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At the Intersection of Person-Centered Management and Learner-Centered Pedagogy

Training, Managing, and Mentoring Student Staff

Matthew Weirick Johnson and Renee Romero

Supervising student workers, managing teams, and training new workers can be informed by pedagogy, especially when we imagine pedagogy as a praxis of relation (e.g., Arellano Douglas & Gadsby, 2022; Noddings, 2012; Schwartz, 2019). In this sense, our approaches to teaching and learning and our approaches to management and supervision are informed by pedagogy because it provides a framework for working together, informed by care and growth. Learner-centered pedagogy and person-centered management coalesce as pedagogical and management frameworks that share key tenets of empathy, care, and being together as whole people—learners and workers who are more than solely learners and workers. We consider how these frameworks are intertwined and how they help us support student workers at UCLA Library who are workers, learners, and teachers at the same time.

We consider our values, as an organization and on given teams, through two case studies: the Writing Instruction + Research Education

(WI+RE) Team and the User Engagement Supervisors of Students (UE-SOS) Team. We consider the relevance for these values both in training and managing student workers but also in the development and delivery of our services to learners and users. The values of WI+RE are explicitly articulated in the WI+RE Manifesto (WI+RE Team, n.d.), but the values of UE-SOS are more implicit. These two examples provide opportunities to explore different approaches to values alignment and articulation of the relationship between values and actions. We explore the relationship between learner-centered pedagogy and person-centered management to highlight their combined utility for managers in user services who are seeking to align their approaches to managing staff with their approaches to delivering services. Although our approach is applicable for management more generally, in this chapter we think specifically about working with and managing library student workers who are inherently both our intended learners and the people whom we manage.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

UCLA Library's WI+RE Team includes four to five full-time staff and three to seven student learner-designers who design and develop open educational resources (OERs) in the form of workshops, tutorials, and handouts through various media, including short videos, slideshows with quizzes and videos, comics, and other interactive content. The UCLA Library's UE-SOS Team includes eight full-time staff who supervise more than twenty undergraduate and graduate student workers who primarily provide research help services across six library and online locations.

WI+RE

WI+RE's learner-designers are the heart of the team and consist of both undergraduate and graduate students who design and develop resources from conception to publication. The full-time staff (librarians and nonlibrarians) who comprise the WI+RE Leadership Team (LT) help develop budgets, coordinate training, facilitate campus partnerships, and more.

One lead WI+RE learner-designer (an experienced student worker) works closely with the LT to bring the student perspective to decisions and assist with coordination of projects. The lead learner-designer attends LT meetings, participates in meetings with campus partners, and meets regularly with each learner-designer.

WI+RE officially launched with its first cohort of learner-designers in 2016. The learner-designers are an essential part of the WI+RE Team, and their unique position as both learners and designers contributes to team success. They know what other students need because they are also student learners and are able to empathize with the daily lived experience of the learner. As such, WI+RE's OERs cover a broad variety of topics pertaining to university life and success after academia. Since WI+RE is based in the UCLA Library, helping students learn more about information literacy and the library is a priority, but the team also recognizes the need to support students holistically and that navigating the library is just one part of the university journey. Thus, in an effort to serve the whole person, WI+RE purposefully strives to prioritize the vast and various needs of learners, which sometimes means creating content that isn't library specific. The WI+RE Team works closely with campus partners focused on student success, especially our Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Undergraduate Research Centers, and the writing programs department. Although WI+RE's main audience is UCLA students, the OERs we create are intentionally designed with a broader audience in mind and made openly available online.

Tutorials span a broad range of topics, but they all follow the same design process created and outlined by Cook and Worsham (2018) in their Build Something Toolkit. The Build Something Toolkit was adapted into a mini, open online learning course, Foundations in Learner Centered Design (Worsham & Roux, 2019). This course, adapted by one of WI+RE's cofounders and a WI+RE learner-designer, walks learner-designers through several activities while giving them a brief primer on learning theories, such as active learning, constructivism, critical pedagogy, and universal design. During the course, learner-designers explore ideas and concepts of pedagogy and design and create prototypes of projects while discussing ideas with the other learner-designers on the team.

Klipfel and Cook (2020) describe learner-centered pedagogy (LCP) as "encourag[ing] library educators to encounter the learner as an individual with personal interests, preferences, and motivations, and a uniquely human set of cognitive capacities" (pp. 2–3). LCP is built on different learning theories and praxis that support its larger pedagogical approach. The learning theory of social constructivism is widely applied in LCP and imparts further insight into how we can help shape the student work experience to be one of care and authenticity. Social constructivism builds upon the foundation of constructivism and "asserts that the knowledge [we] create is shaped by [our] socio-cultural environment," where we collectively decide meaning through social constructions (Critten & Stanfield, 2016, p. 86). This environment can include larger societal systems and also the environment that people encounter every day. Thus the WI+RE Team strove to create an environment that not only allows for students to thrive as learners but also for them to feel more confident in their ability to co-construct meaning as designers and teachers.

WI+RE's work is intentionally guided by cocreated design values that express how we hope to design and share our OERs. These values, collectively called "The WI+RE Way," allow us to affirm and share aspects of our creative process that resist perfectionism, encourage DIY experimentation, and expand agency for learners as designers and creators of instructional materials (WI+RE Team, n.d.). We believe that values guide all design, whether or not they are acknowledged, and wanted the team to have a written shared set of principles to guide us. It is important to treat each individual with care and empathy, and it is equally important to create a team atmosphere where the team as a whole experiences and cocreates an environment where they have the flexibility and freedom to grow together and make meaning together through open dialogue and experimentation. These values are flexible and open to change as new team members join the team or as our current team organically changes and adopts new values.

UE-SOS

The UE-SOS Team officially came together in March 2020 when UCLA Library closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and one of the group's

first tasks was consolidating virtual reference desks (Johnson et al., 2023). The group was originally made up of individuals throughout our User Engagement division who supervised student workers, including those who worked with reference and research assistance, social media, outreach, WI+RE, data literacy, and teaching and learning. However, the group is now primarily composed of supervisors who manage research help service points across campus and online. The UE-SOS Team has existed for considerably less time than the WI+RE Team and is still in the process of formation (see Johnson et al., 2023, for further elaboration of UE-SOS's model and team formation). Additionally, there has been considerable overlap in membership between the WI+RE LT and UE-SOS.

The disparate supervisors were originally brought together by the Research Assistance Functional Team, which coordinated the first training for library student research assistants (LSRAs) who provide frontline research help at in-person and virtual service points. In recent years this training has expanded with User Engagement's Teaching and Learning Functional Team (TLFT) offering library instruction training each winter to train LSRAs to teach library instruction sessions. Each of these trainings is responsive to feedback from LSRAs shared through surveys and conversations with supervisors. The library instruction training in particular was a response to LSRAs who expressed a lack of relevant practical training in their MLIS coursework and a desire for more hands-on experience with instruction. In our library instruction training, we emphasize learner-centered pedagogy and design, duplicating some training and ethos from the WI+RE Team. The research help training similarly discusses the importance of empathy in reference interactions. Additionally, we offer training to meet LSRA needs and workshops geared toward professional and career development to prepare LSRAs for job seeking.

Although the UE-SOS team doesn't have explicit (or written) values and there's no expressed testament to shared management principles, the supervisors are all empathetic toward students and the particular needs of student workers, and we make a point in our training and when scheduling to remind students that they are students first. We approach student workers as whole people and as our current and future colleagues in librarianship. However, the informality of our values makes them

difficult to articulate to LSRAs; despite this our LSRAs still comment on the ways that they see values expressed through our actions.

While we may hope that these base values are fixed, the nature of the group and changing group membership makes the values ephemeral. As in many jobs, supervisory changes and changes in leadership (within UE-SOS and within UCLA Library) also result in changes to the material conditions of the workers. In particular, UCLA Library has experienced considerable changes to leadership, structure, and personnel throughout the organization.

Our student workers are perceptive of those changes and how they are impacted by these organizational changes; it's important to us to make these aspects of the organization as transparent as possible. In this way, critical pedagogy may be considered central to both learner-centered pedagogy and person-centered management for interrogating power structures. Pagowsky and McElroy (2016) define critical pedagogy as "engaging in the theory or practice (or praxis) of inclusive or reflective teaching in order to broaden students' understanding of power structures within the education system and in society" (p. xvii). For anyone working in libraries, but especially for student workers who may continue in other roles in libraries, learning about the power structures within a large organization like UCLA Library is a valuable aspect of the learning experience and career development and an important part of how we demonstrate transparency and trust. Although these dynamics are not always the easiest to discuss and dissect, they shape the work that students have been assigned and the interactions they have. In addition, applying these principles can also be extended further to examine how our institution has shaped our own teams and student employees when given the opportunity to design and create their preferred workplaces conducive to authentic growth and comfort.

AT THE INTERSECTION OF PEDAGOGY AND MANAGEMENT

WI+RE and UE-SOS have taken several steps to create person-centered management approaches that value student workers as trusted partners who each bring unique skills, experiences, and contributions to the

team. While WI+RE and UE-SOS aren't always perfectly aligned in our management practices, they have many shared approaches that combine person-centered management and learner-centered design.

On the WI+RE Team, trust starts right away, as learner-designers begin their training and projects. Training is completed asynchronously with occasional activities that require working with a colleague. Learner-designers are given full autonomy in leading projects, with check-ins with the WI+RE LT and feedback from their fellow learner-designers to guide them throughout the process. They have two project types: passion projects and directed projects. Directed projects most often originate with our library staff or campus partners and usually need to be finished by a certain date. Passion projects are those which the learner-designer self-identifies and are primarily on a work-at-your-own-pace schedule. Learner-designers often choose project topics that they struggled with in the past, which gives them the opportunity to strengthen their knowledge in these areas while simultaneously helping other students. The learner-designer discusses learning outcomes and goals for the project with the WI+RE LT and larger team to decide whether their passion project is appropriate to pursue.

The work of the WI+RE learner-designers is more project based, whereas the work of the LSRAs is focused primarily on staffing service points. In UE-SOS we still employ some similar practices for project work, though this doesn't encompass as much of the work that the LSRAs do. Supervisors in UE-SOS work with LSRAs to support their learning, growth, and career endeavors through special projects with librarians across UCLA Library.

Another practice that has a significant impact on feelings of belonging is our scheduling. WI+RE takes a flexible approach to how and when learner-designers schedule hours. A general schedule for each quarter is encouraged, but a set schedule is not required. Learner-designers have occasionally set their hours on a weekly basis as competing needs from their academic and personal schedules were in flux. A primary focus is that they have lengthy blocks of time to do deep, creative work, as WI+RE projects require a mixture of collaborative and individual work. Students have expressed how much they appreciate being able to change their work hours as needed, without

having to get these changes approved ahead of time. Taking a more empathetic approach to scheduling helps show students that we understand and care about every aspect of their lives and not just when they can work and produce for the institution.

Empathy in UE-SOS scheduling is also valued, but the schedule itself is less flexible. We are responsible for multiple service desks, including an online desk and in-person locations, with drop-in and appointment availability. Providing consistent staffing for these services while also maintaining flexibility with the LSRAs' changing schedules is always a challenge. Despite this challenge, we always prioritize empathy and make frequent schedule adjustments. Our training is generally conducted weekly via Zoom, but we record and caption each training session for students who can't attend. We also support students whenever they need to take time off, and we create a different work schedule for finals week so LSRAs can opt out of working if they want to focus on finals.

We strive for flexibility in communication. WI+RE meets once a week at a scheduled jam session during which we give project updates, ask questions, and have fun together. The LSRAs also meet weekly for a training session; however, over time the training session has evolved to include time each week for the LSRAs to ask questions, share their experiences from staffing the service points, and get feedback about how to handle different questions and interactions.

In addition to weekly meetings, we wanted to make sure that students have a flexible and organic way to communicate with one another and us. This became especially pertinent during the pandemic. Our solution was to create a Slack channel where students check in, ask questions, and request Zoom meetings on the spot. The WI+RE Team and LSRAs have continued to use Slack as our primary form of communication and method of checking in, even with our work moving from remote to hybrid. For WI+RE, jam sessions have also remained primarily on Zoom, as have the LSRA trainings and check-ins. The LSRAs staff service points in pairs, providing opportunities for conversation and learning, which is especially important when new LSRAs are being trained. We aim to remain flexible to meeting and communicating in whatever way students need in order to provide a comfortable atmosphere that values student needs and preferences.

We recognize that bonding experiences contribute to an atmosphere of trust and care. After the business portion of WI+RE's weekly jam session, the entire team often plays virtual games with our remaining time. This was a suggestion from one of our student learner-designers and one that we eagerly adopted. We encourage milestones and personal projects to be shared with the team so that we can support one another as full and authentic people. Being open to learning more about each unique individual on the team helps us to strengthen our bond and create a better environment to learn and grow together.

We encourage our students to take leadership roles in several areas. One way WI+RE does this is by including an opportunity for current WI+RE learner-designers to meet with WI+RE candidates as part of the interview process, to help address any questions they may have about joining the team as a student learner-designer. WI+RE has also established the lead learner-designer role and supported learner-designers as they take the lead presenting ideas and prototypes to our campus partners. For UE-SOS, we've experimented with some opportunities for student leadership. During training, returning LSRAs fill a lead role to provide practical, hands-on training with new LSRAs. Our TLFT also created a library student lead role to help with the administration of the student teaching program, coordinate LSRAs to provide workshops and one-shot instruction, provide some additional training and support, and fill in for classes where needed.

The WI+RE LT and UE-SOS have learned to be more person-centered by listening and talking to student workers and fellow team members. By listening and implementing what the team is asking for, they help members feel heard and valued. The atmosphere this creates means not only students but also our full-time staff are recipients of an ethic of care and empathy. To help create an authentic environment, our leaders have to show up as their authentic selves, having fun and building trust with students.

In this sense we, as supervisors, model empathy and care for student workers who enact the same ethos when designing new resources as a learner-designer or assisting a user at the research help desk as an LSRA. Relying on the research of Masterson (2001), which found that employees treat customers better when the employees themselves

feel that their managers and coworkers treat them fairly, Béliveau (2013) argues that managers "create a trickle-down effect by adopting a person-centered management approach to ensure that employees in turn adopt a person-centered care and services approach" (p. 1347). This is to say that person-centered management can result in both happier and more-supported employees as well as better supported users. By modeling empathy with our student workers, we encourage them to employ empathy with our users. Simultaneously we are building stronger connections with our student workers so they feel comfortable expressing their concerns and seeking help, which is important for all employees but especially for student workers who may have less training and experience. These open conversations with student workers allow us to learn more about their experiences, preferences, and needs directly from them, which helps us understand their motivations and adapt to better support them in their roles.

STUDENT WORKER REFLECTIONS

It's one thing for us to say that we're employing learner-centered pedagogy and person-centered management in our work with student workers and even to believe that we are doing it well, but it's another to hear from the student workers about how this impacts their work, work environment, and sense of belonging as library workers. We reached out to four student workers to ask them to reflect on their experiences.

Neha Gupta • Lead Learner-Designer, WI+RE

I have felt supported as a whole person since the first day I was hired, which is especially valuable given that we have mostly worked in an online environment. My team members and supervisor check in with each other about life and work updates through our weekly meetings. I also have biweekly meetings with my supervisor where we ensure that everything is running smoothly and check in about any questions or concerns on my mind.

My supervisor has created an extremely positive and supportive environment that juxtaposes independent and collaborative

work, so we are able to hold ourselves and each other account-able to our work without having extreme, unyielding deadlines. Additionally, a significant and unique part of the WI+RE experience is having the opportunity to engage in the hiring process for new team members. Being able to contribute to interviews with candi-dates and discussions about hiring has been extremely valuable to me because I feel that my supervisor cares about the team dynamic and wants to make sure that everyone's voice is heard when mak-ing important decisions.

As a student, it can be challenging to balance work and aca-demics, but this position offers the perfect amount of flexibility for me to succeed in both aspects of my life. I always feel comfortable expressing any doubts I may have about scheduling work shifts during finals week, and there is a large support system among my coworkers so that I am able to finish my tasks in a timely manner.

As a learner-designer, I propose topics for the tutorials I help create, which allows me to explore topics that challenge or intrigue me. One of the tutorials I helped write tackled the issue of networking. Networking has always been daunting to me, but this project helped me unpack and research it, and although the target audience of the tutorial is my fellow students, I greatly benefited from the process and information I found as well.

Kian Ravaei ● Lead Learner-Designer, WI+RE

At WI+RE I felt deeply supported as a whole person, in part because our supervisors allowed us to spend significant por-tions of work time having non-work-related conversations. I had the opportunity to be known outside my work identity, which helped me bond with team members. Many of these conversations became productive: we would wind up talking about our various academic experiences, and this would lead to a new idea for a learning module.

Our physical working environment encouraged creativity; it included several whiteboards and bulletin boards, a large table for meetings, and abundant paper of various sizes. There were no

rules or etiquette governing how we were supposed to use these resources, allowing us to approach our work in a flexible, personalized manner. The empty walls were as valid a creative space as any whiteboard.

My supervisors were extremely accommodating when it came to my schedule, as my classes and extracurricular commitments required me to have flexible working hours. At one point I worked every weekday for two hours; at another point I worked seven-hour days twice a week. They trusted me to maintain the same standard of productivity no matter how I structured my working hours. Additionally, when I expressed a desire to step into a leadership position, my supervisors happily created a new position for me, showing their commitment to supporting my professional development and growth.

WI+RE Team members consistently supported my personal interest in music, encouraging me to compose original songs for our video tutorials. They knew we could save time by finding royalty-free music on the internet, but it was more important to them to support my creative endeavors. The team also showed their support by watching live streams of my music recitals, which always took place after work hours.

Magaly Salas • LSRA

As an LSRA, I was supported as a student and student worker. I was inspired to pursue my goals and always aided in all my responsibilities as an LSRA. During my time as an LSRA, I learned how to use databases, the UCLA Library catalog, citation tools, and information literacy instruction. More important, my supervisors provided a welcoming and safe environment that helped me become the curious and well-rounded librarian I am today.

I began my MLIS degree as part of the archive track; however, I switched to academic libraries because of my time as an LSRA. Being an LSRA made me realize how much I loved working with students, teaching information literacy classes, and conducting reference consultations. During my time as an LRSA, my super-

visors created a supportive work environment by allowing me to explore areas of interest and challenging me to pursue those interests. Therefore, because of this supportive work environment, I decided to be an academic librarian specializing in student success and retention.

As an LSRA my individual needs were met. I was motivated to excel as an LSRA and as a student. I was always encouraged to put my schoolwork first.

As an LSRA I was encouraged to explore my interest in special collections and archives and was able to work on a digital exhibition during this time. I was also inspired to work with outside university organizations to motivate students to come to the library. This helped me develop my love for student success and retention while using all library resources.

Alohie Tadesse • LSRA

I have been an LSRA at the UCLA Library for as long as I have been enrolled in my MLIS program. So not only do I feel supported by the supervising librarians in completing my job tasks, but I also feel supported by them in a professional development sense. My initial training as an LSRA was a ten-week minicourse on how to navigate the many departments within the UCLA Library and the nuances of mastering the reference interview. It was intensive, but it gave me the resources and knowledge I knew I needed to be an effective LSRA. I was given readings, exercises, and the opportunity to discuss training materials with other librarians and my peers. After these sessions I felt prepared and excited to share what I had learned in my research consultations.

Also, I really appreciate the library's Slack channel, which gives LSRAs the ability to ask reference questions of all the librarians available to answer them. Additionally, I meet with my supervisor on a biweekly basis. These meetings have given me the opportunity to work with an academic librarian and discuss my interests and professional goals. In working closely with my supervisor, we have designed lesson plans together and cotaught library instruction

sessions. I've always had anxiety when it comes to public speaking so being given the opportunity to teach with and learn from my supervisor has helped me grow and improve tremendously.

My supervisor also has acted as a liaison between myself and other librarians, recommending me for projects that align with my interests. I've created LibGuides on the African continent, helped with digitizing the music library's CD and DVD collections, and completed weeding projects. More than anything, it is these close individual and collaborative working relationships with the librarians that I believe have made me feel most supported as an LSRA.

CONCLUSION

Turning theory into praxis can be a challenging endeavor in any circumstance, and it can feel especially challenging when thinking about how to be a more empathetic manager. However, by employing the learner-centered pedagogical methods of social constructivism, we can push closer to creating workspaces where our student employees are able to show up as their authentic selves. Asking our students to reflect on their experiences gives us a better understanding of how the strategies we employ do or do not benefit our students. Managers benefit from regularly asking their student employees how they are doing, reflecting on their answers, and then implementing desired changes. This also creates an atmosphere where our students are given an ethic of care and empathy, while simultaneously giving ourselves as leaders the opportunity to reflect on our own experiences as managers. To help create an authentic environment, we must also show up, have fun, and build trust by showing our authentic selves to students.

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