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Academic Instruction Librarians' Conceptions of Teacher Agency and Affective Orientations toward the Concept

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abstract: This article reports on findings of an online survey on academic instruction librarians' conceptions and experiences of teacher agency in the context of their instruction work and, more specifically, on their affective orientations (positive, ambivalent, or negative emotions and feelings) toward teacher agency. Two key dimensions of participants' conceptions of teacher agency are evident throughout this analysis: 1) views of teacher agency as an individual experience of autonomy (individual agency) and/or views of it as more relational and interactive (and thus potentially collective), and 2) beliefs about the feasibility of librarians' teacher agency, given librarians' roles and positions as educators. Participants generally expressed positive affect when they felt they were independently in control of their teaching (individual agency), or when they described reciprocal and collaborative relationships with faculty (potentially collective agency). Participants expressed negative affect about experiences of lacking teacher agency. Almost all participants expressed 1) a desire to experience meaning and purpose in teaching and 2) a sensitivity to the highly relational nature of librarians' instructional work. Finally, the author discusses potential implications for academic instruction librarians' teaching practices, professional development, and work environments.

Introduction

Human beings have an understandable need to experience meaning, purpose, and connection in their lives, both within and outside of the workplace. Having some power and choice in one's environment, and moreover acting in ways that align with one's wishes and values, is often referred to as *agency*. The extent to which people experience agency is, of course, greatly influenced by their environment and the conditions and relationships within it.

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