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## Pivoting Feminist Praxis: From Writing Collective to Pandemic Pedagogies

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## Pivoting Feminist Praxis: From Writing Collective to Pandemic Pedagogies

Before the pandemic, we, Sabine, Lauren, and Casey, would meet regularly on our university campus for something we called Feminist Write Club (FWC). We would get together in an empty classroom to share food, coffee, research goals, and pedagogical practices. We also schemed about how to address structural inequities, worked our whisper networks, laughed, complained, cried, and sometimes even wrote. Taking up space on campus each week worked as an effective and affective space for feminist collaboration and a public statement about our work, its volume, visibility, and value (see also Burkholder et al., 2021). This practice was abruptly disrupted by COVID-19. In finding ways to continue FWC at a distance, we have noticed that FWC has become a space where we make sense of our pandemic teaching approaches through intersectional feminist praxis. In what follows, we outline how FWC has pivoted in response to the conditions of the pandemic, the demands of the university, and the needs of our students. We see feminist praxis as shared, self-reflexive, and anchored in responsiveness to the community (Fuller, 2020).

Our aim has been to enact a feminism that is intersectional, and to center our teaching, supervising, and research around an ethics of care (Noddings, 2002). We center our ethics of care in an intersectional framework, responsive to institutional and historical inequities around the axes of race, gender, class, ability, and colonialism (Crenshaw, 1989; Fuller, 2020). This care is rooted in our recognition of our positionality as three cis white women, straight and queer, employed at a mid-size university on Canada's east coast. Two of us have had to navigate the challenges wrought by a global health crisis as working parents of small children, and one of us while leaving a 20-year relationship, caring remotely for a family member, and selling and moving out of a house. It's been a lot.

We know that we are not teaching online classes, which have particular pedagogic logics associated with them that our courses were not designed around. Rather, we are teaching classes that have had to pivot to online delivery modes because of the health risks posed by gathering together with our students in physical classrooms.

Gone are many of the ways we previously exercised our models of care, from visiting each other's offices, to making sure a stash of snacks, menstrual products, tea, condoms, pens, and crisis resource brochures was kept well-stocked for students via a central "Help Yourself Shelf" (Burkholder et al., 2021). Instead, we find ourselves connected to our students and each other via mediated screens and asynchronous conversations.

We are making use of the lessons we have learned from our FWC experiences and from each other as we strive to craft pandemic learning and teaching environments that work for most everyone in our classes, including ourselves. We are keenly aware of how every aspect of this pandemic aggravates existing social inequalities in cascading ways (Kent, 2020).

We circulated surveys to our students at the outset of the semester that included questions like: As your instructor, what would you like me to know about your life during the pandemic? Do you have reliable internet service? Do you have access to a computer that you can use for coursework? Will you have access to a quiet, private space to focus? Do you have obligations or commitments that may pose challenges to your class participation, such as needing to care for

others, or needing to plan around a work schedule? Do you have any accessibility concerns or requests for taking this course online?

Based on our students' responses, we developed a variety of delivery models for our courses that are built on pillars of maximum transparency, flexibility, and accessibility for students across time zones, technological access levels, and pandemic work and care commitments (Fuller, 2020; Juhasz et al., 2020). Casey, for example, offers her courses in a fully asynchronous format to address the unpredictability of childcare amidst the pandemic (for herself and for her students). For Sabine and Lauren, synchronous and asynchronous elements are interwoven to offer students options for engaging in the live class conversations they (and we) miss, while making materials available asynchronously via recordings and alternative participation options.

We've had to get creative hosting classes via our university's remote learning platform, while making room for venting about how soul-crushing alternative remote delivery methods are for us all (Ahmed, 2016). Sabine advocated for the timely adoption of a university-wide chosen name policy, made all the more urgent by the move to digital, account-based teaching and learning encounters. We encourage and invite, but make a point never to require, camera use in our live classes, because while we want to see our students and their cats, dogs, and kids, we know that not everyone has stable internet or wants us to see their living spaces, roommates, or bedhead. We have made room in our classes for sharing the grief, frustration, fear, burnout, and anxiety people are experiencing in spades. We have also shared with our students an eagerness for connection, the intimacy and trust necessary for home-based learning, and the humour to be found in learning curves, context collapses, surprise cameos, and tech fails. Our online classrooms have become a space for students to see clearly illustrated the feminist tenet that the personal is political and the political personal (Juhasz et al., 2020).

We have struggled to streamline our course requirements while preserving core objectives because we know everyone is overwhelmed by the contours and challenges of their own personal pandemic experience (Figure 1). We've explored less hierarchical learning structures while away from the architecture of lecture halls, flexed generosity, and expressed gratitude when students have extended us the same grace. We accommodate. We listen. We support. We hold close the principle that less prep, more presence is what is needed now, "to ask ourselves and others for a deeper listening... a multidirectional listening where we are willing to see our interrelatedness as humans and our desire to connect across the power lines, oppressions and harms [that] separate us" (Fuller, 2020, p. 20).



**Figure 1: Lauren demonstrates that everything is fine**

As part of this feminist ethics of care, we try to mitigate the human toll of the pandemic on our students and communities with the limited power we do have. We offer extensions, exemptions, and compassionate consideration to students that have been diagnosed with COVID-19, have lost their only source of income, or are grieving the loss of family members from far away. These experiences have reminded us that being privy to the complexity of the multidimensional lives of others is a responsibility we take seriously, and that teaching from an ethics of care is not for the weak of heart. Sharing our own humanity with our students and connecting deeply with each other can be as transformative as it is tiring.

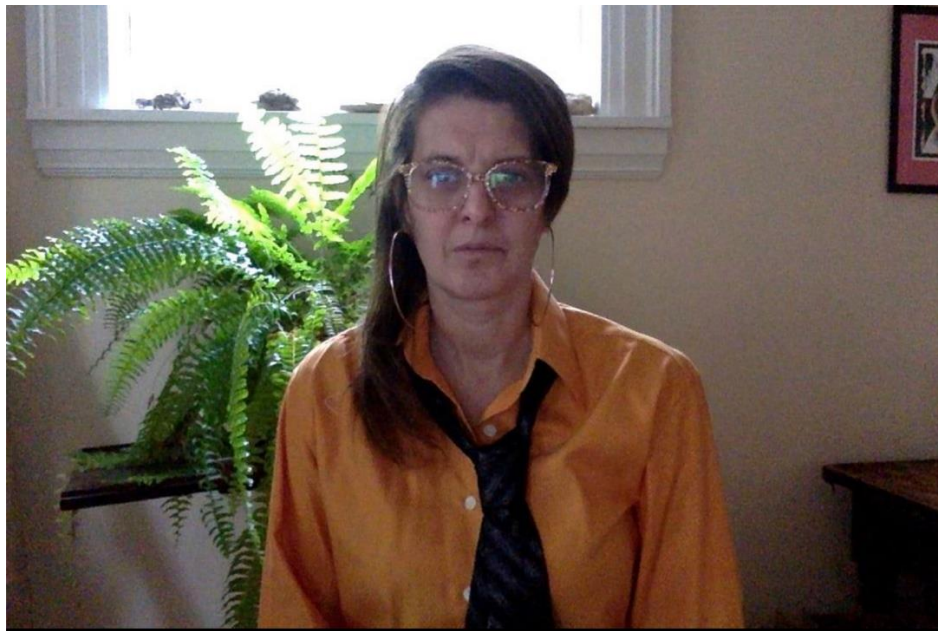
FWC isn't just about feminist pedagogy, it is also importantly about feminist praxis, which for us is also rooted as much in shared laughter as in eye rolling (Ahmed, 2016). We spend so much of our time together scheming and laughing, whether we meet in person or online. Laughter is central to our praxis: it destabilizes the patriarchy, disrupts the spaces of the academy, and offers a haven from the pressures of academia (Ahmed). Our laughter can be warm, inviting, and razor sharp all at once. We use our laughter to support one another as praxis.



**Figure 2: Co-curating an online learning experience**

We are centering our own humanity as professionals, as teachers, as researchers. Sometimes Casey's kid is in her lecture videos (Figure 2). Sabine's cat, Harvey, once barfed very loudly during one of her lectures. And yet, we have been thinking about how we also hide the fact that we are up at midnight or at 5:00 a.m. making lecture videos and writing emails and grading papers and finishing articles. Because we want to model good boundaries for ourselves, our students, our colleagues.

We've been thinking about how difficult this whole situation is.



**Figure 3: Sabine showing up**

And still, we show up (Figure 3). Because that is what good feminist pedagogues do. We model, we share, we laugh, we whisper, we scheme, we fight back collectively, and we do the mother fucking work, even when we would rather sit back and do anything else.

Revising this piece months later has made us think. It strikes us that the hopefulness that we articulated feels distant. Our campus has prioritized a return to in-person teaching models, however, pedagogical challenges and public health precarity compound. The affective labour we engage in—as good feminist pedagogy—has also intensified, and we remain committed to FWC as a space to make sense of it all. The work is ongoing. Our feminist strategizing continues as the conditions change.

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