 43% aren’t planning a career change (Q14)

• **Samaritans** – 64% like helping people (Q11)

• **Unique** – 48% believe their duties are different from paraprofessionals’ (Q12)
Career Choice & Perceptions

Librarians are…

• **Annoyed** – 38% are a bit bothered by stereotypes (Q15)

• **Concerned** – 46% agreed that teaching faculty don’t understand librarians’ teaching roles (Q13)

• **Put-off** – 35% have defended their teaching roles to other librarians (Q16)
Teaching & Instruction
Librarians…

• Love to teach – 74% enjoy teaching (Q20)
  - Why? Course material is important; they feel prepared.
Teaching & Instruction

On the other hand (just the pinky, though)…

• Not so much – 26% don’t enjoy teaching
  - Why not? Concerns about how to engage students; dislike of public speaking.
Teaching & Instruction

Librarians…

• Are limited – 58% don’t teach full-semester or quarter courses (Q19)

• Are busy – 43% teach BI sessions 15 or more times per semester or quarter (Q18)
Some Q’s, Your A’s

- How do you feel when preparing for a class? While teaching?

- If you experience anxiety, how do you cope?

- How do you think your teaching faculty perceive librarianship?
Teaching Anxiety: Symptoms

Generally:

• **63%** are nervous before teaching *(Q23)*

• **37%** reported a decrease in anxiety while teaching *(Q25)*

• **54%** reported complete dissipation of symptoms after teaching *(Q26)*
Teaching Anxiety: Physical Symptoms

60% experienced a combination of symptoms

- No Symptoms - 40%
- Sweating - 31%
- Other (aches, pains, tics) - 25%
- Upset Stomach - 21%
- Myriad -13%
- Heart Palpitations - 10%
Teaching Anxiety: Coping with Physical Symptoms

- OTC Medications: 8%
- Meditation: 20%
- Exercise: 23%
- Personal Coping: 73%
Occurrence of Physical Symptoms

- 7% report always having symptoms
- 20% report often having symptoms
- 22% report sometimes having symptoms
- 10% report rarely having symptoms
Teaching Anxiety: Mental/Emotional Symptoms

65% experienced a combination of symptoms

- "Tough Questions" or Preparation - 40%
- No Symptoms - 35%
- Public Speaking Fears - 27%
- Negative Self-Talk - 15%
- Myriad - 13%
Teaching Anxiety: Coping with Mental/Emotional Symptoms

- OTC Medications: 2%
- Meditation: 10%
- Exercise: 13%
- Personal Coping: 75%
Occurrence of Mental/Emotional Symptoms

• 12% report always having symptoms
• 18% report often having symptoms
• 27% report sometimes having symptoms
• 8% report rarely having symptoms
Help from Stuart Smalley…
The study also shows...

- 1) Stereotype concerns heighten TA symptoms

![Graph showing stereotypes and teaching anxiety symptoms]

- Physical Symptoms: 24% Somewhat Concerned, 4% Not Concerned
- Mental/Emotional Symptoms: 26% Somewhat Concerned, 3% Not Concerned
2) Faculty perception concerns heighten TA symptoms

![Bar chart showing faculty perceptions and teaching anxiety symptoms]

- Physical Symptoms:
  - Somewhat Concerned: 25%
  - Not Concerned: 19%

- Mental/Emotional Symptoms:
  - Somewhat Concerned: 30%
  - Not Concerned: 0.50%
3) Librarian perceptions have no effect on TA symptoms

Librarian Perceptions and Teaching Anxiety Symptoms

- 64.00% of librarians who have defended teaching have physical symptoms.
- 65% of librarians who have not defended teaching have mental/emotional symptoms.
- 36% of librarians who have defended teaching have physical symptoms.
- 34% of librarians who have not defended teaching have mental/emotional symptoms.
4) Career length does not affect TA experiences

- New and experienced librarians have mental/emotional symptoms.
- New librarians more likely to experience physical symptoms.
- Seasoned librarians more likely to experience mental/emotional symptoms.
Other issues considered in this study…

• Specific causes of teacher anxiety at the collegiate level (Showalter, 2003)

• Librarians: teaching vs. informing

• Tenure and academic librarians (ACRL, 2001; Hill, 2005)
Teach with Confidence…

• Consider ACRL’s Institute for Information Literacy (Immersion program)
• Browse these Web sites:
  - ACRL’s Instruction Section
  - Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT)
  - Library Orientation Exchange (LOEX)
• Share your experiences, techniques, and lesson plans with other professionals via employee meetings, wikis, blogs, etc.
Teach with Confidence…

Advocate librarianship!
Questions?
Your comments are appreciated.
Works Cited


