Body Awareness

Become aware of affective experiences in learning environments

BEING | Self-awareness

What you will need:

- Groups up to 6
- Individual & group
- 15 mins preparation
- Throughout a course
- Notepad or sketchbook

Related Tools:

- The Superhero in Me
- Social Presencing Theatre
- Inside-Outside Presence

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"Affect can stick to people, objects, places and therefore travel through time. Body Awareness teaches the students to capture their affect and pass it on to others or their future self."

—Timothy Bland

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I. Overview

The process of learning is not limited to the brain alone; the body, too, has a crucial part to play. The learning environment affects the body through physical responses, also known as *affects*, that determine such behavioural modes as the extent to which one is able to concentrate, communicate or grasp a learning concept. Despite being often overlooked, bodily experience has a substantial impact on one's behaviour and learning.

Affect is a force within the biological, neurological or psychological makeup of a person that allows them to register a connection with another entity or the environment around them. This can manifest as a physical sensation like flushing of the skin before feeling embarrassed, or an intangible feeling that is difficult to express in words (Blackmann and Venn, in Coleman, 2016 p.17).

Despite this barrier to language, affect is a form of *embodied knowledge* that allows people to communicate their emotions to others. Affect is also "sticky," meaning it has the ability to attach to people, objects and places, and persist over time (Ahmed, 2010).

Learning outcome

- The student is able to notice and reflect on “affective experience” in their learning

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II. Learning Activity

Students learn to express and reflect on how their body feels in a learning environment, such as a classroom or a library, covering a few sessions up to an entire course.

1. Start a Personal Affective Logbook

4 hrs

Guide the students in keeping a personal "affective log" on a weekly basis. Encourage them to use a variety of creative methods such as poetry, drawing, painting, music or natural objects to express their affective experiences in learning environments.

The logbook serves a space for experimentation: to attempt different methods of expressing oneself. It is not necessary for students to have a clear understanding of what or why they are expressing a particular thing – rather, they should trust that other unconscious parts of themselves do know.

Share these guiding questions for affective experiences with the students:

- How does my posture affect me?
- What sensations do I notice in my body at this moment?
- Do I detect any tension or tightness in any parts of my body?
- Am I breathing deeply and rhythmically?
- Am I able to maintain focus, or am I easily distracted?

Tip: facilitate a safe and supportive environment where students feel at ease expressing their emotions and feelings and can fully engage with the affective experience.

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2. Reflect on Expression of Affective Experience

15 mins

After each entry in their affective logbook, invite students to engage in a free-writing reflection. Encourage them to take a moment to reflect on the impact that expressing their thoughts and feelings had on them. Prompt the students to write down any thoughts that come to mind when they recall contributing to their affective log, without hesitation or correcting themselves.

Please note, as part of assessment *as* learning, students reflect on expressing their affective experience using reflective questions.

3. Engage in Reflection on Affective Experience

15 mins

Guide the students to assess their affective logbook entries and freewriting reflections, allowing them to gain deeper insights into their affective experiences and consider ways to integrate this awareness into their lives.

Please note, as part of assessment *as* learning, students assess their affective logbook entries and freewriting reflections using reflective questions.

4. Create an Affective Product

5 hrs

Instruct students to create a physical product that represents their non-cognitive affective learnings. Ask students to use the content and themes explored in their affective logbook entries as a source of inspiration for the creation process, as well as their reflections from Steps 2 and 3. Encourage creativity and experimentation with different materials and techniques to bring their ideas to life.

5. Sharing Affective Products & Reflecting on Learning

2 hrs

Create an immersive and engaging experience that allows viewers to connect with the affective products and reflect on their own emotions and experiences.

Instruct students to showcase their affective products. Encourage students to create a

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sensory-rich environment by incorporating elements like lighting, music or scents that enhance the emotional ambiance and connect with their affective products.

Ask students not to explain what their affective product (re)presents explicitly. Instead, let the viewers have their *own* affective experience by engaging with the product. For example, by encouraging viewers to interact with the affective products directly. Allow them to touch, observe or explore the physical aspects of the creations.

Then, ask students to share their learning process of becoming aware of their affective knowledge to the viewers, based on their reflections from the previous steps. Remind viewers that the affective experience is subjective and their interpretations and emotional responses may differ. Encourage them to embrace and respect diverse perspectives and emotions.

Conclude the session by inviting viewers to share their overall reflections on the affective journey and the impact it had on their understanding and awareness.

Please note, as part of assessment *as* learning, students answer the reflective questions to guide the overall reflections.

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III. Assessment

Assessing affective self-awareness is a complex task due to its subjective and intangible nature. The student who created the logbook is best positioned to reflect on their own learning experience. Nevertheless, since affect can be shared, others can also connect with it. That is why in Step 5, students are invited to share their overall reflections on the affective journey and the impact it had on their understanding and awareness.

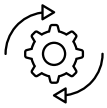
This activity is primarily designed for self-assessment, aligning with the principles of assessment as learning, which is integrated into Steps 2, 3 and 5.

Purpose

Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.

Roles

Self-assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning

Materials

Reflective questions

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Assessment

Reflective questions (Step 2)

1. What bodily sensations or reactions did you feel while adding to your file?

2. What emotions did you experience during this period and how intense were they?

3. Did anything trigger those emotions? If so, what were those triggers?

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4. Did you notice any patterns in your emotions throughout this period?

5. If your logbook could convey a message in words, what would it say?

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Assessment

Reflective questions (Step 3)

1. What did you write about in your freewriting reflections?

2. Did you notice any themes or patterns in your writing?

3. Did you feel any emotions while writing? If so, what were they?

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4. Did any insights or realisations come up during your writing?

5. How could you incorporate affective awareness in your life?

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Assessment

Reflective questions (Step 5)

1. How would you describe your overall experience of the affective journey?

2. What new insights or perspectives did you gain through this affective journey?

3. Did any particular affective product or moment resonate strongly with you? Why?

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4. Did the affective journey impact your understanding and awareness of yourself and others? Please elaborate.

5. How do you think this affective journey will influence your future experiences or interactions?

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IV. Key Advice

Guidelines to create a safe learning environment (Step 1) can be downloaded below.

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Key Advice

Seven golden guidelines to create a safe learning environment
Creating a safe and inclusive learning environment is an ongoing process. By implementing these guidelines, you can foster open communication, a sense of belonging and collective learning:

1. Set clear expectations
Clearly communicate your expectations and routines from the beginning. Ensure that students understand what behaviour is acceptable and what is not. Encourage them to participate in creating these expectations, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility.

2. Build trust
Establish a trustworthy and secure environment by emphasising that anything shared within the group should remain confidential. Encourage students to make their own decisions about sharing personal experiences and respect their individual levels of comfort.

3. Foster active listening
Emphasise the importance of truly listening and understanding. Foster an environment where students feel free to express themselves without fear of judgment or criticism and discourage interruptions. Strengthen active listening skills by teaching non-verbal cues and using prompts.

4. Encourage empathy
Encourage students to consider the feelings and experiences of others and to respond with kindness, acceptance and understanding, even when perspectives differ from their own. Foster an inclusive and respectful environment where empathy is valued and embraced as an essential aspect of communication and mutual understanding.

5. Be a role model
Lead by example and embody the behaviour you expect from your students. Treat all students with respect, fairness and kindness, and appreciate their diverse backgrounds, individual strengths and contributions. Ensure the safety and well-being of all students by promptly and decisively addressing any form of harassment or discrimination. Reflect on mistakes and offer apologies when necessary.

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6. Adapt the pace and intensity

Recognise when emotions escalate and become overwhelming, adjusting the pace or intensity of the activity as necessary. For example, implement the "five-minute rule", where each student can express their controversial view in a respectful manner, or offer a short break for students to journal and reflect on their emotions, enabling them to regulate their feelings.

7. Follow up and check-in

Encourage students to reflect on the impact of the experience on themselves as well as the group. Provide individual or group follow-up and inquire about the well-being of students. Offer the opportunity for further discussion or support if needed. If you believe that the emotional intensity or well-being of the students exceeds your expertise, do not hesitate to seek advice from a student advisor, mental health professional or the appropriate support services provided by your institution.

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V. References

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