Towards a Theory of Collective Care as Pedagogy in Higher Education

Cory Legassic

Abstract

This piece offers a conceptual framework for collective care as pedagogy in higher education, and a proposition of how to theorize its orientations within anticolonial and feminist work on affect in education. First, I spotlight work that helps to define collective care. Next, I call on the concept of affective individualism as a way to describe what is: the taken-for-granted affective governmentality (Zembylas, 2021) that shapes how we often come together in our classrooms. Finally, I ground collective care as pedagogy as the building of affective solidarity, an affective conceptual framework for what could be, grounded in the feminist work of Clare Hemmings (2012).

Introduction: Collective Care in a Time of Crisis

I teach higher education in a time that calls for more collaboration in classrooms rife with anxieties. Responding to research on student engagement, experts celebrate the shift to collaborative learning environments in schools, where students turn to each other for deeper engagement through a wide range of active learning strategies (Strelan et al., 2020). Across the disciplines, students are increasingly urged to collaborate—from note-taking and active reading, to working together with the help of smart technologies, problem-solving in spaces designed for group work, and pursuing group projects. But collaborative learning does not occur in a vacuum: we teach on an unequal playing field. COVID, racial injustice and the climate crisis are only a few of the contexts exacerbating the inequities and anxieties shaping lives in and out of the classroom.

This piece offers a conceptual framework for collective care (as much-needed) pedagogy in higher education, and a proposition of how we may ground its theoretical orientations within anticolonial and feminist work on affect in education. Feminist anticolonial education facilitates learning, together, ways of resisting heteropatriarchal colonial and imperialist forms of knowledge production that come to life through education discourses, institutional structures, and pedagogical approaches (Logue, 2021; Ramos & Roberts, 2021; Smith, 2021).

As a starting point, *collective care* "refers to seeing members' well-being—particularly their emotional health—as a shared responsibility of the group rather than the lone task of an individual" (Mehreen & Gray-Donald, 2018). In the initial stages of my doctoral research, I am gathering individual and collective reflections, alongside literature about affect and learning, to work towards further developing a definition of collective care that grounds its care as a form of resistance to powerful colonial discourses of wellbeing that inhere in higher education. This work is also a love letter to New School at Dawson College in

Montreal, Quebec, where I have been a facilitator, faculty member, and coordinator for the last 15 years (as part of my regular full-time position as a Sociology and Humanities teacher). At the time of writing, New School is celebrating 50 years of holding space for alternative education models in Quebec's public CEGEP system. CEGEPs (collège d'enseignement général et professionnel) are publicly funded colleges unique to Quebec that provide technical and pre-university programs—all supported by mandatory general education courses in English, humanities, physical education, and French.

It is not my goal here to write a history of New School, or to focus on its many emergent practices. Rather, I am reflecting on my own, and with others, about what makes New School a worthy contribution to conversations about wellbeing in the wake of recent pandemics that are also shaped by the legacies of ongoing endemic violences. When my colleagues and I try to put a finger on the longing in our teaching that New School nurtures in contexts of multiplying crises, collective care is that special quality that deserves appraising and protecting through further research.

In her book *Reconstructing Education* (1992), New School co-founder Greta Hofmann Nemiroff describes New School's pedagogical model as "critical humanistic education." Much of that pedagogy comes alive in testimonials and stories we have been collecting leading up to New School's 50th anniversary celebration in the spring of 2024. When different generations of New Schoolers share their experiences, most remember what New School *feels* like, that it's a relational learning philosophy in action.

Fig. 1a: A New School group during class time, a decade ago

Fig. 1b: A New School group during class time, a decade later

On the page, critical humanistic education is an ongoing commitment to bringing together the lineages of humanistic education and critical pedagogy in higher education classrooms. Off the page, our students (mostly 17- to 20-year-olds) speak about the embodied experience of gathering in learning circles, sitting on couches, or on the floor with pillows; they emphasize the check-ins and grounding activities where we help each other be a little more present after long days. Pedagogically, New School is about emerging curriculum, participatory course design and "self-to-subject" approaches to learning outcomes. Perhaps most profound is what I would describe as our *leaning in* together, each according to their means, to the learning edges that emerge. "Learning edges" (Adams & Bell, 2016, p. 74) connotes the affective and cognitive dissonances that emerge in learning, an integral part of New School's group effort at learning to care for each other in the collective discomfort that often surfaces in social-justice-oriented learning spaces. At our anniversary party, a New School alumna (Class of 2020) shared a poem entitled "The Room," which describes an embodied experience of learning in one of our classrooms that resonated with a packed audience of alumni spanning five decades who came back to celebrate with us:

Note to the Future Student

You are the student in this room.

Your story is as broad as albatross wings

and as deep as the ocean beneath them.

I can write about the room you sit in,

but I cannot write about you,

for you have crossed mountains

whose names I do not know,

and plains whose flowers I have never seen. (Santavy, 2020)

The power of Santavy's words come in part with their acknowledgment of difference and dissonance as part of the learning experience, an emphasis on leaning into discomfort. As a teacher, student, and emerging practitioner-researcher, I want to lean into New School’s attention to embodied conditions of learning together and help articulate more explicitly the ways collective care—as described in, but certainly not limited to, this example—works at its center.

Despite much being written about collective care in transnational feminist, decolonial, Black, and Indigenous scholarship, little scholarly literature is available to ground how we might work with collective care as a theoretical framework within education. The most fruitful fields have been critical affective pedagogies, critical scholarship on care, and the activist literatures that proliferate outside academia around mutual aid and community care. Like most concepts that do not exist in a discursive vacuum, collective care as a guiding concept is also subject to the same critical concerns that single out, for example, EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion) initiatives as suspect and ultimately complicit (in their impacts) with other racist and colonial higher education policies (Henry et al., 2017). As teachers, we grapple with the complexities of our institutional structures and cultures, and work to challenge the complicities of our higher education classrooms in reproducing epistemic violences. Accordingly, this essay aims to offer a way to center collective care within anticolonial and feminist approaches to affect-based theories in education. My proposition to ground collective care in these lineages is genealogical (Foucault, 1980), providing an alternative to those lineages that have profoundly shaped Western education. To do this genealogical grounding work, I define collective care as pedagogy through elaborating the relationship between the concepts of *affective individualism* and *affective solidarity* in higher education classrooms.

Through tracing, describing, and analyzing the relationships between key concepts, this essay becomes a portrait of collective care in three broad strokes. First, I spotlight some important work that helps to contextualize and define *collective care*. Next, I call on the concept of *affective individualism* as a useful way to describe *what is*—the complicities with colonial epistemic violences and the taken-for-granted affective governmentality that shapes how we often come together in our classrooms (e.g., taking aim at some emotional hegemonies within Social Emotional Learning [SEL]). Finally, grounded in the feminist work of Clare Hemmings (2012), I theorize *wellbeing* in ways that move beyond the legacy of affective individualism, rather toward *affective solidarity*, an affective conceptual framework for *what could be* in our classrooms. Affective individualism and affective solidarity are conceptual poles that create productive analytical tension for holding collective care accountable to its political commitments when applied to the growing field of critical affective pedagogies. I outline this conceptual framework for collective care with an eye to future research on developing collective care as pedagogy (praxis) in higher education.

On Collective Care and Critical Affective Pedagogies

In 2018, I started considering collective care as a meaningful framework because of a workshop in a series we organized through New School—"Teaching Outside the Box"—which focused on the concept of collective care as a response to teacher burnout. Additionally, in the following years, I continued to explore collective care with New School colleagues as a theme in further reading groups on decolonizing and abolition pedagogies, and monthly teaching support circles which we called "Collective Care for Teaching Community." (For the love of study groups, read Leigh Patel's (2021) "No Study Without Struggle is a Love Letter.")

Moving from learning with teachers about collective care to enacting collective care in the classroom and exploring the concept with students, I recently co-designed and co-facilitated a New School course on Care and the Climate: Critical Thinking in a Time of Crisis (Fall 2023). Drawing on discussions and resources within our teachers' collective care support circle, my co-facilitator and I explored with students four different dimensions of care within our lives: 1) self soothing, 2) self care, 3) community care (as collective-care-from-below), and 4) structural care (as collective-care-from-above). These dimensions draw from the work of Deanna Zandt (2020), who frames community care as the "workarounds for systems that don't inherently support care" and structural care as "systems that support community care, self-care and self-soothing." To facilitate understanding of these dimensions, we asked students to share their own experiences and thoughts about care as multi-dimensional. The result was a large poster on a bulletin board in our learning space with four quadrants containing a forum of over one hundred Post-its (see Figure 2). In our facilitated discussions, we grappled with the nuances of the different dimensions: for example, asking how police do or do not fit into this grid for different-bodied folks. The next step in this essay is to situate the complex nuances of these dimensions of care within everyday lived contexts.

Self-soothing (yellow): Activities that provide distraction and/or comfort in difficult times

Self-care (pink): Activities that help you find meaning, and that support your growth and groundedness

Community care (blue): Workarounds for systems that don't inherently support care (i.e., capitalism!)

Structural care (green): Systems that support community care, self-care, *and* self-soothing

Fig. 2: Four dimensions of care: student Post-its

The Care Manifesto (The Care Collective et al., 2020) maps "political care" from an interdisciplinary perspective across different spheres—"from caring politics, caring kinships, and caring communities to caring states and economics as well as caring for the world" (DeCuir, 2021). Current crises can be framed at multiple scales around the world as forms of *carelessness*—naming both the ongoing neglect, harm, and structural violence that continue to act on targeted communities and the marginalized histories of care and care-related activities, practices, professions, and institutions. Conversely, "We also need to account for the ways that care, intimacy, and tenderness are also media of violence," especially where systematic racial violence is embedded in "practices, policies and policings that name themselves as care" (Antwi, 2024, pp. 10, 23). Taken together, collective care is a politics that "puts care front and centre" at every scale of life, but as "a social capacity and activity involving the nurturing of all that is necessary for the welfare and flourishing of life" (The Care Collective et al., 2020, p. 5). It is in these contexts of carelessness, or "being loved to death" (Antwi, 2024), that I continue to look for feminist and anticolonial lineages for collective care that refuse on a basic level any notion of care that denies the interdependencies of living.

A radical politics of care is necessarily collective in its "moving back and forth from notions of proximate physical and emotional care, through theorizing caring infrastructures and the nature of an overarching politics of care, to conceptualizing care for strangers and distant others" (The Care Collective et al., 2020, p. 22). For me, that distance is not just represented by faraway places, but also, for example, the distance that inheres in my own learned relationship as a settler to the land and waters that I call home. Collective care orients us toward a politics of intimacies and relationships, and thus requires a grappling with a relational understanding of both ontology and epistemology. How does affect-based work do this theoretical work for collective care?

Affect theories help us to move an understanding of collective care away from a focus on wellbeing as the interiorized property of pre-given individuals:

> Affects are the forces (intensities, energies, flows, etc.) that register on/with-in/across bodies to produce and shape personal/emotional experiences. In other words, affect is not what you feel, as much as it is an event that forces you *to be(come) affected, to feel some-thing* (Shaviro, 2010). A body then is a processual "event" constantly being re/modulated through affects, rather than a static and self-contained entity being acted on from without; a body is defined not by what it is, but by what it *does* and *can do* (Clough & Halley, 2008; Massumi, 2015; Puar, 2012). (Dernikos et al., 2020, p. 5)

Affect theories take embodiment seriously by emphasizing "the ways in which multiple figurations [discourses being but one such figuration] interact to produce the sites, scenes and episodes of social life" (Wetherell, 2013, p. 358). It becomes clearer that *collective* not only describes the collection of individuals in a given context of mutual care, but also necessarily centers the conditions of care as an ongoing, relational, embodied process (remembering that care can reproduce and/or resist violence). How does affect scholarship help us think critically about wellbeing, collective care, and pedagogy in higher education?

Feminist lineages, within what is described as an "affective turn" across disciplines, are important for bridging affect and education. Feminist anti-racist affect theorists who write about higher education—like Sara Ahmed in "Queer Feelings" (2014) and *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), and Megan Boler in *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* (Boler & Greene, 1999)—are useful guides into the field of critical affective pedagogies. Critical affective pedagogy takes seriously "the ways in which affect is also a means to address the critical, and makes visible the power and privilege that develops and maintains limitations that are placed upon various forms of thinking, ways of being, and the bodies that become consequentially tied to . . . discourses of power" (Cartun, 2017, p. 30). Thus, I situate collective care within work on critical affective pedagogies because it constitutes an integrated framework— a container that can hold together cognition, affect, and relationality in the context of the tensions between human individuals and collectives in learning contexts, while always considering power.

Accordingly, collective care as pedagogy can be understood as the work in education of resisting affective individualism and developing our capacities for affective solidarity. The field of critical affective pedagogies has not made analytical use of *affective individualism* as a quintessential problematic in social justice higher education. In the following sections, I introduce the problematic of affective individualism and the possibilities of affective solidarity to help ground the onto-epistemological commitments of collective care as pedagogy within feminist anticolonial education.

Collective Care as Against Affective Individualism

Feminist and anticolonial scholars use the concept of *affective individualism* to describe the problematic of a colonial (Enlightenment) onto-epistemology (Bhattacharya & Kim, 2020): a colonial way of understanding how we know ourselves as humans in the world that limits the conditions and possibilities of how we learn together. With recourse to the problematics highlighted in affective individualism, we can begin to unpack how formal education organizes our emotional and embodied lives in classrooms through discursive practices such as managing anxiety through "self-regulation" or stress through "time management"—and their implications on notions of selfhood linked to property, governance, capital, and hyperindividualism. Schools organize wellbeing within dominant discourses of care that produce a subject who is "autonomous, entrepreneurial, and endlessly resilient, a self-sufficient figure," whose care is organized around self-enhancement and self-discipline, but whose needs for care are internalized as pathologies (Bhattacharya & Kim, 2020, pp. 5, 12, 23).

Affective individualism is deeply rooted in the "intimacy of four continents," a turn of phrase that traces the interwoven and interlocked "coeval global processes of settler colonialism, slavery, and imported colonial labor, as the conditions for British and American national formations of liberty, liberal personhood, society, and government at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries" (Lowe, 2015, pp. 20–21). Affective individualism was first coined in 1977 (Stone) to describe a Western figuration of a "liberal subject" through shifts "in disciplining of gendered subjectivity and desire in relation to family and home" (Lowe, 2015, p. 21). But Lisa Lowe pushes the problematics of affective individualism further conceptually to signal a deeper shift of Enlightenment worldviews into a colonial ontology (beyond Stone's original focus on marriage and family):

> Philosophy elaborates [the liberal] subject with interiority, who apprehends and judges the field of people, land, and things, as the definition of human being . . . as a particular fiction that depends on the "intimacies of four continents," in other words, the circuits, connections, associations, and mixings of differentially laboring peoples, eclipsed by the operations that universalize the Anglo-American liberal individual. (Lowe, 2015, p.21)

I work with Lowe's definition here of affective individualism as describing the (re)shaping of an affective subjectivity. Critiques of affective individualism identify colonial affective "structures of feeling" meant to organize how we come to understand what it means to *feel* human (or less human, or non-human): these are affective structures held up by a repertory of habits of thinking and feeling, discourses, informal and formal rules, categories and institutions that scaffold colonial knowledge production (Zembylas, 2002).

Dominant discourses today on wellbeing in higher education follow a neoliberal framework of care that reflects Lowe's framing of affective individualism as both a way of being and learning/knowing. Neoliberal notions of care depend on a consumer-subject who is always-already lacking and, more specifically, in our schools, a student-subject committed to "habitual self-doubt" (Hemphill quoted by brown, 2021, p. 18) under a white supremacy culture of urgency and perfectionism (Page, 2019). From the problematic perspective of affective individualism, wellbeing can be mobilized as a form of capital for political gains (Phipps, 2016) within educational contexts. For a recent example, we can look at how the language of safety is being used on North American campuses to justify the policing of campuses by governments (Kouri-Towe & Matthews, 2024).

The problematics of wellbeing in higher education, as shaped by affective individualism, are a good starting place for working on frameworks and methodologies that bring our bodies and our senses into understanding the role emotions play in shaping collectivities and power relations in the classroom. One site where these discourses of self-regulation and hyper-individualism are working powerfully, and gaining currency, is the field of social emotional learning (SEL).

Since the 1960s, the growing field of SEL has done a lot of work to make emotional literacy into a framework for learning, and sometimes as a learning outcome in itself, mostly through focusing on developing skill sets for students. My own teaching has benefitted from the literature and skills-based approaches that come out of SEL resources, but I question the reductive discourses around emotions that are normalized through SEL. Dominant in SEL discourses is a centering of the individual within a context of self-awareness, self-management or self-regulation, interpersonal dynamics, and productive decision making (with its pillars of autonomy, agency, and individualism).

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)—a multidisciplinary network across the US that includes researchers, educators, practitioners, and child advocates—has become a good site to catch the pulse and orientations of emerging SEL approaches (Casel.Org, n.d.). For example, the CASEL website points to the trend of "transformative Social and Emotional Learning" with its central aim of facilitating a "critical examination of individual and contextual factors that contribute to inequities and collaborative solutions that lead to personal, community, and societal well-being" (Casel.Org, n.d.). Despite a turn in SEL toward responding to inequities, I don't see CASEL or transformative-SEL advocates

challenging the dichotomy of reason/emotion through which emotions are disciplined, subjugated to reason, or seen as sites of control that are socially, culturally, and politically situated (Boler & Greene, 1999). SEL's advocacy for emotional intelligence and emotional safety is "dependent perhaps on not noticing that these discourses and practices in education create certain exclusions and inclusions" (Zembylas, 2014, p. 543). Greco and Stenner (2008) ask, for example: "How does knowledge about emotion enter into the power configurations of our time? How does it contribute to the ways in which individuals and collectivities can both affect and be affected?" (p. 13). And, I would add, how might those limitations perpetuate harm in the classroom and risk playing out as what Linda Jacobson (2021) calls "white supremacy with a hug"? Critical affective pedagogy scholarship asks these questions but could be better served by identifying the problematic of *affective individualism* as a conceptual anchor in these discussions. In other words, problematizing affective individualism becomes a productive starting point for a theorizing of collective care as pedagogy and for my interest in further developing New School's pedagogical approach.

Critiques of affective individualism help to better articulate the critical humanistic approach taken by New School. They highlight the possibilities and problematics of calls for a more humanizing education "because," as Nathan Snaza (2020) argues, "what is at stake is precisely the articulation of the human in relation to its constitutive outsides: the inhuman, nonhuman, and less-than-human" (p. 117). Humanistic education discourses are "thus always already about a struggle over what the human is and how it is effectively policed" (Wynter, 2003, as cited in Snaza, 2020, p. 118). In other words, our calls for humanizing education risk reproducing the same colonial divisions between thinking and feeling that fuel colonial ontologies. The student poem cited earlier intimates the pedagogical possibilities in surfacing the "affective milieu of the classroom" as political. Certainly, unsettling feelings become grounds for collective care that challenges individualist discourses of wellbeing and care that shape the taken-for-granted conditions that produce the "I," "us," "them" (and all of the exclusions and absences they in turn produce) in our classrooms. I want collective care as pedagogy to challenge affective individualism as the paradigmatic condition for learning.

But unlearning affective individualism is not a standalone event, or an easy switch into some new way of thinking or way of being—much like anti-racism is not a new, enlightened identity or perspective one simply adopts. The long, hard work towards collective care comes in cultivating an openness to confronting what we don't know we don't know about different ways of being and relating in the world. Critically unpacking affective individualism as a colonial ontology can be understood within an "ontological politics" that requires such an "ontological openness" (Emmanouil, 2017). But engaging in this ontological politics in a classroom can't just be thinking work—it requires a pedagogy for groups that supports a diversity of complex embodied positionalities and praxes. At New School, I think of the different embodiments and emotional literacy that are at work in class discussions in the Care and the Climate course, where students were responding to the storytelling of Pacific Islander communities who are forced to relocate because of rising sea levels (Solnit et al., 2023). Collective care as pedagogy asks, what constitutes good feelings and bad feelings when different stories of displacement emerge from students in the classroom? How might these lead to conversations about differing complex relationships to land (and water)? How do our frameworks for feelings shape the conditions for solidarity in the

classroom? What surfaces differently in and on our bodies, and how have we learned to make sense with what we don't know we don't know about ontological differences? And how do we carry the weight of these conversations differently outside of the classroom? How do we support each other when the answers don't come, and the unknowing feels unsettling? As Zembylas (2014) notes:

> There is no satisfactory basis on which to assume that an atmosphere that feels safe, welcoming and caring to one person will feel that way to another person. . . . People who face systematic injustices daily generally recognize that feelings of trust and safety are not prerequisites of participation, but privileges endowed by existing hierarchies. (p. 543)

Collective care as pedagogy stays with Zembylas's sense of risk here, and in doing so takes seriously bell hooks's (1994) warning against the possibility of a universal applicability of comfort in the classroom. The key question intimated here is how do we care for each other when the learning environment may be one that risks feeling unsettled, anxious, and fraught.

In the next section I describe what happens affectively when learning and relationships in the classroom challenge the kind of regulatory goals of affective individualism. As different students experience varied levels of affective dissonance, there is a pedagogical opportunity for developing affective solidarity as a powerful framework for how we can care for each other in unsettling moments.

Collective Care Through Affective Solidarity

So what is *affective solidarity*? Let me start off with what it is not. Affective solidarity is not a commitment to calibrating a group of people (facilitators and learners) into sharing the same feelings and experiences. The distinction here parallels the discussions in social justice classrooms around the difference between equality and equity (where justice is not about the same treatment but fair treatment that responds to inequities). The distinction holds closely and carefully how power shapes the ways we come together in the classroom. Following a feminist tradition of exploring the relationship between reflexivity and power, I propose grounding a theory of collective care as pedagogy explicitly in Clare Hemmings' (2012) elaboration of affective solidarity, and those whose work builds upon Hemmings (i.e., Luzynski et al., 2023; Zembylas, 2022).

Affective solidarity as a political mode of relationality and engagement moves away from "empathy as the primary affect through which affective connections with others might be achieved" (Hemmings, 2012, pp. 147–148). Instead, affective solidarity describes a mode of engagement that "draw[s] on a broader range of affects—rage, frustration and the desire for connection—as necessary for a sustainable feminist politics of transformation, but that does not root these in identity or other group characteristics" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 148). Black feminists (Crenshaw, 1991; Taylor, 2017) have developed the analytical framework of intersectionality for resisting an understanding of experience through the comfort of monolithic identity categories, but it is important work to translate intersectional approaches to the affective economies that underlie the relationship between experiences, affects, and power relations in the classroom (without decentering a feminist analysis of anti-blackness).

Reflecting on the ways my various positionalities and experiences interact with those of colleagues and students, social justice pedagogies have taught me to be wary of innocence and guilt, and rather to move toward responsibility—or response-ability. Relevant to this response-ability, Hemmings (2012) urges us to look for "modes of engagement that start from the affective dissonance that feminist politics necessarily begins from" rather than look for points of shared empathy (p. 148). Affective dissonance is the experience of tension between ontology and epistemology—that "feeling that something is amiss in how one is recognised, feeling an ill fit with social descriptions, feeling undervalued, feeling that same sense in considering others" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 150). This dissonance can become a political impetus in the classroom. And to further understand affective dissonance as a starting point for defining affective solidarity, it helps to understand the theoretical lineage from which it emerges: the feminist tradition of exploring the relationship between reflexivity and power.

Affective solidarity emerges from the field of feminist epistemology and picks up many of its critical reflexes: stressing the significance of intersubjectivity and relationality; valuing modes of knowing that prioritize dialogue and collectivity; highlighting "feeling for others as a way of transforming ourselves and the world"; highlighting the centrality of process as well as content; prioritizing the ability to appreciate the other, to render them a subject rather than object of inquiry; and "centering the 'other' in an alternative, politicised epistemology" (citing various authors, Hemmings, 2012, pp. 148–151). Key to this philosophical project, affective solidarity asks us to resist "the privileging of ontology over and above *the negotiation of the relationship between ontology and epistemology*" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 152). Or, stated another way, developing a praxis for "staying with the trouble," in ways that build community (Haraway, 2016).

Here, feminist reflexivity is an active reflection on (negotiation of) the difference between one's own sense of being and what the world makes possible (conditions for being / knowledge of being); an active shuttling back and forth between ontology and epistemology (how we negotiate what we experience about our being and the social ordering of knowledge and power about being) (Hemmings, 2012; citing Probyn, 1993). I can offer examples of affective dissonance from experiences facilitating New School groups and teaching regular stream sociology courses: racialized students grappling with the monolithic category and legacy of *settler* together, alongside white and Indigenous students; students' discomfort with or outright refusal of the label *feminist* despite their feminist politics; neurodivergent students necessarily and strategically navigating an ableist discourse of "accommodations" with other students; students feeling like they don't trust science "because everything is ideological"; and more. I have experienced this in my own life with my ambivalence to social categories (like "gay") that I have nevertheless leaned into at times in order to find community—as a form of strategic essentialism (Sharma, 2015).

Affective solidarity is the praxis of finding nurturing ways to do the work of looking into each of these examples from a framework of intersectionality, while considering how many of these experiences (among so many others) also intersect with each other in classrooms. More than examining discourses, and critically *thinking* our way through these ambivalences, we need affective strategies that tend to the ways we have internalized these ambivalences as powerful classroom affects (or "conditioned tendencies" [Haines, 2019]). Affective solidarity knows the limits of challenging white supremacy as

solely an intellectual project, and speaks to the effort of working on unlearning embodied white supremacy. Somatic abolitionism describes “living, embodied anti-racist practice and cultural building” (Menakem, n.d.) and insists that “all of us need to metabolize this trauma [of white supremacy], work through it with our bodies (not just our thinking brains), and grow up out of it” (Menakem, 2017, p. 25). In order to know differently, we have to feel (and sit with feeling) differently.

Affective dissonance is central to feminism and can be “theorised as the basis of a connection to others and desire for transformation not rooted in identity, yet thoroughly cognisant of power and privilege” (Hemmings, 2012, p. 154). Where a clear understanding of affective solidarity is important, and perhaps counterintuitive to how we might understand solidarity, is asking how we might “square a focus on affective dissonance with the necessity of engaging others without a presumption of reciprocity” (Hemmings, 2012, p. 155). Feminist theorists consider empathy to be an essential part of an “ontology of connectedness,” but also caution that empathy can block feminist praxis from moving from individual feminist reflection to collective engagement (Hemmings, 2012; Tong, 1997). Through empathy, we run the risk of misrecognizing the other, bending their experiences to the service of our own feminist knowledge project; thus, empathy “may signal a cannibalisation of the other masquerading as care” (Kaplan, 1994, as cited in Hemmings, 2012, p. 152). What if what we think is significant about others (especially in moments we experience as empathy) may be marginal to the other’s sense of self? This colonial politics of recognition (Coulthard, 2014) is another characteristic of affective individualism. Desiring a connection with others through empathy can rush us too quickly out of the potential generative connection that comes in being present for each other before settling into some form of understanding.

Affective solidarity means creating space for not having the same affective experience (emotions, bodily responses/needs, coping mechanisms, etc.); it means not assuming a universal or essentialized understanding of feelings, or that any shared feelings stem necessarily from the same understanding of experience, or nature of being (ontology). Where I see promise in affective solidarity as a conceptual tool for theorizing collective care within a critical affective pedagogy is in its commitment to explore affective dissonance in collective care that allows for a more dynamic, rather than essentializing, account of experience. It moves us away “from a feminist politics based in identity, . . . while nevertheless retaining the importance of politicized transformation of . . . social relations” (Hemmings, 2012, p. 158). When pedagogical strategies explore affective solidarity, through feminist reflexive praxis, “this may be a productive basis from which to seek solidarity with others, not based in a shared identity or on a presumption about how the other feels, but on also feeling the desire for transformation out of the experience of discomfort, and against the odds” (Hemmings, 2012, p. 158). We need strategies for learning to become attuned to our own bodies and feelings, and the feelings of others, in ways that will foster deeper response-ability as we engage in challenging discussions and collaborative work.

To conclude with some possibilities, building affective solidarity might require us learning more about the “amygdala hijack” together—having a kind of basic literacy of neurobiology and the ways our fight, flight, freeze, and appease responses shape the ways we collaborate in our discussions (Gold, 2021)—and how those responses are also shaped by histories and contexts. Social justice education should encourage students to feel injustice in ways that don’t reproduce what Zembylas calls “affective governmentality.”

We can unlearn anxiety as just a "bad feeling," and rather learn to develop such unsettling affects as sites of transformative work in collaborative classrooms—being comfortable with being uncomfortable in ways that encourage care for inequities, and developing our "windows of tolerance" for unsettling work. Trauma-responsive education looks at students developing their window of tolerance as a capacity to stay present in high-intensity deregulating learning environments (i.e., Siegel, 2020).

Perhaps another strategy worth investigating—moving us from a pedagogy organized around discomfort (Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012) toward collective care as pedagogy—is exploring co-regulation. Co-regulation refers to skills that students develop in relation to one another in the classroom when tackling discomfort (Daniels, 2020), as opposed to the common emphasis on self-regulation skills (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011), where students are encouraged to manage stressors on their own. Most research on co-regulation has focused on early childhood contexts**,** but I want to highlight its potential in the field of higher education as a dimension of pedagogy that can facilitate affective solidarity. Co-regulation for collective care would not be about feeling the same things, but listening and holding space for each other's bodies in the classroom as we grapple with the many interlocked crises that shape our times. Finding ways to build affective capacities intentionally together is the fieldwork of affective solidarity: it is an important priority in collective care as pedagogy.

Critical affective pedagogies do not take for granted that the desire for empowerment and resistance are a "natural resource" in critical pedagogy or social justice education; instead, they center the affective tensions around issues of empowerment and resistance at the heart of that work (Amsler, 2011). Collective care as pedagogy can transform classrooms into spaces for more embodied learning that is "not merely disciplining the body with new repertoires, but doing so in the context of opening up the body's capacity to know itself as permeable, and moveable, with other bodies; . . . an imaginative invitation to engage in knowing otherwise" (Leander et al., 2023, p. 33). In my time at New School, I think I have felt what I am coming to know as experiences of affective solidarity—in feelings, actions, or as something "in the air." Collective care as pedagogy is the work of cultivating the conditions for affective solidarity. I think it's in the culture and materiality of the space we share, how we facilitate ways of being together in the classroom, opportunities to care for each other while learning strategic ways of being vulnerable with each other, as responsibly as possible. I want to develop collective care as a transformational pedagogy that could help us rehearse a radical care that we need in order to face the trauma and systemic violences that threaten our interdependencies.

References

Adams, M., & Bell, L. A. (2016). *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822392781

Ahmed, S. (2014). Queer feelings. In *The cultural politics of emotion* (NED-New edition, 2, pp. 144–167). Edinburgh University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09x4q

Amsler, S. S. (2011). From "therapeutic" to political education: The centrality of affective sensibility in critical pedagogy. *Critical Studies in Education*, *52*(1), 47–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2011.536512

Antwi, P. (2024). *On cuddling: Loved to death in the racial embrace* (1st ed.). Pluto Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/jj.8501591

Bhattacharya, K., & Kim, J.-H. (2020). Reworking prejudice in qualitative inquiry with Gadamer and de/colonizing onto-epistemologies. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *26*(10), 1174–1183. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418767201

Boler, M., & Greene, M. (1999). *Feeling power: Emotions and education*. Routledge.

brown, adrienne maree. (2021). *Holding change: The way of emergent strategy facilitation and mediation*. AK Press.

Cartun, A. (2017). *The affective archive: Supporting critical-affective practitioners and pedagogies in teacher education* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder]. https://www.proquest.com/openview/382f034abcdfcc929981eacf4c81c9af

Casel.org. (n.d.). Casel.Org. Retrieved February 21, 2023, from https://casel.org

Coulthard, G. S. (2014). *Red skin, White masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. University of Minnesota Press. https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1793913

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299.

Daniels, E. R. (2020). *The regulated classroom: Bottom-up trauma-informed teaching: A new somatosensory and polyvagal-informed approach to creating safety and connection in the classroom*. Independent Publisher.

DeCuir, G. (2021, June 9). *The interdependence of care: A conversation with The Care Collective - NECSUS*. https://necsus-ejms.org/the-interdependence-of-care-a-conversation-with-the-care-collective/

Dernikos, B. P., Lesko, N., Niccolini, A. D., & McCall, S. D. (2020). Feeling education. In B. P. Dernikos, N. Lesko, S. D. McCall, & A. D. Niccolini (Eds.), *Mapping the affective turn in education: Theory, research, and pedagogies* (1st ed., pp. 3–27). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003004219

Emmanouil, N. (2017). Ontological openness on the Lurujarri dreaming trail: A methodology for decolonising research. *Learning Communities: International Journal of Learning in Social Contexts*, *22*, 82–97.

Foucault, M. (1980). Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews* (pp. 139–164). Cornell University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501741913-008

Gold, E. (2021). Trauma-sensitivity. In *Essential resources for mindfulness teachers* (pp. 177–188). Routledge.

Greco, M., & Stenner, Paul. (2008). *Emotions: A social science reader*. Routledge. http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0816/2008016530.html

Haines, S. (2019). *The politics of trauma: Somatics, healing, and social justice*. North Atlantic Books.

Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

Hemmings, C. (2012). Affective solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation. *Feminist Theory*, *13*(2), 147–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700112442643

Henry, F., Dua, E., James, C. E., Kobayashi, A., Li, P., Ramos, H., & Smith, M. S. (2017). *The equity myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian universities*. UBC Press.

Hofmann Nemiroff, G. (1992). *Reconstructing education: Toward a pedagogy of critical humanism*. Praeger.

Jacobson, L. (2021, April 6). Social-emotional learning or "white supremacy with a hug"? Yale official's departure sparks a racial reckoning [News website]. *The74*. https://www.the74million.org/article/social-emotional-learning-racial-reckoning-yale-center-departure/

Kouri-Towe, N., & Matthews, S. (2024, May 3). Debates on campus safety in response to Palestine solidarity activism show we need strategies to navigate discomfort. *The Conversation*. http://theconversation.com/debates-on-campus-safety-in-response-to-palestine-solidarity-activism-show-we-need-strategies-to-navigate-discomfort-228865

Leander, K., Carter-Stone, L., & Supica, E. (2023). "We got so much better at reading each other's energy": Knowing, acting, and attuning as an improv ensemble. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 1–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/10508406.2022.2154157

Logue, J. (2021). Gender, anticolonialism, and education. In J. Logue, *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1383

Lowe, L. (2015). *The intimacies of four continents*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822375647

Luzynski, C., Caretta, M. A., & Tanner, E. (2023). Vulnerability and affective solidarity: Feminist assemblies in Appalachia under and after the Trump presidency. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 31(3), 1072–1091. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13077

Mehreen, R., & Gray-Donald, D. (2018). Be careful with each other: How activist groups can build trust, care, and sustainability in a world of capitalism and oppression. *Briarpatch*.

Menakem, R. (n.d.). *Somatic abolitionism | Anti-racist practices*. Resmaa Menakem | Embodied anti-racist education. Retrieved February 24, 2023, from https://www.resmaa.com/movement

Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*. Central Recovery Press.

Page, K. (2019, November 5). *White supremacy culture in organizations*. COCo. https://coco-net.org/white-supremacy-culture-in-organizations/

Phipps, A. (2016). Whose personal is more political? Experience in contemporary feminist politics. *Feminist Theory*, *17*(3), 303–321. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700116663831

Probyn, E. (1993). *Sexing the self: Gendered positions in cultural studies*. Routledge.

Ramos, F., & Roberts, L. (2021). Wonder as feminist pedagogy: Disrupting feminist complicity with coloniality. *Feminist Review*, *128*(1), 28–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/01417789211013702

Santavy, A. (2020, September 7). *Rooms*. Explorations | SPACE. https://space.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/explorations/article/rooms

Sharma, N. (2015). Strategic anti-essentialism: Decolonizing decolonization. In K. McKittrick (Ed.), *Sylvia Wynter: On being human as praxis* (pp. 164–182). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375852-007

Siegel, D. J. (2020). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are* (3rd ed.). The Guilford Press.

Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (3rd ed.). Zed Books. https://ca1lib.org/book/17408769/98df44

Snaza, N. (2020). Love and bewilderment: On education as affective encounter. In B. P. Dernikos, N. Lesko, S. D. McCall, & A. D. Niccolini (Eds.), *Mapping the affective turn in education: Theory, research, and pedagogies* (1st ed., pp. 108–121). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003004219

Solnit, R., Young Lutunatabua, T., & Gill, J. (2023). *Not too late: Changing the climate story from despair to possibility*. Haymarket Books. https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/fac_monographs/320

Stone, L. (1977). *The family, sex and marriage in England 1500-1800*. Harper & Row. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.01414

Strelan, P., Osborn, A., & Palmer, E. (2020). The flipped classroom: A meta-analysis of effects on student performance across disciplines and education levels. *Educational Research Review*, *30*, 100314. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100314

Taylor, K.-Y. (2017). *How we get free: Black feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Haymarket Books.

The Care Collective, Chatzidakis, A., Hakim, J., Littler, J., Rottenberg, C., & Segal, L. (2020). *The care manifesto: The politics of interdependence*. Verso.

Tong, R. (1997). Feminist perspectives on empathy as an epistemic skill and caring as a moral virtue. *The Journal of Medical Humanities*, *18*(3), 153–168.

Wetherell, M. (2013). Affect and discourse—What's the problem? From affect as excess to affective/discursive practice. *Subjectivity*, *6*(4), 349–368. https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2013.13

Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—an argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, *3*(3), 257–337. https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015

Zandt, D. (2020, November 11). The unspoken complexity of “self-care.” *Medium*. https://medium.com/@deanna/the-unspoken-complexity-of-self-care-8c9f30233467

Zembylas, M. (2002). “Structures of feeling” in curriculum and teaching: Theorizing the emotional rules. *Educational Theory*, *52*(2), 187–208.

Zembylas, M. (2014). Making sense of the complex entanglement between emotion and pedagogy: Contributions of the affective turn. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, *11*(3), 539–550. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-014-9623-y

Zembylas, M. (2021). Affective strategies of abolition pedagogies in higher education: Dismantling the affective governmentality of the Colonial University. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *54*(2), 121–135.

Zembylas, M. (2022). Post-truth as difficult knowledge: Fostering affective solidarity in anti-racist education. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, *30*(3), 295–310.

Zembylas, M., & McGlynn, C. (2012). Discomforting pedagogies: Emotional tensions, ethical dilemmas and transformative possibilities. *British Educational Research Journal*, *38*(1), 41–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.523779

Zimmerman, B. J., & Schunk, D. H. (2011). *Handbook of self-regulation of learning and performance*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Cory Legassic is a faculty member in the Sociology and Humanities Departments as well as a coordinator for New School at Dawson College in Tio'tia:ke (Montreal, Quebec). He is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. He is a recipient of the Canada Graduate Scholarships—Doctoral Program Award as well as the 2022 SALTISE Best Practices & Pedagogical Innovators Award for college instructors.