Affective Learning in the Online Classroom

The case against technology as a platform for learning has been made from a variety of perspectives, nearly all which revolve around the difficulties of establishing human connection in the online space. Former New York Governor Mario Cuomo's comments about online learning sparked one of these reactions. Cuomo, questioning the efficiency of classroom learning, asked the following just two months into the COVID-19 pandemic: "The old model of everybody goes and sits in a classroom and the teacher is in front of that classroom and teaches that class and you do that all across the city, all across the state, all these buildings, all these physical classrooms. 'Why? With all the technology you have?'" (Cuomo, 2020, as cited in Mesibov and Drmacich, 2022, p. 223). Cuomo's questions drew a reaction from Mesibov and Drmacich (2022), who accused him of trying to "teacher-proof education." All students, they argue, benefit from a trained teacher's expertise, especially students with complicating factors such as poverty, trauma, or learning disabilities (p. 223). To be fair, technology use has been linked to a rise in instances of depression, and depression has been shown to spread through social networking sites (Carrier, Cheever, Rosen, Rab, and Whaling, 2013). Moreover, excessive screen time has been associated with lower levels of empathy and emotional awareness (Springer, 2020; Hoerr, 2019)—the affective muscles that are built in real-time interaction with others, typically in physical environments. Indeed, in an online learning classroom that functions mostly like a virtual filing cabinet, or on the flip side like a social media site, engaging the material productively and empathetically is difficult, if not impossible. Yet conceived of as an event space, the online classroom can—and does—engage students in their real lives, as real people, in real cultures, with real bodies, and in doing so, it proves its own effectiveness.

Affective engagement separates a truly memorable online learning experience from one that is merely transactional. Introducing affective awareness and instruction in the online classroom, though, proves challenging, as affect itself is poorly understood—an uneasy mix of psychology,

biology, and social life (Berg, Diffenerffer, and Osher, 2023), all categories that seem on the surface to have little to do with online learning. Yet bridging an incredible diversity of minds, bodies, and cultures is precisely what the most effective online learning experiences do. Indeed, the diversity present in the virtual classroom gives it special affective potential. Within the realm of learning theory, affect has often been described as a reversal of Bloom's taxonomy. Bloom's, of course, aims to move an individual from unreflective, impersonal knowledge or mere memorization to more fact-based and considered judgments (Schwarz and Goldberg, 2013); affective learning, however, asks students to take another step—to examine the ways in which their own cultural, emotional, and physical engagements cause them to consider facts in their own unique way. As early as 1872 in his *Grammar of Assent*, John Henry Cardinal Newman described a process of learning that incorporates affective elements. As people move from knowledge to belief to what Newman calls the "illative sense," they gain an awareness of the way that they state a case to themselves, and an ability to parse their individual approach to knowledge and belief. The diversity of positions and perspectives in virtual classrooms by its very nature creates opportunities to enter into this belief- and reflection-making process. In short, the online learning space offers fertile ground for affective learning.

Affective learning may be located within the broad nexus of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) theories, playing a role in widely discussed SEL categories such as emotional and cognitive regulation, social skills, public spirit, and sense of identity and agency (Frey, Fisher, and Smith, 2021). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CSEL) echoes these categories and adds to them responsible decision-making and social awareness, all of which may develop within a classroom, a school or institutional culture with specific practices and policies, partnerships with families and caregivers, and larger communities (Black, 2022). Similarly, the National Research Council's 21-Century Competencies are organized in domains—cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal—each of which has characteristics that bleed into territory occupied by affect, such as creativity, intellectual openness, positive self-evaluation, and collaboration. By

2017, more than 136 SEL frameworks had been identified in literature on the topic, and the number has only grown since (Casillas, Roberts, and Jones, 2023). Cognitive learning, it appears, cannot do the whole work of making an educated person.

Following from these, other frameworks apply affective concepts within practical scenarios. These include the NSCC School Climate Framework, which includes concepts such as social inclusion; the Conditions for Learning framework, which emphasizes concepts such as identity safety and cultural affirmation, personal motivation, and the experience of belonging; and the Safe and Supportive Schools Framework, which includes relationships and emotional safety in its approach (Berg, Diffenderffer, and Osher, 2023). Finally, the INTASC standards, which inform teacher preparation accreditation guidelines at schools nationwide, state that the social and emotional areas of development must be addressed when designing learning experiences and that learning environments should encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, self-motivation, and collaborative learning. All these frameworks understand affect as operating "outside of language" (Dernikos, Lesko, McCall, & Niccolini, 2020b, p. 146) and tapping into the often-unarticulated motivations and emotions that can be employed to improve student learning outcomes (Mullins, Deiglmayr, & Spada, 2013; Järvenoja & Järvelä, 2013). Affect addresses the "why" behind the feelings associated with communal relationships, including conflicts (Mirza, 2013), and the student's own interests, memories, and experiences (Posey, 2018). According to both Krathwohl's and Newman's Taxonomies of Affective Learning, affective learning requires students to be able to clarify how their perspective differs from that of others—an activity that requires self-knowledge and reflection, or Newman's illative sense—and then to explore the implications of how their own viewpoint leads them to behave in the world (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Allen & Friedman, 2010).

Designing for affective learning in the online space, as we shall see, requires a reimagination of teaching and learning. Many a quality online class winsomely organizes and delivers on-topic

information to students, who then perform tasks that demonstrate the extent to which they have learned the material. While information must be delivered and learning must indeed be measured, the affectively aware online classroom sees both teaching and learning as events that unfold across multiple temporalities; they happen again and again, for each student in turn, with each repetition contributing to the establishment of virtual learning rituals. Affective learning contrasts with the merely instrumental learning that occurs when students, seeking a credential alone, memorize answers to multiple choice questions, dutifully produce them on cue, and then promptly forget the material. Affective learning requires a step-by-step journey through knowledge to belief to the illative sense, a process that more often than not requires a highly differentiated, individualized approach that unfolds for each student in their own time. Affective learning touches both body and mind, reason and passion, and imbeds itself within the student's everyday life, at home and in community with others (Hardt, 2007). Students learning affectively, regardless of their modality of study, must function as far more than "brains on sticks" (Hrach, 2021, xiv): they must acknowledge their bodies, and they must be aware that they live in community with others.

In the online classroom in particular, the diversity of experiences that students bring to their learning typically multiplies in a surprising and wonderful way. While this greatly increases the potential for full-scale affective learning, diversity also presents a challenge for both curriculum design and course management. Effective online learning requires far more than merely transposing typical in-person classroom techniques into an online environment; curriculum must be restructured, pedagogy reimagined, and students acclimated to the virtual space (Isaias, Sampson, and Ifenthaler, 2020). Doing this with an eye toward affective learning presents another layer of challenge. For example, online courses typically need to be fully designed and built before launch, which makes them difficult to imagine in anything but a Platonic sense—as a sort of ideal, divorced from any particularity a specific student may introduce. While a savvy residential classroom instructor may be able to make on-the-fly adjustments to suit instruction to students' emotional states, motivations, or

in-the-moment reactions (Lao & Young, 2020), the nature of online course design makes such adjustments difficult and often ill-advised. Imagined differently, however, online courses can indeed be responsive and nimble. To imagine affective—and effective—learning in the online space, a key shift must be made. Whereas in residential instruction, affective learning happens most readily when the instructor reacts or responds, often emotionally, to students in real time, in the virtual space, it makes far more sense to understand affective learning as the product of a curriculum designed specifically to address each student in turn, in their own time, their own body, and their own community. It is less immediately reactive than proactively differentiated.

Affective curriculum structures learning in a way that is necessarily and inherently embodied, communal, and responsive (Stewart, 2020). It must emphasize the ways that knowledge affects students, as well as the ways that knowledge in turn empowers them to affect their community: *affective* learning measures and produces *effects*. Within the online classroom, affective learning must be understood as a choreographed, planned-for event that will play out across each instance of a student's engagement with the material. Students, like attendees at a concert or sporting event, will bring with them their bodies, their experiences, and their interpretive frameworks, but they will participate, *en masse*, in a ritual that runs by known and published rules. In so doing, the affective learning event not only engages students where they are but creates a new "where" for them to occupy together. The online affective classroom both incorporates students' own cultures and creates a culture of its own as moments of affective learning unfold within the structured rituals formalized in the Learning Management System (LMS), then engage each student in their time. Community emerges not from spontaneous interactions among people sharing a space but from the opportunities online instructors give for each student to enter into and play a part in a ritualized learning event. The affective potential of online learning thus occurs in a space that feels less like a meeting than a like symphony, performed by countless orchestras to many audiences at various times and places.

Emotion and the Affective Curriculum

Literature on affective learning offers no consistent stance on the relationship between affective learning and emotion. It is clear, however, that powerful affective learning can occur outside the realms of collective or spontaneous emotion—good news for curriculum design in the virtual space. Typically, of course, students who learn affectively have some emotional engagement during the process; it is hard, after all, to learn in a way deeply imbedded in one's own body and culture without in some way feeling it personally. Yet in its most stringent sense, affective learning need not include emotional components at all. Indeed, the lack of immediacy in the online learning environment often blunts both students' and instructors' efforts to be emotionally responsive. While instructors ought to do what they can to communicate sensitively given what they know about their students' situations, they should do so primarily as a means to recognize and incorporate their students' identity positions and community commitments within the learning process. This requires instructors to design curriculum that allows students to enter into the class in a way that acknowledges and incorporates their own cultural and physical realities. Moreover, they can and should plan interactive moments, even asynchronous ones, in order to make space for the formation of empathetic community bonds. Finally, they should communicate rules of engagement for the course to assure an atmosphere of safety (defined not as the absence of risk but the presence of allies), predictability (defined not as repetition and boredom but as consistency and well-articulated bearing-setting), and active participation (defined not as an online free-for-all but as a series of interactions in which students' voices are requested and responded to hospitably) for as many students as possible. Structuring online learning in this way not only allows students to learn affectively from within their own identity positions, but also frames the online classroom as its own culture: a community of which students know themselves to be valuable parts.

Curriculum designed for affective engagement in the online space ought to connect as closely as possible with students' motivations and personal interests. Assignments may be designed so that

students have opportunities to apply concepts to their own lives, for instance, or to imagine a way that the course materials will help them to meet their professional goals. Structuring assignments to increase relevance and hence motivation can be an important affective technique, as with increased motivation comes improved learning outcomes. Besides asking students to apply course content within their own contexts, it also makes sense to include "fun" learning moments, such as gamification and play. Assignments and tasks such as vocabulary bingo in a foreign language class or 20-questions-style quiz reviews and or even structured play such as modeling with Legos (James, 2019) can benefit students cognitively, emotionally, and socially by recasting learning as a personal challenge. Gamified or project-oriented learning tasks can also create real and productive interaction among students by introducing elements of excitement, suspense, or friendly competition (O'Neil, Baker, Perez, and Watson, 2021). Structuring collaborative assignments in this way also helps the learning space to feel safer, given that games run by rules that all can follow (Forbes, 2021).

Reflective moments that give opportunities for affective learning should be built into the online curriculum as well. Assignments that ask students to engage in introspective work, in fact, both mirror and anticipate the effects of in-person social interaction, as they pause and consider themselves from the outside (Davis and Bellocchi, 2018). These assignments in turn can be scaffolded into collaborative learning experiences. For example, as part of a discussion board post, students may be asked to record the first three things that surprise them when they read William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." If a student notes that they are surprised by (1) the fact that the whole town turns out for Miss Emily's funeral, (2) the fact that Miss Emily was not punished for not paying her taxes, and (3) the fact that Miss Emily's world bears some evidence of racial conflict (all details that emerge in the first few pages of the story), a savvy instructor might quickly intuit that this student has little experience with traditional culture in the American South. By contrast, if a student reports being surprised only by the fact that Miss Emily keeps her ex-lover's corpse in her home, we might surmise that this student has more personal experience with the sort of local culture Faulkner

discusses. In turn, these introspective moments set up actual moments of learning-focused interpersonal engagement in the online classroom, as students together spin out ways in which the legacy of the old South shapes the town's practices, beliefs, and sense of right and wrong. Students already familiar with southern culture will likely have much to contribute to the discussion about the South but much to learn about the uniquenesses to which those practices give rise, and vice-versa for those less familiar with that culture. Each student's self-reflection on their cultural locatedness and honest assessment of the "why" behind their reactions means that all have something to learn and something to teach.

Beyond this, moments of direct faculty-to-student interaction, already dictated by federal Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI) guidance, can lead to affectively rich learning. Students who form an interpersonal bond, even a very pedestrian one, with an online faculty member typically feel more motivated (Davis and Bellocchi, 2018). Interaction can be encouraged when an instructor takes a playful or even humorous approach to teaching, makes space for empathy, explores identity positions, practices compassionate listening, expresses enjoyment and appreciation, and invites contemplation (Reeve, 2007). Even a simple response from a faculty member that suggests they enjoy engaging with their students ("Your discussion board posts were such a pick me up this morning!") is likely to increase student motivation. More directly instructional moments can also encourage the rhythms of "call and response" that structure so many social interactions. For example, a faculty member who uses a weekly announcement to address student concerns about an upcoming assignment models empathy and responsiveness, while also delivering needed cognitive instruction. Faculty members can invite students into these sorts of interactive processes as well. Structured and strategic discussion board assignments might ask students to engage with course content and with one another in empathetic ways, for example, such as completing active "listening" exercises with each other's compositions, expressing appreciation for each other's comments, or asking questions about moments of confusion.

Such moments of learning require a heavy level of engagement from students, and as such, they may initially be met with resistance. Affective learning poses risks and rewards that, because they address the individual students in places that matter to them, exceed those of merely cognitive learning experiences. Indeed, these moments can carry with them significant emotional heft. Given that, wise instructors will do well to communicate to students the size of the rewards, and to signal that risks have—to the greatest extent possible—been minimized, so whatever emotional reactions they have will prove productive and manageable rather than threatening. Students likely already understand that affect plays no less a role in virtual learning environments than physical classrooms (Turula, 2013) and thus likely need little help imagining what those risks and potential threats may be. Anyone who has spent even a little time browsing comments on news stories or scrolling through social media knows how emotionally superheated the online space can become, often because—not in spite of—the lack of real relationships among those in a conversation. It is far easier to spew vitriol at a stranger than at someone you will have to see at tee-ball practice on Monday. Agreeing on reasonable and practical rules of virtual engagement helps to minimize this risk, as does helping students to see each other as real people who have real feelings.

In addition to this, the mere thought of learning online may cause emotional distress for some students, especially when they are studying in disciplines that typically present challenges, such as mathematics or foreign language. While it has been demonstrated that emotion, properly channeled, can assist with recall (Stevens, 2022), it can just as often hijack reason and cognition, as feelings of shame, fear, anxiety, or frustration come as unbidden tag-alongs to quadratic equations or conjugations in the subjunctive mood. Yet instructors who empathetically lay out the emotional course that students may likely find themselves running will not only help the student to succeed, but also affectively anchor that cognitive learning in a way that pays off over the long term and makes the student more eager to advance (Lao and Young, 2020). A simple recorded announcement that reminds students who may be feeling frustrated or anxious that they are having common reactions

and that with steady work and practice, their negative feelings will likely be replaced by a sense of pride, enjoyment, and satisfaction, both demonstrates empathy and "unsticks" the student's learning process. Providing examples of quality student work, then opening a forum for students to discuss and ask about why the sample work succeeds, both reduces student performance anxiety and invites them to collaborate in a discussion about their own success. Moreover, reminding students to take a principle from this—to be mindful of but not paralyzed by their emotions and to remember the steps that helped them to feel better—prepares them to handle similar situations better the next time, thus speeding them on their way to achieving their broader learning goals (Bellocchi, 2018a).

Emotion and even motivation serve as intensifiers in the learning experience, and they can be martialed for good or for ill, regardless of delivery format. Even a highly motivated, highly engaged student may not necessarily learn better (O'Neil, Baker, Perez, and Watson, 2021), after all, so it is important that curricular techniques used to peak affective engagement also improve cognition. The principles of affective learning—that it must incorporate the student's body and cultural position into the learning process—serve as litmus tests for whether an affectively oriented pedagogical decision is likely to improve or stymie learning. Two examples illustrate this point. First, a study was released showing that students who were allowed to participate anonymously in online group activities participated at a higher rate, likely because they did not fear judgment from their peers (Turula, 2013). This raises an obvious question: should we allow students to participate anonymously if they so choose? Second, it is a widely accepted good practice to allow students to choose what assessments or activities they complete to earn credit for the course, so as to increase their sense of agency and control (Turula, 2013). Given that, should students not then be given choice at every available opportunity, as it increases engagement?

In both scenarios, the wisest pedagogical path emerges when the tenets of affective learning are introduced into the conversation: how will these techniques play out with real students, in real bodies, in real cultures? Anonymity reduces some students' anxiety and thus increases their

likelihood of participating in an online forum. Indeed, in specific scenarios such as peer review or "honest feedback" sessions, using an application such as Padlet to preserve anonymity may lead to more frank and helpful discussion and hence better learning. Yet doing so over the duration of a course actually interrupts the learning process, making it impossible to scaffold and differentiate each student's learning (real students, real bodies), and hindering any community that may be built over the course of the class (real culture). Anonymity may thus make sense in some strategic situations, but not as a rule. Similarly, it makes sense to offer choices to students who are already well informed and capable of navigating the online classroom without much assistance. However, giving inexperienced students virtually free rein as they chart their own path through a course can paralyze them. Following the principles of affective learning means that students are offered choices commensurate with their background and familiarity with the institution and the discipline in order to allow them in turn to engage the material with as much positive affect as possible. A responsible instructor designs curriculum in such a way as to increase the level of productive affective learning available to students in the class, while also keeping in mind that students' own affective positions, the burdens they bear in keeping up their own digital identities, may improve or impede learning (Dernikos, Lesco, McCall, and Niccolini, 2020a).

To be fair, even in the best of curricula, deep affective learning can be difficult for an instructor to bring about, as people typically resist one of the common offshoots of sustained affective learning: modifications in their belief systems or thought patterns (Lao & Young, 2020, p. 371). Bringing about change of this sort requires the instructor to be willing to steer through deep waters: the student's own dispositions (emotions, motivations, goals, etc.), the learning climate (the institutional mood, the approach to assignment/instructions, the nature of the material, others in the class), and prior memory structures, both individual and collective, that may dispose students to interpret in certain ways (Lawson & Kirby, 2012). Precisely because it extends into the socio-relational and emotive dimensions of the person, then, students may resist affective intrusions; they

may, for example, take issue with the way an idea is presented or feel offended or triggered by the course material (Baker, Andriessen, & Järvelä, 2013) and consequently withdraw or shut down. Such triggering may produce positive outcomes, however. In her meditation on teaching, theorist bell hooks describes the excitement of learners who are "deeply affected by [their] interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence. . . . any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged. That insistence cannot be simply stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices" (hooks, 1994, p. 8). While affective learning requires significant planning, energetic execution, and thick skin on the part of the instructor, an instructor able to engage their students affectively in these ways will almost certainly be more successful (Cavanaugh, 2016).

Not surprisingly, the accepted list of High Impact Practice (HIPs) includes the opportunity for affective learning in every instance. Service learning and field experience offer opportunities for personal experience in groups, while also giving the opportunity to develop both a self-reflective capacity and empathy (Davies and Stodulka, 2019). Experiential learning creates knowledge through transforming experience (Kolb, 1984), and goal-focused learning increases motivation and even offers an opportunity for friendly competition (Yokoyama and Miwa, 2020). Problem-based learning, which requires attention to the filters and perceptions individuals bring to their attempt to solve complex problems (Tharp, Gould, and Potter, 2009) mirrors the affective work that exercises such as such as role-playing or occupying various positions in argumentation exercises can do (Mirza, 2013; Asterhan, 2013). Both role-playing and assigned argumentation exercises allow the student to decouple their personal, sometimes strongly held beliefs about an issue from their classroom performance, so as to practice newfound knowledge and learn to empathize with other viewpoints in a safe, ritualized way. Each of these invites the student to bring their own experience, skills, and cultural commitments to a task whose outcomes are defined but whose step-by-step execution depends on myriad personal decisions. Affective learning of this sort promises to drive deeper the

cognitive information that forms the content of nearly any course, and to do so in ways that feel both personally and culturally relevant to the student.

Bodies, Cultures, and the LMS

Affectively informed online pedagogy incorporates ways of knowing and experiencing the course content that go well beyond what curriculum design alone can address directly: the LMS-based learning space must also be structured in such a way as to allow students to learn with maximum affective impact. Indeed, without both a clear pedagogical strategy and a strategic operational and design approach, classrooms tend to focus on the cognitive realm alone (Immordino-Yang and Damasio, 2008)—a tendency that is exacerbated in the online space. Regardless of delivery format, however, students do not leave their bodies or their cultures behind when they enter into a learning space: they are there already and must simply be acknowledged. While residential students may show up to learn in bodies that are chilled from a trek across campus or flashily encased in a pair of new Jordans, online students bring their bodies to the learning event as well, perhaps in the form of an aching back, tired eyes, and a set of noise-canceling headphones that enables them to learn in peace. For online as well as for residential students, of course, cognitive performance depends on bodily health (Hrach, 2021, pp. xvi-xvii), and when students in any delivery format engage, their bodies and minds both register it (Zembylas, 2020). Even the most basic form of affective engagement—emotional response—has components that are both physical and mental (Cahour, 2013). The four primary emotions of anger, fear, sadness, and happiness all have a bodily component that can affect learning outcomes (King, Sandhu, Henderson, and Ritchie, 2018). Bodies enter the learning space in other ways as well, such as the ways in which being a person of color, a woman, an elite athlete, or a person with a disability may affect perception. The body is the "seat and site of our lived experience" (Greenberg, Sohn, Greenberg, Pollio, and Smith, 2019, p. 18). Dernikos, Lesko, McCall, and Niccolini (2020d), in fact, describe affective studies as an heir to feminist

scholarship, with both asserting the importance of bodies in social spaces. Bodies *will* affect learning, so it is no wonder that inviting students' embodied selves into the learning process leads to better and more consistent outcomes.[1]

As we have seen, a basic version of incorporating students' bodily experiences into online learning may involve incorporating assignments or discussion prompts that lead them to reflect on their own embodied experience vis-à-vis the course materials. A student studying to be an elementary teacher, for instance, may benefit from an assignment asking him to discuss the ways in which his background (race, class, gender, or any other category that he wants to discuss) should inform his pedagogical approach in a wealthy suburban school, a rural Appalachian public school, and an urban arts magnate school. A Caucasian student who is the son of farmers, who earned his degree at a non-selective rural public school, and who speaks with a thick West Virginia accent may have to build a longer and stronger bridge if he is assigned to teach at a Chicago magnate school than if he stays closer to home. More sophisticated versions of this sort of assignment abound; the key, however, is the deliberateness with which the question of embodiment is approached. It cannot be assumed, and an instructor must not fail to mention its relevance in the learning process. Otherwise, the bodies that might otherwise impact and improve student learning may become not just irrelevant but denied—lost in assumed homogeneity.[2] Here is where the structure of the LMS matters. When students complete assignments of this sort, to what extent will their own demographic information be visible

[1] Even as early as the seventeenth century, Spinoza argued that the mind cannot hold ideas that exclude the existence of bodies: we cannot think without somehow bodying forth that cognitive effort. Moreover, we cannot perceive any external body as existing unless we do so through the "affections of [our] own body" (2020, p. 137). Thus, to perceive empathetically another's pain requires us to be able to name our own, "to theorize from that location" (hooks, 1994, p. 74). Embracing the embodiedness of the online classroom thus honors the space each student occupies, honoring the experiences of their lives that filter their learning (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010).

[2] There is historical precedent for this sort of elision of bodily difference. The Hellenic public sphere, which represented a communal space where private things were hidden and the best that had been thought and seen was brought to a common forum (Habermas, 1991, p. 4) had obvious strengths—the opportunity for civil discourse and decision-making, for example. Yet the "public opinion" that emerged from such discussions often represented a privileged consensus that reflected the needs and desires of those at the top of the power structure. The same dynamic was evident in other spaces as well, such as eighteenth-century salons and coffee houses, where the bourgeois public sphere regulated civil society along capitalist and mercantile lines. "The Self" was taken to mean a bourgeois property owner (Habermas, 1991).

to others in the course? For instance, can students choose their own profile picture, or must they use a university-issued ID photo? The "student self" in the online classroom *not* understood as a diversity of particular, embodied learners by default reflects a homogenous—and anonymously privileged—self. It cannot meet students where they are.

Yet curricular interventions such as assignment design already have an LMS-based, digital-forward component in the online space—as do student selves. When Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* was published in 1985, it represented the most forward-thinking sort of approach to the human. Haraway defines the cyborg as a "hybrid of machine and organism, a creation of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. . . By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are all cyborgs" (p. 272). Haraway's thesis seemed edgy in 1985, but 40 years later, it seems, if anything, like a statement of the obvious. The online student is from the first a cyborg—a pixelated presence that exists first as a username and password and who can, if they so choose, remain just that anonymous throughout their experience. The journey that an affectively aligned classroom initiates, though, calls that student back into the self, back into the body, in a way that may initially seem retrogressive, or digital-backward. Yet in insisting on the importance of embodiment, affective learning requires students to approach deliberately, and hopefully with greater sophistication, the ways they choose to bridge their digital realities with real space, real time, and real bodies that they occupy. We cannot escape our bodies. They carry memories, including cultural histories and inherited traumas, that last a long time. When pained, they arrest our attention and focus it in the here and now. We have arranged the object-world around us in a quest to be comfortable in our own skin (Scarry, 1985). Why, then, would we want to learn outside of the reality that flesh gives us? Even online, embodied learning is best. Asking students in an American history class to explain what they know about their family's heritage or immigration patterns and to locate those within the events discussed in the class allows them both to reduce the cognitive load the class's content imposes and

to feel its reality for themselves. Similarly, asking students in an anatomy class to analyze the strain that their online hours put on their bodies (carpal tunnel, tired eyes, cramped back) and to develop simple mitigation strategies benefits them both physically and cognitively.

In addition to acknowledging embodiment, the LMS must be structured so as to allow for the incorporation of the element of culture, both students' particular cultures and the culture of the virtual space itself. Employer preference surveys consistently identify the ability to collaborate, to work with and communicate with diverse others, and to resolve conflicts as among the most desired skills (Turk, 2002; Crook, 2013). Well-structured online classrooms are especially equipped to teach these skills of civil engagement by developing in students the cultural literacy that undergirds them. Much as the rules in a sport or board game make it possible for all to participate and thrive, so also does a transparent and well-articulated set of classroom practices create a multi-level learning experience, in which students, welcomed in their rich, embodied individuality, come together for a common event, occurring within the culture of the LMS. The "commonness" aspect of affective learning is key, as without people interacting, no one actually *affects* anyone else—yet that common space must be well-defined and orderly, able to function across multiple temporalities, if it is to accomplish its goals.

These "common space practices" define the way that the collective "us" of the virtual learning space will interact—and in so doing, they protect and honor, rather than undercut, the individual selves students bring to the learning event. Indeed, the very idea of civility requires "the existence of a dimension of society which stands apart from, at a distance from, intimate desire, need, and identity" (Sennett, 1974, p. 267). Civility, which Sennett describes as "the activity which protects people from each other and yet allows them to enjoy each other's company" (p. 274) is still evident in various social milieu, such as concerts and sporting events, as well as occasions such as graduation ceremonies, where all graduates receive applause despite any personal animus one may have against another. Occasions such as these build communities across difference, not by pretending such

difference does not exist but by establishing rules of the road whereby people who do not agree or have any natural inclination for each other's company can learn to function productively together. In the virtual classroom, this choreography consists of policies around topics such as attendance and participation, citation and plagiarism, and assignment submission; it also incorporates the rhythms and routines of the class, such as the dates when assignments are typically due, the times when instructors post messages, typical turnaround windows for email responses, and so on. And it includes things such as the look and feel of the LMS's template, material from the institution that filters into students' inboxes, and public representations of the institution. Together, these form a certain "way of being" that, as students grow accustomed to it, is internalized as part of their private architecture, or their illative sense. Culture, in this way, refers to a set of exterior practices that come to seem like part of the self, while also protecting the self's most vulnerable and intimate areas.

One way to understand the secondary culture that the virtual learning space creates, as opposed to the far-reaching cultural backgrounds of each student, is to imagine the LMS as an event space. Event-learning engages students in a cognitive and potentially emotional way, and as it is shared and enacted across a learning space, it creates a community based on shared practice as well (Ritchie, 2018). Event learning must be highly structured and repeatable; it must be aware of the institutional and political context within which it is situated, and it must understand itself as building a microculture within the learning space. It must have clearly articulated, planned for, and repeated moments of engagement, and it must be aware of its own spatial and temporal realities, spread as it is across the locations and timeframes in which each student engages. Event-learning happens in each student's location, on a schedule, and it builds community by choreographing a series of interactions with the course materials and others in the class. Constructed properly, the online learning space's structured, repeated, and sequential nature gives it the potential to become productively ritualized, repeated in a way that builds rather than siphons off meaning, with each student's learning experience adding to the variety of ways that the content can play across audiences. To put this

another way: a well-designed online learning event unites the idea of the curriculum-as-plan with curriculum-as-lived (Irwin and Chalmers, 2017): it is a planned for, structured, and designed experience that engages real people, and, over time and with repetition, contributes to a culture of belonging that grows out of the learning experience. As each student enters the LMS, opens the announcement for each module, participates in curated discussions, reacts to reading assignments and submits materials for peer review, then does this over and over throughout the course, the rhythm of the tasks creates meaningful alignment among its members, even if they are not synchronously connected via Zoom or some other interface. Repetition, not unison, creates a sense of unity.

Imagining learning as an event, like the performance of a symphony that is repeatable on many occasions and in many locations, helps it to steer clear of two of the most common barriers to learning that occur in the online environment. These barriers are well known. On the one hand, online learning is potentially isolating—happening not in the context of the class but in each student's own personal sphere alone. Temptations abound in this direction both for instructors and students, as students, particularly Millennials and younger, are "highly engaged in a process of personal identity development" that leads them to "meet all learning initiatives—consciously or unconsciously—with such questions as 'What does this mean to *me*?'" (Illeris, 2018, p. 12), as though learning is only worthwhile if it fits with the individual's sense of self. On the other, online learning may not be individuated enough, too open about the ways in which it moves students through like goods on an endless assembly line that stamps all learners with the same mark. While some students can and do learn in these two approaches, they are rife with risks that more often than not play out along affective lines. The individualized approach may lead to fear and paralysis on the part of the student, as well as an inability to enter into the culture of the course; the mechanized approach likely produces disengagement, and limits learning to the lowest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. What is wanted is not an in-between that spans the distance between the learning individual and the curricular machinery, but rather a way for the machinery to contribute to the

individual's learning in community. Oakley (2018) notes that while it can be challenging to create successful personal interactions via technology, with established boundaries and clear and repeated standards and practices, it can be done. Over the long term, repeated successful interactions in the LMS create positive, systematized rituals—learning events—that create and add to knowledge.

The shared culture of the LMS makes it possible for students to participate fully in the class while also occupying their own individual cultural positions. Learning is an embodied process at both the individual and communal level (Lemke, 2013), and thus "always an affective experience" (Dernikos, Lesco, McCall, and Niccolini, 2020b, p. 144). How does this work? Ideally, an asynchronous online learning experience will create synergy among the students' individual bodies and cultures by inviting them into the shared culture or event of the class, then in turn asking them to take that culture back to their own bodies and lives. The LMS is used to communicate goals and outcomes, explain the tasks to be performed, and lay out the best ways to get there, typically within a modular format that creates rhythms and appropriate expectations at each turn. In turn, students apply that shared learning to their own lives via assignments with heavy applicability to their own situations. Culture layers on culture: the student engages in a continual back-and-forth between their own cultural and bodily position and the material the course wants to communicate. They do not just study tax accounting but strategize about how best to maximize their small business's refund; they do not just write a persuasive essay for English class but apply those skills to the note they must write to their son's teacher after he reported a playground incident. This outside cultural framework, so insistently present in the online learning space, can either hinder or improve understanding (Greenberg, Sohn, Greenberg, Pollio, Thomas, and Smith, 2019), but the affectively informed classroom assures that it is incorporated in a way that benefits the learner, and that it intrudes safely and productively, within the culture of the class itself. As Illeris (2018) explains it, learning involves an external process of interacting with the environment and an internal process of incorporating new understandings, all of which are managed via the LMS.

The event of learning, then, happens less like a beautifully choreographed ballet than like a cooking demonstration, in which raw materials of various types are brought together into a satisfying product: you may make a carrot cake, and I may make a coconut cake, but we follow the same principles to make confections that are, though not identical, meaningfully similar in kind. The methods for cake baking that we share include those repeated and common elements that the course instructor imbeds in the LMS, but the carrot and the coconut represent the myriad ways that students' varying backgrounds (their diverse geographical, historical, political, perspectival, and experiential differences), as well as their own individual, embodied ways of living in the world, frame their knowledge and give it lift in the real world. A case in point: in the English language, emotions are typically adjectives and result from causes; in Russian, they are verbs and active in their own right (Gabryś-Barker and Bielska, 2013). Might not a student whose parents speak Russian at home understand certain content in Psychology 101 differently than a native Pennsylvanian? Similarly, it seems likely that a student who occupies a position of extreme economic privilege and stability might respond differently to a book chapter about capital gains taxes than a Pell-eligible student who is raising multiple children alone. Both will cognitively and affectively engage the content in ways that reflect their varying ideas of the relationship between justice and cashflow.[3] For this reason, then, virtual classrooms in particular must be forthcoming about their shared and public functions—their common policies and procedures, how they help you make your cake—in order not to elide but to make space for difference.

Because of this continual interchange between the culture of the online class and students' own cultures, students benefit from continual calls from the instructor for mindfulness, self-checking, and other-awareness: where, they should habitually ask, do our responses come from? As Flatley

[3] The relationship between emotion and justice is foundational. Western thinkers from ancient Greece through the British Enlightenment have consistently described emotion as a marker of social difference (Gross, 2006, p. 171), from Aristotle's description of anger as an indication of some injustice or slight to Seneca's description of apathy as "the resignation that comes with accepting one's place in the world" (p. 71) to Hume's description of gratitude as an acknowledgement of another's power.

(2008) has argued, the social structures that shape responses "can only be enduring to the extent that they are woven into our emotional lives in the most fundamental way" (p. 79). The cultural structures and realities that we have internalized, so typically invisible to all of us, show up in much the same way that the wind does—we see the movement it creates, rather than the thing itself. Affective learning thus teaches students to mind "the forces (intensities, energies, flows, etc.) that register on/with-in/across bodies to produce and shape personal/emotional experiences" (Dernokos, Lesco, McCall, and Niccolini, 2020d, p. 5). Individual students' reactions thus point to their own embodied experience at an individual level, and to the ways their experience may or may not fit easily in the culture of the online classroom. In a class with, for example, 20 students each reacting in turn, productive diversity emerges, and the impingement upon each body of a cultural breeze blowing, the effect of one person's selfhood bumping up against another's, can be charted time and again. It is the potential of moments such as this to help us find our way to truth, Deluze and Guattari (1987) argue, that makes good pedagogy so necessary. Otherwise, we either fall prey to the shiny surface of marketing culture (the culture of the online class, university PR lingo, etc.) or, conversely, to the voices in the echo chamber of our own experience (Dernikos, Lesco, McCall, and Niccolini, 2020c).

We need not court controversy to develop engaging content that is likely to help students tease out their own learning positions. For instance, political debate might be analyzed in a history, political science, or communication course. Topics for analysis might include the way that political speech and gesture deploy imagery, symbolism, or language designed to evoke a bodily reaction in order to create an in-group and an out-group, with rhythms of resonance and belonging. For greater emotive effect, recent political content should be used; for lesser effect, content from more distant history can achieve the same outcomes. A similar exercise might be conducted with the #MeToo movement or another polarizing trend in popular culture (Fleig and von Scheve, 1999). Other fruitful fields of analysis may include recognizable visual representations and visual rhetoric, which often carry affective weight because of their ability to go "beyond rational discourse" (Lünenborg, 1999, p.

31). How might visual imagery—a rainbow flag, for example, or a Starbucks logo—build, discipline, and perform the selfhood of an affective community? Concepts such as piety, outrage, "wokeness," and shared mourning, all of which can function well outside the realm of reasoned, logical discourse, may all form the basis for alignments in the community and thus in turn make evident the community commitments through which students interpret data—commitments that are often very difficult to dislodge. To take an example: while various objective data points on climate change do exist, even with substantial time studying the evidence, it is virtually impossible to effect a change in a person's beliefs about it, as group membership, rather than scientific understanding, drives their interpretation (Lenci, 2023).

Thus, as affective learning events, like affects themselves, are situated in culture (Baker, Andriessen, and Järvelä, 2013), and, as there are no "pancultural emotions" (Plummer, 2015, p. 77), no single pedagogical approach can manage the affective impact that information delivered in class might have. Students register information in their own way, through their own political, economic and cultural filters (Clough, 2007), and they make meaning accordingly. This is why, even with some historical context, Americans may struggle to understand Antigone's preoccupation with her brother's burial or the Spanish Civil War context that prompted Picasso's *Guernica* (Berg, Diffenderffer, and Osher, 2023). It is also why we tend to make friends with people who are the most like us; it is simply less risky to enter relationships with people with whom we share in common the assumptions that our home, nation, community, race, gender, sex, skin color, social class, and so on have built into us (Gandhi, 2006, p. 31). At the same time, the two-level culture of the affectively informed online learning space, in which the culture created within the LMS overlays the disparate cultures students bring into the learning space, promises a way to navigate the potential affective chaos that too much differentiation could introduce. That is, the affective learning event offers not an attempt to choreograph students' responses, but a toolkit to help them develop empathy, so that even if they cannot "feel like," they can learn to "feel with."

In some disciplines, the role of empathy in learning emerges readily. The study of history, for instance, will tend to invoke students' own ethnic backgrounds, family histories, sociological affiliations, and so on, all of which influence the way they interpret and integrate historical information (Schwarz and Goldberg, 2013)—and such authenticity is the currency that purchases empathy and participation (Röggla, 1999). Especially with younger learners who tend to focus on personal identity formation, treating history as something that is learned from a space of affective detachment does poor service, both to the discipline and to the learners (Schwartz and Goldberg, 2013, p. 274). To learn to take the perspective of various parties in a historical event is key goal of historical study, after all, as with empathetic identification comes deeper understanding. This sort of perspective-taking requires a formal acknowledgement that individuals in the learning space all bring with them prior beliefs that affect how they perceive information; that their prior beliefs are in large part derived from their peer group; and that they will likely behave in a way consistent with those beliefs (Stiglitz and Greenwalk, 2015). Free from deliberate self-awareness, we tend to behave in ways that reproduce our own social milieu, simply because that is how the world looks to us. This in turn makes the world look all the more that way, as the echo-chamber in which we live turns up the volume on what we were hearing already. Constructing the culture of the LMS, replete with its own rituals, within which a shared set of beliefs can flourish, thus does high-level ethical and interpersonal work that benefits both students in the course and the cultures they occupy.

Group Cohesion in Affective Learning

While the group occupying the residential classroom space can be relatively easily defined by the four walls of the room, plus the larger campus on which that learning occurs, the space of virtual learning must be defined in other ways: by the reach of the community it builds, and by the potential it has to make people pay attention. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) embrace this discussion of learning within flexible spaces. They define two sorts of space, one better suited to repeated, mechanized

processes, such as assembly line-style learning, and another to new learning or creativity. The first, mapped or striated space, "produces an order and succession of distinct forms, and organized horizontal melodic lines and vertical harmonic planes. (pp. 478-79). Within mapped space, with each step in a process laid out, learners will achieve predictable results in lock-step, but they cannot learn anything new, or personalize the process they complete. By contrast, smooth space—the space where new learning occurs—is filled with events and happenings rather than things; it is more affective and haptic in nature than optical. For Deleuze and Guattari, setting bearings within a smooth space leads to better learning than does mapping each step of the journey, check-box style. The learner's journey through the online space, then, should be understood as a free-flowing movement between two lines, one being the learner's own individual starting point (body, culture) and the other the learning goals and cultural practices of the course. This free movement between points enables the learning to make connections along the journey, as opposed to simply arriving at a variety of stops.

The possibilities for relationships to form within the online learning space rely on shared set of practices—pedagogical rituals, or the classroom culture—that reward students for participating in expected ways. In a magisterial work synthesizing Durkheim on rituals with Goffman on microsociology, Collins (2004) argues that in the short term, individuals will make choices and arrive at beliefs based on the emotional energy that stems from social interactions that establish their sense of self and place in society. If they follow the directions, they fit in, and that feels good. Over the longer term, once established, that individual will then choose the practices and rituals that tend to firm up their own social sphere, including symbol systems, solidarity practices, and so on. They then encourage others to participate with them, so widening their circle. In this context, participating in public displays of emotion via, for instance, shared patriotic celebrations or holiday rituals on the positive side and collective expressions of fear, disdain, or envy on the negative, gives individuals a path to belonging and, for those who already belong, strengthens the status quo (Nussbaum, 2013). One need look no farther than a political rally for an example of this sort of group-formation work.

For Nussbaum, the relationship between public emotion and group cohesion argues for the need for affectively discerning leaders, who propagate productive emotions that tend toward the public good, especially sympathy and love. Similarly, within the classroom, the affective appeals that instructors make via shared rituals such as weekly announcements, symbol systems such as grading marks, and storycraft have the potential to shape collective feelings about the teacher, other students, and ultimately the learning process itself (Dernikos, Lesko, McCall, and Niccolini, 2020d).

Instructors may encourage engagement in the culture of the classroom by directly confronting two negative ways to define community: shame and polarization. The presence of shame indicates a social violation—a rule broken, an ethical principle violated. In the learning event, shame-based interactions may rise and fall on the instructor's communication via words, gestures, images, and affective appeals, and may help students to evaluate and state their own ethical commitments (Zembylas, 2020). For instance, a student who is shamed because of a naïve comment made on a discussion board post may have their place in the group re-established by an instructor's wise intervention in the conversation. In some cases, of course, shame is warranted: a student who makes an overtly offensive comment should not be re-introduced into the group without instruction. At the same time, seeing the moment of shame not as a ritual of expulsion but as a moment of productive polarization that can help students to learn empathy, stronger communication skills, and appreciation for difference, can help classrooms perform in a far more instructive way than, say, the world of social media where "uncurated many-to-many communications" so often exhibit the worst sorts of group-bonding rituals (Fleig and von Scheve, 1999, p. 2). In some cases, in fact, when an instructor intervenes empathetically in a way that demonstrates gracious management of a polarizing situation, other students' nerves or sense of potential shame may be calmed, and they may feel more ready to participate and hence to learn (Illeris, 2018; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010). The affectively informed classroom can be an online haven that represents a desirable alternative to the vitriol of social media (Wetherell, Smith, and Campbell, 2023; Mesibov and Drmacich, 2022).

Ritualizing the ways that the classroom runs—its rules, procedures, and look and feel—not only helps learning to happen more seamlessly but also encourages the establishment of affective community, both in the learning space and beyond. Rituals produce the mood that reminds students they are part of a learning culture. Sins and Karlgren (2013) argue that establishing knowledge practices—the routines, procedures, conventions, and so on, that form part of the ways of knowing of the discipline being studied—invite students into well-understood, culturally accepted ways of getting at knowledge. Practices such as laboratory protocols, systematically searching library resources, reading aloud (via recording or live), and peer review can all serve ritual functions and thus build community within a safe and well-known structure (McCarthy, 2020). Repeated over time, these localized practices fall into an emotional cadence, eventually bringing about the transformation of the social institution within which they function (Davis and Bellocchi, 2018, p. 106). Following Durkheim, we might argue that rituals are established as the group together enacts the parts of the ritual and as each group member participates in the ritual's rules and components, eventually adopting those practices as their own (Bellocchi, Davis, and King, 2018). As such rituals are re-enacted across the span of a student's education, they gain affective strength, conjuring entire narrative scenarios and mood-worlds that often prove highly contagious. The collective fear that beginning nursing students share in their first anatomy class likely will, over time, give way to shared excitement about their clinical experiences, and telling this story makes it part of the "us" that propels such students to succeed.

Even if some mood-worlds are inherited and brought into the classroom without the instructor's having encouraged it, the instructor can do much to affect the mood of the class as well—even (and especially) online. Rituals, even simple ones such as beginning each week's module with a greeting video or a meme, can establish a sense of predictability and security that helps students feel safe (Sprenger, 2020). Moreover, repeating various instructional and approach elements will make learning easier for students. If the "course policies" and "library catalog" are always linked

on the left-hand side of the LMS, and if each assignment's rubric can be found in a link within the assignment guidelines, students will, in time, know where to look for these and use them more readily, and each time more comfortably. The haptic ritual of mousing over to the library link produces, with repetition, a positive affective experience of the freedom that comes with knowing how to navigate, and of confidence in the learning process (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

The example of LMS navigation demonstrates that students' attention can be directed not just by offering an unusually strong stimulus ("Pay attention! This will be on the test!") but also by predictable behaviors that remove competing stimuli (Stevens, 2022). If the link is always in the same place, and if Monday morning always brings a friendly video announcement, students will develop productive expectations that bring with them a sense of belonging. To put this another way, students who are comfortable in the rhythms of the LMS and the course know how and when to pay attention, and as such, they enjoy the rewards of being a part of something—an increased sense of belonging, agency, and confidence. An analog may be found in the entertainment industry, that succeeds to the extent that it captures and holds attention. Any individual entertainment asset works by helping viewers distinguish the foreground from the background—what they should notice versus what is simply noise (Manning and Massumi, 2014). Just as a wise director uses camera angles, focus, and lighting to draw the viewer's attention to the protagonist walking anonymously in a crowd, or to the villain whose camouflage and disguise break for only a moment, so also does a wise instructor draw students' attention through all available means—the visual design of the course, specific notations in the course content, and even moments of entertainment. Applied to the space of virtual learning, effective pedagogy helps a student to direct their attention where it needs to go, and as they do this more adeptly over time, they become part of the affective community that the online space hopes to build—a community that will help them arrive more quickly and confidently at the end of their educational journey.

Heidegger's analysis of mood, an agent of attention, proves instructive as we examine the elements of mood that an instructor may attempt to address. *Stimmung*, usually translated "mood," includes both mood in an emotive sense and atmosphere—and atmosphere is certainly something that course designers can deliberately influence. *Dasein*, which refers to a person's inhabitation in a moment, or "being there," can be affected by clear moments of invitation—assignments to complete, call-outs in discussion board posts, and friendly "learn your classmate's name" exercises. *Geworfen*, or "thrown," conjures the feeling of unsettled disconnection that happens when we find ourselves in a world we did not make or bring into being; it is the feeling that so dominates the experience of new students at an institution and that can be met empathetically with explicit and hospitable instruction. *Sorge*, finally, refers to the way that the world signifies for us—what it means to us emotively, and the ways in which we care about it. It is the way in which we import our own individual embodied experiences into the culture of the classroom. For Heidegger, the most powerful moods are those that we do not notice: the ones that we simply assume are part of the architecture of reality—or culture. They are the moods that dominate those who have grown comfortable (Highmore, 2017), and they tend to reproduce themselves across groups, thus setting the whole group's direction.

Within a capitalist system, moods motivate us to buy and consume: when we go to a nice restaurant, for instance, they nudge us to pay attention to the wine menu, even if we don't really care to imbibe that evening (Illouz, 2018). Illouz's (2018) term for such emotions is "emodities"—or emotions reconfigured as commodities that can be produced, transferred, and bought at a cost. The sense of peace that comes over a person opening the lobby door of Club Med, the coziness that unwrapping a Christmas gift inspires, or the spine-tingle that the *Jaws* theme initiates are all manufactured, affective realities that can be shaped with appropriate resources. An extreme example of this is the extent to which members of some groups, particular youth cultures, manage their own affective experience in a way that protects the ego-ideal and reduces potential discomfort (Ziehe, 2018): they direct their attention so as to assure that they do not have to see or experience what is not

comfortable, safe, and desirable. In such a world, the learning event, which produces an affective reality in which supportive rituals help people to feel safe, comfortable, and seen (Ziehe, 2018, p. 217), can become a way of bonding or establishing community, yet it can do so across, not in spite of, difference. Mood reveals the ways students are already related, as their reactions, considered reflectively, reveal the historical forces, personal positionality, and unexpected points of contact among them. Adorno calls these moments of recognition and complicity the "shudder" (Flatley, 2008). Mapping the *stimmung* in this way can reveal connections among people, ways that one person's experience, and their shared emotional reaction to it, mirrors another's (Flatley, 2008), and it can do so across a space of difference that might otherwise be threatening.

Shared emotional reactions, however, can stall out at just that level—emotion—and never make it into the realm of affective learning. An argument about a political system in a history class might drive productive conversation that causes students to evaluate their own positions; it might, however, devolve into a simple exercise in social belonging (Schwarz and Goldberg, 2013, p. 289). Similarly, identifying commonalities among students in a class can, if not properly managed, simply strengthen the status quo; as Sennett (1974) describes it, "through the sharing of a common, collective personality, the more are they diverted from using their fraternity to change social conditions. Maintaining the community becomes an end in itself; the purge of those who don't really belong becomes the community's business" (p. 260). These moments of what Durkheim calls "collective effervescence" can contribute to the affective learning of members in the class, or they can simply shape social bonds, modify status relationships, and create in- and out-groups. Instructors must assure that the virtual space functions as an event that has clear learning outcomes, charted bearings towards which all learners progress. An exercise as simple as distributing a weekly film clip that reflects the course content creates an enjoyable and communal experience that gives students something safe to which to react. Inviting students then to submit their comments or even their own examples creates a second layer of learning and belonging at once. Moments of reciprocity among

students, active responsiveness, and shared mood moments make the journey more efficient and productive (Bellocchi, 2018b), and, to the extent that these remain focused on the course content, they improve cognition. The virtual learning space is—and must be—a place with a purpose.

Why does affective learning matter? One online student, a mother whose youngest child has just begun kindergarten and who is hoping that a degree will help her start her career, logging in at 11 p.m. from Salt Lake City, seems to have little in common with the New Jersey-native solider using his military benefits to earn the degree he never finished after high school or with the nineteen year old who has enrolled in an online college because his crippling social anxiety has made the prospect of moving away to attend a residential campus seem impossible. These students do not share a similar home environment or close personal relationships. They do not come from the same extended family or school system, neighborhood or surroundings. While as Americans all three likely share some elements of their belief systems, laws, and cultural practices, they are really and profoundly different (Frydenberg, Deans, and Liang, 2021). As such, they may want to meet in the virtual classroom space as cognitive players in the same game—nothing more. Yet we know that learning that goes into the realm of the social, the emotional, and the more deeply personal—the affective, in other words—is the only sort that will prepare these students to meet their real-life challenges in a strategic way. How else might a mother who has never entered the workforce learn to complete job-related tasks in groups? How else might a career soldier imagine life after the Army? And how else might a student working through social anxiety find meaningful ways to participate in a professional and personal community? A well-designed assignment that these students, working in a group, can complete will give them needed cognitive content—and moments in that assignment that ask those same students to reflect on and, if needed, adjust their communication style or approach will also yield affective and professional benefits.

The virtual classroom that takes seriously each student's embodied culture not only incorporates those students' real lives into the learning process but also works to produce a common culture that all of them can enter into together. Accessible course materials, an adviser who checks in on the student routinely, and the instructor's personal presence are not simply parts of the rituals of learning that a well-engineered online program incorporates but pivotal meaning-makers—invitations to learn in community in a deeper way. When the institution establishes systems to improve student success, provides resources and opportunities for interaction, and propagates a healthy and branded version of the institution's identity, it gives students the tools to participate confidently and successfully in the common learning event that unites them all. Further, when institutional messaging, tag lines, and practices convey a collective sense of belief, pride, and values that the institution as a whole holds and wants to propagate in its students, those students, over time, start to repeat those messages, and their belief creates a contagious mood. An institution that can tell its own story—where it came from, how it has lived out its mission, and where it will go next—creates the sort of narrative that students can buy into, learn within, and celebrate, both for the culture they represent and for their own embodied selves.

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