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Feminism, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Kindness

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> Feminist politics of care are not only about describing the conditions of care in the world as it is, but also about the risky speculative politics changing the order of things by becoming people who care. Thinking with the work of care in mind can then be a political act that points to a generic refusal to push away activities and affects that are dismissed as petty and trivial in a particular setting: for instance, in "serious" knowledge, politics, or theory.
>
> —Maria Puig de la Bellacassa, "Thinking With Care"

> All caring teachers . . . see that to be successful in the classroom (success being judged as the degree to which we open the space for students to learn) [we] must nurture the emotional growth of students indirectly, if not directly.
>
> —bell hooks, *Teaching Community* (130)

Feminist theorists use a number of pedagogical techniques to resist existing structures of domination and oppression. In *Methodology of the Oppressed,* Chela Sandoval argues that feminist scholars use different terms including "trickster," "coyote," "mestiza consciousness" (Gloria Anzaldúa), "sister/outsider" (Audre Lorde), "margin" (bell hooks), or "cyborg" (Donna Haraway), and by reading across the disciplinary boundaries of critical race theory, cultural studies, feminist studies, queer theory, and global studies one can see how each phrase helps feminists to conceive of a "methodology of the oppressed" (Sandoval 170). Shifting technologies of resistance are, for Sandoval, a "complex kind of love in the post-modern world, where love is understood as affinity-alliance and affection across lines of difference" (169). This article seeks to radically reconceptualize kindness as one such "technology of social transforma-

tion" (2). As Michalinos Zembylas argues in "'Structures of Feeling' in Curriculum and Teaching," it is important to note that we need to analyze emotions as "cultural formations" (188). That is, we need to theorize the ways that feelings "play a critical part in the construction of teacher identity, subjectivity, and power relations" (188). Here, we seek to explore how kindness might produce pedagogical relationships that sow the seeds of possibility for the transformation of our students' lives. In particular, we ask: how might we imagine a feminism that uses kindness as a pedagogical strategy? And what might feminist kindness in the classroom do to the lives, bodies, experiences, and identities that inhabit these spaces? We do not conceptualize kindness as a pure feminine emotion,[1] nor do we imagine that kindness is free from co-optation or appropriation for neoliberal or conservative political projects, as emotions remain a central

site of social control in education (Boler 11). We begin, then, by defining feminist kindness and complicating contemporary perceptions of its possibilities as they are understood in historical context. We next examine kindness's impure history by using an interlocking feminist analysis, employed by Razack (*Looking*), to examine its relationship to imperialist endeavors aimed at maintaining oppressive racial, class, and gender orders. In doing so, we demonstrate that who is allowed to claim kindness, and on behalf of whom, remains tied to existing structures of white supremacist heteropatriarchal ableist domination. That is, kindness has been and continues to be used to explicitly marginalize othered bodies. From the institutional exploitation of kindness to persuade women to work for lower wages, forego promotions, and sacrifice their own interests in the name of nurture and love for their students, to the scripting of women of color as always-already angry and refusing to behave "kindly" or with gratitude to the institutions that oppress them, kindness has been deployed by higher educational institutions in ways that maintain existing structures of power, and are, therefore, nontransformational. And yet, despite its polluted history and complicated present, we argue that we should not abandon kindness as a feminist pedagogical strategy. Where it is used, how, and by whom matters. To this end, we aim to provide a critical reimagining of kindness through a "politic of accountability" (Razack *Looking*). We understand a politic of accountability as a way of accounting for our own forms of race, class, ability, and professional privilege, an accountability we argue is essential to any methodology of kindness. Understanding kindness as a microtechnique for both resisting and

shaping power relations within classrooms and institutions, we explore its utility as a tool for coalition building across difference and provide concrete pedagogical and curricular suggestions demonstrating some ways to put this educational theory into practice.

Defining Kindness

The etiology of kindness is the root word of "kin," "kindred" (family), and "kind" (type), suggesting that a relation of kindness among groupings remains a central part of human relating (Rowland 207). And yet, in conducting a search on kindness, one finds a more limited bibliography than one would expect. This bibliography is particularly limited when one searches for uses of kindness in pedagogical contexts, which reveals only two hits (Rowland, Lampert). As Stephen Rowland argues, "the concept of kindness is singularly silent in accounts of teaching excellence, student satisfaction, or professional values" (208). Kindness in the contemporary moment continues to be an under-researched emotion even in the midst of a surge of work in emotion and affect theory. Of course, as theorists of kindness note, this is no accident. As Stephen Rowland argues, perhaps because of the challenging and vulnerable path of pursuing kindness as an affective goal, during the Industrial Revolution, kindness came to be associated with the domestic realm and was contrasted with the masculine pursuit of industrial toil. As a result, kindness as an emotion was simultaneously feminized and devalued. In their cultural history of kindness, authors Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor argue that in post-Augustinian Christianity, the joyous element of kindness was ignored, and instead, "Kindness became linked,

disastrously, to self-sacrifice, which made it a sitting duck for philosophical egoists such as Thomas Hobbes, who could easily demonstrate that self-sacrifice was rarely practiced even by its most ardent proponents" (19). As a result of this systematic project, critics ignored the profound pleasures of connection through kindness and kinship and instead highlighted the possible consequences of opening oneself up to the pain of others (Phillips and Taylor). As a result, we have reached the state of affairs in which "speaking (or writing) about kindness in the context of research, or indeed any discussion of education, brings about embarrassment. Such embarrassment signifies a transgression of accepted boundaries: what Mary Douglas calls "matter out of place" (qtd. in Rowland 207). Of course, there are good reasons for why speaking about kindness violates normative boundaries. Phillips and Taylor note that historically the turn away from kindness accompanied the rise of free-market ideology in the nineteenth century, during which we saw the abolition of laws aimed at protecting people living in poverty and instead witnessed a heightened call for the importance of protecting one's own self-interest (39). Specifically relevant to the academy, an ongoing climate of intensifying neoliberalization, a divide and conquer approach to labor, an emphasis on "audit culture" (Rowland), and an intensification of competition and a growing climate of what feminist theorist Janice Hladki calls a "culture of diminishment"[2] all contribute to a dismissal of the virtues of kindness. Phillips and Taylor give as a central definition of kindness that it is "the ability to bear the vulnerability of others" (8). That is, they argue (in ways that reiterate some of the primary findings of disability theory about the importance

of interdependence rather than independence)[3] that there is an "alternative Enlightenment account of kindness that avoided these dangers, by treating self and other as interdependent. Here the self was seen not as isolated but as inherently socially formed through its kindly relations with others" (Phillips and Taylor 28). Following Rowland as well as Phillips and Taylor, we advocate for a form of kindness in the classroom that can bear the vulnerability of others and that bothers to do the labor of being compassionate while not giving in to forms of leniency that make appraisal impossible. This has been described by Stephen Rowland as the form of kindness that is "built upon a commitment to social justice" and that "embraces critique" (208).

Colonization, Charity-Based Models of Disability, and Imperial Benevolence

Kindness historically emerged alongside moral superiority in white bourgeois subjectivity (Heron). In exploring and conquering the colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, white European individuals came to know themselves in relation to Others; one of the ways they did so was by helping premodern "others" to enter modernity through imperial strategies of "civilization"—strategies that were deemed to be intimately connected to kindness. Of course, in doing so, European colonizers helped to shore up the self as different from the Other (Said). The civilization mission was imagined as a benevolent act in which those who advanced knowledge would bestow their kindness to backward Others. Civilizing missions were not conceptualized as domination, oppression, or control in

official discourse, but rather coloniza-
tion was often referred to as a "do-good"
activity. In other words, it was perceived
as an act of kindness to help those who
could not help themselves.

In their history of kindness, Phillips and
Taylor show that kindness must be prob-
lematized, as it is sometimes an emotion
that people perform in order to prove their
moral worth. One example that they give
is what was known as "'moral weeping,' in
which privileged women indulged in wax-
ing poetic about their own 'extreme soft-
heartedness'" (27). As Phillips and Taylor
note, "Skeptics had a field day mocking
sentimentalists who wept over orphaned
puppies while paying their servants star-
vation wages" (27). Troubling forms of
kindness are also found in the "helping
imperative" that remains characteristic
of contemporary approaches to accom-
modating people with disabilities. This
"do-good" approach is sometimes termed
a charity model (Wendell; Thomson). Here,
people with disabilities are imagined as
docile bodies: passive, without agency,
and in need of charity from able-bodied
people. Instead of conceptualizing restric-
tions for people with disabilities as ableist
violations of their human rights, people
with disabilities are conceptualized by
the charity model as objects to be both
pitied and controlled (Thomson; Wendell;
Razack, *Looking*). As Robert McRuer fur-
ther argues, this pitying gaze is part of a
system of compulsory able-bodiedness
that assumes that "they" would always
rather be "normal."[4] Of course, broader
state and political projects are not the only
places that kindness is misused. Women
educators historically have been cast as
the "caring police" in which their emo-
tional behavior is carefully scripted and
in which they are compelled to practice a

pedagogy of compassion while simultan-
eously being forbidden from expressing
anger (Boler 69). In another vein, Valerie
Walkerdine notes that women educators
are compelled to do the work of the state
in terms of teaching their students to
follow the rules (see also Boler 69). As a
result of problematic and erroneous bio-
logical understandings of gender, women
are imagined to be more sensitive, com-
passionate, and kind, and as a result,
asked to do the majority of service work
in academic departments. Feminist theor-
ists have explored how women have been
socialized to put others' needs before
theirs—or "live for others"—and how this
results in compromised lives and needs
(Blum et al.), and, we would add, careers.
"Celebrity academics" who lead high-pro-
file careers involving lots of travel regularly
leave the "caring" for the department,
administrative staff, and students to their
colleagues on the ground, a highly gen-
dered practice that shows how kindness
at home does not a career make (Lynch,
Baker, and Lyons; Clegg and Rowland).
In this way, we can see how ideologies of
kindness and of women's roles as nurtur-
ers have helped to hold them static in the
academy. Moreover, caring labor takes
a toll on women educators' well-being
and health, as this type of labor is very
time-consuming and can be stressful or
overwhelming. Part of our agitating around
a politics of kindness is also accompan-
ied, therefore, by the call for institutions to
recognize and valorize this important care
work, especially as it is mostly performed
by women.

Thus, kindness has historically been,
and continues to be, a project inflected by
assumptions around gender, race, class,
and ability, as is the history of emotions
themselves. The kindness of women edu-

cators is, of course, a racialized category, as Black women are asked to be "mammies" to departments in ways that can interrupt their research time and scholarly work. Where women of color transgress the "mammie" role, they often encounter accusations of anger, hostility, and irrationality, as emotions unwarranted in "rational" and "objective" academic work. As Sara Ahmed's recent work in *The Promise of Happiness* also highlights, faculty of color, queer faculty, and feminist faculty face particular challenges to being read or seen as "kind." Reflecting on the ways that "feminist killjoys" and "angry women of color" are presumed from the start to create unhappiness, many teachers may feel that students will reject any attempts to build connections or pedagogies of care. Ahmed argues that "the body of colour is attributed as a cause of becoming tense, which is also the loss of a shared atmosphere . . . As a feminist of colour you do not even have to say anything to cause tension" (*Promise* 44). Research on the uses of kindness also reveals it to be operationalized in problematic ways. For example, in the discipline of psychology, research on the possibilities of loving-kindness meditations in some cases has mandated professionals to exhort their patients to be kind in ways that seem troubling. For example, one study claiming to investigate the possible uses of loving-kindness recommended compelling refugees to attend counseling that would exhort them to be kind. One refugee who had lost most of her family during Pol Pot's brutal regime in Cambodia was told by the research team that when she acted in an angry way to her family, she would be causing them distress, whereas "if she practiced loving-kindness, then she would be making merit for herself, her living relatives, and those who died in the Pol Pot

period" (Hinton et al., 825). In this way, this woman was compelled to feel and practice loving-kindness or else risk being told she was failing, as she was explicitly instructed by the researchers that "if she wished to get better, she had to cultivate positive states, and that her medication and other treatments would be effective only if she did so. As an example of a positive state, DH gave the example of laughing, and to demonstrate this, DH laughed and got her to laugh along with him. There was quite a shift from her sullen state" (Hinton et al. 822). This racist narrative, replete with tales of a sullen and unresponsive native informant, suggests that professionals know better than their research participants that kindness is the only responsible reaction to trauma. Here, we see clearly how kindness can be misused.

Kindness is both affectively and effectively complicated. It is naïve to exhort teachers to be "more kind" as if all bodies and faculty exist in the same circumstances within the academy. As advocates of kindness as a political tool we recognize the ways in which anger and rage have a meaningful place in the academy, as 1970s feminist consciousness-raising groups demonstrated in their work aimed to politicize emotions, including anger (Boler 19). Feminist anger directed toward the academy is central to the project of changing the most oppressive tactics of the institution. Although some bodies—particularly bodies of color—have been more penalized than others for the expression of righteous rage, we want to support the anger of faculty, students, and staff as they both survive and resist the racist, sexist, homo/transphobic, and ableist academy. And yet, we also wish to suggest that, as anger has its place in our toolbox of resistance, so too does kindness.

By providing a description of how kindness has been and continues to be mobilized, we aim to demonstrate our unromantic attachment to kindness. We recognize that kindness is a multilayered concept with a rich and complicated history, one that included its strategic deployment in ways that further imperial projects, or resulted in the marginalization of othered communities. These imperialist, ableist, and sexist forms of kindness above reveal the risks of this affective goal. In their groundbreaking article theorizing kindness in the classroom, authors Clegg and Rowland note that there is a "risk in not only writing about kindness, but in the kind act itself. The paradox of kindness is that it can lead to acts that by intention are kind but may involve misjudgement and harm to the others" (723). Kindness as a political tool could never be deployed solely as an intention. To assume an act is kind, or to revel in one's kind feelings, disallows opportunities for social transformation. Rather, kindness must be understood and operationalized as an act or engagement with those around us to confront oppressive practices in the academy while simultaneously remaining accountable to systemic forms of discrimination in our communities. Given that educational institutions are situated within white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy, "Feeling kind is not enough" (Clegg and Rowland 724). Although Clegg and Rowland's brilliant article does much to theorize kindness, it does not fully unpack its connection to racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism. In this way, we aim to further Clegg and Rowland's work to show that connecting kindness to inequality is important in preventing this pedagogical strategy from replaying systemic forms of violence.

Reviewing the Feminist Academy: What Possibilities Are There for the Deployment of a Micropolitics of Power?

Before turning to the ways that we deploy a methodology of kindness as part of a micropolitical analysis of power in the academy, it is useful to briefly review the current state of the feminist academy. The institutionalization of academic feminism means that the university is a central place that students come to learn feminist theory and practice, understanding that these two are firmly interlinked. Because the academy remains one, though by no means the only, of the central places that feminists are trained, it provides an ideal vantage point from which to reflect on feminist pedagogy. In the current moment, we understand higher education organizations, including Canadian universities, to be a place of "recolonization." We borrow this term from Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, who define the phrase as the current "global realignments and fluidity of capital [which has] led to further consolidations and exacerbation of capitalist relations of domination and exploitation" (xvii). Certainly, this involves curriculum. As Mohanty maintains, how educators structure curricula should not be immune from criticism regarding the production of knowledge and power. Focusing on the ways that Third World women are represented in the linking of the "local" and "global" in women's studies curriculum, Mohanty asserts that recolonization and practices of domination occur in and through the curricular choices we make. According to bell hooks (*Teaching to Transgress; Teaching Community*), education can be a practice of justice and freedom.

Yet, both the Canadian and US academies reflect the current intensification of neoliberalism, a trend resulting in the increased corporatization of education (Mohanty).

According to Alexander and Mohanty, women's studies programs in the United States (and we would add Canada) have not adequately addressed white supremacy[5] and capitalism, and thus have in fact bolstered Eurocentricsm and racism in the academy. Of course, women's, feminist, and gender studies programs and feminist scholarship also foreground imperialism, Eurocentrism, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and Islamophobia in their challenges to gender and sexual norms and women's experiences, with women of color feminisms leading the way in the United States. In Canada, critical race scholars and specifically members of the Researchers and Academics of Colour For Equity (RACE) are at the forefront of writing and organizing against (neo)liberal and racist feminisms in the academy.[6] Yet the academy's hierarchal structure based on gender, race, class, and disability and its reliance on a "banking system" of education has meant that such voices are often marginalized or silenced.

In the academy, liberal conceptions of the rational individual still reign supreme, and educational and research pursuits are based on neoliberal economic prescriptions of free-market competition for limited funding and comparative advantages in original and individual theories,[7] while there is too often too little to gain from community mobilizations and collective research and activism. The increasingly neoliberal academy reflects a broader culture of neoliberalism identified by Lisa Duggan. Referring to welfare reform and law and order in the US, she explains

that, "in both arenas, neoliberals have promoted 'private' competition, self-esteem, and independence as the roots of personal responsibility, and excoriated 'public' entitlement, dependency, and irresponsibility as the sources of social ills. And in both arenas, state policies reflect and enact identity and cultural politics invested in hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality as well as class and nationality" (Duggan 14). For feminists in the academy, the experience of marginalization and the neoliberal competitive atmosphere, described as a "chilly climate" (Chilly Collective, 1995), often means the lessening or lack of communal and collective processes of learning, research, and community action. Of course, the climate is differentially experienced by trans people, queer people, communities of color, and people with disabilities in ableist, heterosexist, and predominantly white institutions, understanding that these communities of course overlap. Individuals in the academy may experience self-doubt, self-criticism, and self-loathing, and they may mimic dominant and powerful individuals so as not to be overlooked for promotions and other opportunities. Such power dynamics often reproduce violent forms of engagement in the classroom, including using fear as a motivator for students, employing shame-based or humiliating educational strategies in seminar and small-group classes, and exhibiting a competitive style of engagement. In the classroom, an atmosphere of fear and competition can create another type of "chilly climate" where isolation and lack of peer support are predominant concerns, especially among graduate students. By way of contrast, kindness may help to foster an environment where students wish to

collaborate with one another and exchange ideas. As Kathleen Fisher documents in her article "Curiouser and Curiouser: The Virtue of Wonder," curiosity is an emotion necessary to learning and discovery, one that thrives more easily in an environment where students feel safe to try out different ideas and to dialogue with one another. In this way, a pedagogical commitment to kindness also helps to foster curiosity, an essential feature of education. In Fisher's words: "By cultivating students' intellectual curiosity, we encourage in them a more balanced set of scholarly skills and attitudes, and we help them to grow in wisdom, kindness, and generosity."

In response to neoliberal globalization, Mohanty and Alexander suggest an anticolonialist, anticapitalist vision of feminist practice that acknowledges the "objectifying, dehumanizing effects of colonization" such as horizontal violence, self-deprecation, and self-distrust, and they encourage feminists to think our way out of oppression through reflection, action, and praxis (xxvii). In Sandoval's words, feminists must build an "oppositional consciousness." Where fear tactics, competition, and individualism have become central to work in the academy, we propose kindness as a reparative strategy. It is with a strong belief in academic activism that we propose kindness as a feminist tool for radically reshaping feminism within the academy.

Micropolitics and the Classroom

One of the commitments inspiring this article is a belief in the importance of micropolitical tactics in the classroom. While we address the importance of curricular reform and larger institutional reflections on kindness, we also argue

that kindness is valuable and should be cultivated at the micro level. In the following section we theorize and explore the impact of seemingly small or isolated acts we have experimented with in our own classrooms. We understand micropolitical tactics to include both what Foucault has characterized as arts or techniques of the self as well as more collective strategies for resisting the multiple techniques of control, normalization, and surveillance that Foucault identifies (*The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 [1978]; *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 3 [1988]; Foucault and Gordon). Micropolitics can have profound political and social effects, but not within the traditional terms of political action. They may take place at the level of small acts of political engagement (Internet petitions, culture jamming, generosity, rallying, child rearing, recycling, worship, etc.), and they often work on the level of bodily affect or cultural sensibility instead of the level of, for example, deliberative democracy or institutional policy.

Micropolitics can thus mobilize, but are not reduced to, techniques of the self that seek to intensify or discipline the many layers of being that go into political judgment and action. While techniques of the self are often seen as "aesthetic" or decadent individualized practices divorced from meaningful collective political action, a focus on the importance of the micropolitical assemblage conceptualizes these techniques as part of the broader fabric of political, and in this case, pedagogical, life. Arts of the self become practices of micropolitics when they enter into the life of a community or to relations between them. Seen this way, arts of the self are "not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice" (Foucault and Gordon, *Power/Knowledge* 51).

Frantz Fanon, for example, focuses our attention on the microtechniques of colonialism and their psychological impact on colonized peoples. Although the French government relied on large instruments of power like the military, they also sought to reconfigure Algerian culture through more dispersed means. Reflecting on French attempts to "unveil" Algerian women, Fanon writes that "the truth is that the study of an occupied people, militarily subject to an implacable domination, requires documentation and checking difficult to combine. It is not the soil that is occupied. It is not the ports or the airdromes. French colonialism has settled itself in the very center of the Algerian individual and has undertaken a sustained work of cleanup, of expulsion of self, of rationally pursued mutilation" (65). In this passage we see the impact of disciplinary colonial power on the subject—power that works in diffuse ways, permeating society and placing every aspect of a culture under surveillance. The productive aspect of colonial power—its ability to create "colonized" subjects—plays a crucial role in establishing the power of the colonizer. Importantly, Fanon also comments on the many ways that these techniques were turned against the French. Women, at first the subjects of intense campaigns to liberate them from the patriarchal oppression of Algerian and Muslim society, turned the concern with the veil against the colonial government. Fanon explains that, "removed and reassumed again and again, the veil has been manipulated, transformed into a technique of camouflage, into a means of struggle" (61). The use of the radio demonstrates similar techniques. Until anticolonial forces began disseminating information on it, Fanon says that most Algerians rejected the radio because it was an instrument of French domination. Once the "Voice of Algeria" established a presence on the radio, however, it became an important revolutionary tool. Exploring how micropolitical action and techniques of the self can be mobilized to transform or resist existing power relations or institutions allows us to take these micro acts seriously and to conceptualize kindness as a diffuse tactic for resisting different forms of domination within the academy.

Kindness Through Connection and "Thinking With"

Our first micropolitical strategy is both a curricular commitment and a pedagogical commitment in the classroom to "thinking with." In an article analyzing the implications of what Haraway terms "thinking with" for academic engagement, feminist science studies theorist Maria Puig de la Bellacassa argues that this pedagogical strategy works in opposition to a neoliberal academy concerned only with pedagogy through competition. Rather than placing scholars firmly on one side or another, "thinking with" refuses neat disciplinary divides (Haraway). As an unromantic act of kindness, "thinking with" is not free from critique, where it is constructive (Clegg and Rowland). Furthering Haraway, Puig de la Bellacassa wonders if we might think about "thinking with" as a call to place feminist scholars in conversations[8] rather than camps, conversations that engage differences and from which "new patterns might emerge" (Puig de la Bellacassa 4). Puig de la Bellacassa reminds us that "It is not the same thing to co-exist and tolerate each other [as] to actively co-habit. It is a day-to-day concern to wonder: how do we live and think

with others? How do we build accountable relationships while recognizing divergent positions?" (8). Kindness as an inter- or transdisciplinary tactic of intellectual community building should not be confused with leniency. To do so is dangerous. As Phillips and Taylor remind us, when educators confuse kindness with leniency they often reveal that they are "not being motivated by the learner's needs but simply avoiding responsibility for the student's confrontation with the inevitable pain of learning" (274).

In our classrooms and in our syllabi, we explore Puig de la Bellacassa and Haraway's ruminations as to how we might inhabit scholarly practice differently. Often feminist theory gets taught as a series of waves or camps. Teaching feminist theory and activisms in this manner is rightly criticized as contributing to the ongoing erasure of women of color and Indigenous women in feminist history, since, as Andrea Smith points out, these women only "make an appearance to transform feminism into a multicultural movement" ("Indigenous"). In composing curricula for graduate seminars, in particular, we propose the model of conversations as a way of "thinking with" rather than ideological camps of theory or the periodization of feminist waves. That is, rather than asking which position a particular author represents, and how that might be undone or updated by a later text in the course, we ask instead how a particular feminist conversation being held between two theorists might contribute to feminist movements. This way, our teaching of feminist curriculum refuses attempts to create neat binaries. For example, rather than teaching feminist writing about pornography as about "pro-sex" versus "anti-sex" camps, we use the metaphor of conversations

to reframe which texts we use and how we might "think" with different theorists about this issue. For example, in Shoshana's graduate seminar class in Gender, Race, and Representation, she teaches critical race feminist theorist Sherene Razack's contribution in theorizing racism to help feminists structure how we think about sex work, a perspective that is additionally helped by Angela Davis's (*Prisons*) and Andrea Smith's (*Conquest*) work on the relationship between the criminalization of sex work and the growth in the prison industrial complex. That is, we might explore how Sherene Razack would normally be understood as an "antisex feminist," but also how this characterization leaves out the nuances of her intersectional approach to violence against women. In this way, rather than placing them at odds with one another, our syllabi aim to place texts in relation to one another so that students might begin to see how the difficult work of building coalitions across difference might be done as a reading strategy.

A second micropolitical strategy that we understand as kindness is to reframe both our own and student's ability to "think with" by teaching whole books rather than excerpts. This is a strategy that we feel is helpful to students and our pedagogy and is a methodology of kindness for a number of reasons. First, it refuses easy or reductionist readings or an overemphasis on what is lacking from a particular argument. It also honors the complete project of the book, paying attention to the way that different chapters riff or expand on the book's main argument. While students may find themselves under monetary pressure to purchase whole books rather than coursepacks, teaching whole books is meant to help out both presses and

bookstores, especially feminist, queer, left, local, and independent presses and stores who gain little from coursepacks, but do stand to profit from book sales. As importantly, teaching books places texts in conversations, helping students to see the myriad intertextual possibilities and where authors build on and "think with" one another. Finally, we set guidelines for engagement (and model them ourselves) that ask students to consider what a reading has added to a dialogue before simply critiquing it. This does not mean that our classrooms become bland spaces of agreement where texts cannot be challenged, but rather that we spend time cultivating our own and our students' abilities to make connections between texts instead of simply finding flaws with them—a common dynamic in graduate seminars.

Here, kindness is understood as a pedagogical strategy to rearrange our engagements with texts and each other, so that "thinking with" rather than "speaking to" or "arguing with" is central to the classroom objectives. By "thinking with" theorists and their texts, students in feminist classrooms have an opportunity to engage, expand, connect, and disagree with texts while remaining accountable to the ways in which some voices are privileged over others in curriculum and in classroom relations. This includes, but is not limited to, remaining accountable to the ways in which teaching "the waves" of feminism can function to idealize canonical texts or fetishize new theory, while often leaving women of color and indigenous theory at the margins.[9]

How might kindness contribute to actively living across difference? That is, how might it demand a move from tolerance to accountability? "Thinking with" as

a scholarly commitment to accountability is partly what we argue allows kindness to be recovered as a useful tool despite its polluted history. Accountability, including an obligation to reflect on and be accountable for our privileged positions as educators within pedagogical relationships (of course, relationships that occur within larger power structures) is necessary to meaningful pedagogical engagement across difference, as it acknowledges that these are "differences that matter" (Ahmed, *Differences*). It also allows us to build relationships of solidarity with our students and each other.

Kindness and Connection: Against Shame

Puig de la Bellacassa notes that she once heard Haraway say that "feminist politics are much about reminding what it takes to go through the day—those very details that we used to consider boring, trivial and easy to dismiss" (13). Here, Haraway is highlighting the "micro" level of the easily dismissed details of how we "go through the day"—details that, we argue, can be shaped using a methodology of kindness. Following "feminist reclaimings of the work of care as a source of knowledge" (Puig de la Bellacassa 13), it is important to theorize care as labor and examine what constitutes those details of what gets us "through the day." The labor of care allows us to create counterstrategies that challenge the constant institutional messages that students and teachers should "suck it up" and cultivate individualist and competitive professionalism. We live in a world in which the "feminist sense of caring in knowledge is driven by a yearning for connections" (Puig de la Bellacassa 24). Connections

to students are one of those seemingly "trivial and easy to dismiss" details that enables both us and them to "go through the day."[10] As the literature stemming from feminist approaches to therapy has widely demonstrated (Chaplin; Magnet and Diamond), trauma often stems from a lack or breakdown in connection. In making connections to therapists, even though they can never replace the original connected relationships that were denied, a form of healing occurs, a healing through connection.

Using kindness to actively connect to our students engages them in a pedagogical experience in a way meant to excite their interest as well as engage their sense of personhood. One example of using kindness to achieve these ends is to express an interest in getting to know our students, including what interests them and arouses their curiosity. In one case, Kathryn had a seminar in which one student rarely spoke and seldom contributed to class. In speaking with this student at the break, Kathryn discovered that she was a musician, and she asked this student to name her favorite song. Kathryn then began the class after the break by playing the track and discussing it briefly in her seminar. Following this attempt to engage her interest, this student participated in the discussion and became further engaged in the class. In Corinne's classes, she has students shout out five "positives" of the day, both good and small, in order to set a tone of engagement in the classroom before beginning any lesson. This is both pedagogical commitment to kindness and an engagement in her university's Positive Space campaign. Students have listed everything from kissing their first girlfriend to getting their kids to school on time. These moments of kind-

ness in the classroom are, for Corinne, about making connections with the real lives of her students. Kindness is as much about deliberately reaching out to connect to students' lives as it is about teaching them material within the formal confines of the classroom.

In *Teaching Community*, bell hooks argues that educators often reinforce values of domination, sexism, and white supremacy through a deliberate attempt to destroy "*connection and closeness when in the academy*" (xv, emphasis our own). As we noted above, loss of connection is a primary source of trauma for students and academics. A methodology of kindness that works to value the building of connections in and through education can in this way help to promote hooks's emphasis on the importance of an education rooted in community and hopefulness, rather than cynicism and despair. This is an affective enterprise that, hooks notes, is central to any liberation movement, as she reminds us that despair is any movement's "greatest threat" and cynicism can inflict "pain and violence on students through teaching" (*Teaching Community* 12).[11] Like Haraway and Puig de la Bellacassa above, hooks also argues that competition is most often in direct opposition to liberation movements aimed at working together "for the good of the community" (*Teaching Community* 49).

One example of pedagogies of competition is the disciple or protégé model. As hooks notes, in her educational experience, professors often singled out one student for praise and admiration, while the rest of the students who did not receive this praise were made to feel as if they had some inner lack (*Teaching Community* 86). This is a model we increasingly find in the feminist academy, and one we must

dismantle. Rather than fostering collaboration, it only pits students against one another and reinforces existing competitive structures. Instead of a pedagogy of competitiveness, hooks argues that we need a "learning that values wholeness over division, disassociation, splitting" in which "the democratic educator works to create closeness" (*Teaching Community* 49), a way of being in the classroom that she terms a "radical openness." This is an intimacy that "does not annihilate difference" (Palmer cited in hooks, *Teaching Community* 49).

A pedagogy of kindness also refuses the predominant model of shame in the classroom. The rhetoric that we need to shame our students to help them learn is omnipresent, whether it is professors describing how they shame students for coming in to class late or how they interrupted their class to shame students who were speaking in class. Rather that humiliating students in front of the class, we speak to students at the beginning of class as to how it is important to us that they come in on time, and if they are going to leave, to please do so at the break. When students come in late in a disruptive way, we speak to them privately. Similarly, when students are rowdy in class, we ask them to settle down by saying, "We know that it is hard to sit through class sometimes, but it's important to quiet down now." If we have a particularly talkative student, we speak to the student privately. Kathryn has found that explicitly sharing the responsibility of the classroom with students has helped to eliminate latecomers and chatting during big classes. She explains to students that when she comes to class, she listens to them when they talk, turns off her cell phone, and makes sure to get there on time—requests that she then makes of

them. The curricular strategy of having students read bell hooks's books *Teaching to Trangress* and/or *Teaching Community* at the beginning of every course similarly helps to develop ideas of shared responsibility and commitment in the classroom. By naming the respect that she has for her students (and the commitment this requires from her) Kathryn seeks to create a collective sense of the classroom and a collective sense of learning as a shared project. This conversation has worked remarkably well for maintaining a respectful and sustainable classroom environment and has ended up ensuring that Kathryn rarely has to be an authoritative disciplinarian in her classrooms.

We believe that giving students responsibility for what goes on in a class and helping them think about why what they want to learn in it works much better to engage students than shaming or humiliating them. Often, shaming pedagogical techniques result from professorial insecurity. hooks notes "many of the professors who teach in colleges and universities have crippling[12] low self-esteem that is covered up by the mantle of power and privilege their positions as educators affords them" (Teaching to Transgress 99). This is where educators would benefit from feminist psychotherapy aimed at working out their own emotional issues so that they do not pay them forward onto their students, an argument we have made elsewhere (Magnet and Diamond).[13] Regardless, a shame-based pedagogy simply does not work. In fact, shaming students in the classroom often works as a kind of psychological violence in which professors use their power to humble their students.

This strategy also refuses to acknowledge the proven connections between

shame and violence (Gilligan, 2000; Smith, 2008; Davis, *Abolition*), as rage is the most common reaction to shame. Rage has important utility, according to Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael, whose book *Coming Out of Shame* serves as an important resource for hooks. They write, "when the intensity of shame reaches the highest levels, rage is triggered. Rage serves a vital self-protective function: it shields the exposed self" (cited in hooks, *Teaching Community* 101). Shame-based pedagogical strategies are often intimately connected to systemic forms of discrimination: working-class students are shamed for not knowing the middle-class norms of the academy (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*); students with disabilities are shamed by professors who doubt their need for accommodation or who restrict movement and speaking to the "correct times" during class; students of color are shamed through pedagogical practices in which they are called on in classrooms to serve as native informants about issues of race and racism (Srivastava and Francis). Given the ways that shame is closely connected to the intersections of transphobia, racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and homophobia, it is not surprising that trans students, queer students, working-class students, and students of color may become consumed by rage as a result of their treatment in the classroom.

A pedagogy of kindness refuses shame as an educational strategy, since we believe it does not aid in educating. With little (or unclear) opportunity to respond to shame and humiliation experienced in the classroom due to power relations, students may lose connections they had, or hoped to build, with professors and their classmates. Here kindness as a political

tool is practiced at the microlevel, where every refusal of shame and humiliation is a resistance to structural inequalities that shape our classrooms and the institution of the university as a whole.

The Importance of Being Wrong

In *The Unity of Mistakes,* sociologist Marianne Paget interviews doctors about their experiences of medical error. Paget is particularly interested in the impoverished language we have for describing blunders in medicine, a phenomenon that she finds is intrinsic to clinical practice. That is, the language of malpractice is mostly used to describe the whole range of medical errors, and there is limited language that simply describes being wrong without negligent or malicious intent. Paget argues that medicine is an experimental science, in which processes of trial and error guide practice. As a result, mistakes that do not involve negligent acts or lack of care occur constantly. In fact, mistakes often help to guide the process of care. And yet, when they occur, both doctors and patients may be devastated or traumatized without having even a language to articulate their feelings. Paget terms doctor's "actions becoming wrong," including actions that they may have thought were right at the time, "complex sorrows" (7).

In the realm of education, teachers are often expected or feel compelled to demonstrate that they have all the answers. We argue that education, like medicine, is an experimental science, and one for which we need an expanded language describing mistakes. Different experiments are conducted in the classroom in the hope of engaging and educating students. Sometimes they succeed, and sometimes they fail miserably. Like in clin-

ical medicine, however, pedagogical failures may help to guide future successes. Some of these failures may be due to malicious desires to enact power over students, and sometimes they may be due to negligence or lack of preparation. We are most interested in those pedagogical mistakes that professors make not through bad faith, but through educational mistakes. Here, a methodology of kindness becomes relevant as a microtechnique of both resisting and shaping power relations within classrooms and institutions, in that we feel that this would encourage professors to admit that they don't know the answer, that their pedagogical exercise has not worked as intended, or that they feel a particular teaching attempt has failed. Admitting to failure is a form of pedagogical kindness with accountability at the fore: it places both the students and the professor in the messy business of trying to work through these "complex sorrows" together. In these moments of risk and trust, the kindness of refusing to claim academic privilege and acknowledging when things are not working can help to build the connections so essential to meaningful educational engagement.

Admitting to errors is additionally a way of interrupting the classroom as a space of domination. One pedagogical example is a class in which Shoshana decided to show the film *Earthlings,* a pro-vegetarian film that shows the impact of factory farming on animal welfare. Although it draws important connections between environmental racism, meat-eating, and food insecurity, it also makes troubling parallels between slavery and animals in captivity, as well as meat-eating and the Holocaust, thereby collapsing difference in problematic ways that do not acknowledge the complex and histor-

ically specific histories of racism and anti-Semitism. This film is also extremely graphic in its depictions of animal abuse and was traumatizing for many students in the class. As students began to flood out the door, Shoshana stopped the film and acknowledged that she had failed to teach the complexities of the film sufficiently. She asked students to respond to what was making them leave, and apologized for showing traumatic material with little warning. This pedagogical moment, though a failure, also provided the chance for teachers and students to reflect together on what works in the classroom. It placed students and teachers together in the messy business of trying to puzzle through tough pedagogical problems. This is still material Shoshana is struggling to figure out how to teach, but she feels that a methodology of kindness is one microtechnique of resisting normative power relationships in the classroom that allowed her to acknowledge her own failure as an educator, and in doing so, provided space for students to speak back about their experiences of being silenced, retraumatized, or upset at having diverse struggles collapsed. This willingness to be asked hard questions attempts to meet bell hooks's challenge to educators to have a "radical openness" and a willingness to acknowledge our lack of expertise in certain key moments, rather than leaving students feeling let down or failed by pretending that a particular pedagogical experience has been a success.

As a pedagogical tool, admitting to errors also opens up a radical space of possibility for students to also make mistakes, and provides an acknowledgment of the ways in which students' errors or failures are "complex sorrows" that can be worked through in an intellectual

community. As educators, we need to think carefully about how we respond to students' errors, and we need to think beyond our universities' mandated systems for punishment. That is, for example, when students make mistakes, we need to remember that students are human, and oppose harsh and shaming sanctions in face of their failures. One example of working with kindness is how we might respond when students miss an exam or forget a midterm. Obviously, this does not work in all cases, but Shoshana has had two students who raced into class at the end of the midterm, realizing that they had written down the wrong time of the test. Of course, it is possible to either fail them (as per university policy) or to make them write a more heavily weighted final, but in practice, Shoshana has rescheduled the midterm for them or let them sit it right then, if possible. As she is doing so, she asks them to think about this moment when they themselves have employees or hold positions of power, so that they will similarly try to be generous with other people's mistakes. We would argue that one of the ways that we can model kindness in the classroom, and how to treat each other, is through allowing the space for mistakes.

We can also model kindness in the face of mistakes by thinking through our affective responses to conflict in the classroom. For example, we need to think carefully about our responses to students who make sexist, racist, homophobic, ableist, and other forms of discriminatory remarks. Other students and faculty often feel that the best way of handling these remarks is to call them out in the public space of the classroom. Sometimes this strategy of calling out people's problematic politics is indeed helpful and/or necessary. When

we are asked to reflect on our experiences of being challenged that were most transformative for our own politics, however, we often remember experiences where we were challenged privately, or in ways that refused shame, or by someone we cared about who did not seek to humiliate us. In this way, we might think about how strategies of "calling in" in addition to strategies of "calling out" might be useful in the classroom (Ahmad). In one case, Corinne had a student who asked what a lesbian looked like and if there were aesthetic markers for sexuality. She then went on to point out Corinne's clothing choices and asked, for lack of better words, about the "gayness" of her boots. This moment was humiliating for Corinne—whose body and dress were brought into conversation in ways that undermined her power in the classroom. While Corinne could have called out this student, she instead "called-in" the student and redirected the question about her own dress and sexuality to a more general discussion about gender expression and performativity. Of course, there is often privilege associated with admitting to "being wrong." Where white, able-bodied, and heterosexual educators are able to offload their internal sense of shame of being wrong by sharing their errors, professors and students of color, those with disabilities, and queer individuals are often marginalized in their classrooms as always already "wrong." Routinely penalized or marginalized for speaking against white supremacy, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and classism, certain students and educators have much to lose in admitting errors. Thus, being wrong is not an opportunity distributed equally. As we have noted, kindness is a slippery tool, and not always the appropriate choice for resistance in the classroom.

Encouraging Engagement and Emotionally Actualized Teaching

Reflecting on the possibilities of alternative forms of pedagogical techniques, bell hooks notes that although academics often have contempt for self-help genres, they can be useful for unlearning colonization. For example, hooks describes her practice of speaking daily affirmations to herself in order to unpack internalized racism. Following hooks, we argue that one microtechnique that resists normative power relationships in the classroom through kindness is those educators who work hard to affirm students. This can take the form of rewarding a student simply for being brave enough to ask a question in a large lecture class. Responding positively to an answer or question, regardless of quality or correctness, is an act of kindness. In this context, kindness may also involve holding on to one's patience and remembering that it takes time and effort to learn and to transform one's thinking processes. Here, kindness may require seeing "individuals as they are, rather than how we might want them to be" (Phillips and Taylor 93). Kindness can also take the form of rewarding both those students trying out poorly formulated ideas as well as those intellectually gifted or theoretically sophisticated students. That is, a methodology of kindness would direct educators to have a spirit of generosity toward our students, instead of participating in a culture which highlights some as smart and some as not, and in which those who can articulate the most savvy language are privileged over all others. We must ask, can a theoretically sophisticated feminism that has its roots in a classroom filled with anxiety, in which some students are rewarded and others shamed, actually

do meaningful work? We would argue that this type of pedagogical experience is extremely limited.

Kathryn has tried to cultivate this affirmative stance in teaching large undergraduate classes. She has made a point of affirming and praising students who speak out in classes that range from one hundred fifty to two hundred students—acknowledging their courage in speaking out even when their comments might misunderstand the readings or concepts being discussed. Setting a deliberate intention to smile and thank every student for her or his comment before responding to the content sets up an engaged space where students become increasingly comfortable with speaking and making mistakes. This strategy, coupled with an open and receptive approach to students who disagree with her, means that Kathryn can joke about disagreements or praise students for having the confidence to challenge her in class. In this way, the discussion becomes a true exchange of ideas, despite the power imbalances between students and professors.

A pedagogy of kindness also asks us as educators to think about how we might engage in emotionally actualized teaching. For example, emotionally actualized educators ask themselves how a conflict with a particular student might be bringing up their own issues that they might need to unpack. An attempt to be emotionally actualized in the classroom also reminds us that we must not use our students to meet our own emotional needs. Furthermore, this educational strategy means that we allocate time for students that includes acknowledgment of their emotional lives if and when they are willing to share. Where students feel pressured to open up their emotional lives as part of an approval

process with professors, and where little is often shared on the other side, we must remember that kindness is about making mutual and respectful connections, while remaining accountable to the importance of boundaries between students and professors, as well as to systems of power and privilege.

We realize that in the neoliberal academy, time is a scarce resource. We would never suggest that professors act as therapists. We noted above that emotionally actualized teaching is often gendered labor that inhibits the development of the careers of feminist (and disproportionately female) professors. However, despite the costs, we find that the complete lack of regard for students' lives does not fit into an educational strategy of kindness. Moreover, we find that even when professors' jobs are secure post-tenure, too many of us only make time for our own research and writing, or for students who further our own research projects. Instead, we need to make time for students to speak about some of the struggles they are having in educational settings. We are certainly not arguing for an intensification of these gendered divisions of labor. Instead, this is a call to all faculty to take further notice of a wider range of teaching obligations, and to work through, rather than ignore, the intersections of our work and our emotional lives.

Conclusion

In their history of kindness, Phillips and Taylor note that "a society that romanticizes kindness, that regards it as a virtue so difficult to sustain that only the magically good can manage it, destroys people's faith in real or ordinary kindness. Supposed to make everything happy and

right, magical kindness cannot deliver the realistic care and reassurance that people actually need. Magical kindness is a false promise" (56). In this article, we do not advocate for a magical kindness, but we want to argue for a robust form of pedagogical kindness. Kindness is a labor to which educators need to pay attention—both to the details of its workings and the theory of its practice. Part of a way to recognize this labor is through analyzing what the labor practices are that accompany kindness, what they look like, and how we might go about doing them. We realize that a methodology of kindness may sound like one more task in an increasingly corporate and commodified academic life, one for which we don't have time. As Maria Puig de la Bellacassa asserts: "But please: we cannot possibly care about everything; not everything can count in a world; not everything is relevant in a world; and there is no life without some kind of death; and women know how much attention to care can devour their lives, how it can asphyxiate other possible skills" (18). We still think it is important, however, to put a pedagogical strategy of kindness on the table as an imperfect educational strategy, but one that we do not want to abandon.

Speaking about curiosity, Kathleen Fisher argues that we must continue to cultivate it because "Drawing students into the deepest mysteries of life is a challenging intellectual responsibility and a profoundly moral act" (32). We would argue that the same goes for kindness. We have reviewed here some of the pedagogical strategies of kindness we use in the classroom, both to investigate these strategies as meaningful academic labor and to offer them up as tools for others who are struggling to find femi-

nist pedagogical tools by which to "think with" their students. This is a struggle to engage in feminist pedagogy that makes knowledge more interesting, as "in the sense emphasized by Isabelle Stengers, inter-esse: to be situated in-between; not to divide, but to relate" (Puig de la Bellacassa 6). bell hooks states that throughout her academic career, she has "sought the spaces of openness, fixing my attention less on the ways colleagues are closed and more on searching for the place of possibility" (*Teaching Community* 74). We believe a strategy of kindness can help us to value the doors that are opened to us as educators. In doing so, we hope to heed hooks's call for a pedagogy aimed at "enriching a life in its entirety," an education "about healing and wholeness, empowerment, liberation" (*Teaching Community* 42–43).

NOTES

1. For our purposes here, we define emotions in two ways. That is, we understand emotions as having an actual physiological component as well as one shaped by our culturally held beliefs. In the words of Megan Boler, "Emotions are in part sensational, or physiological: consisting of the actual feeling—increased heartbeat, adrenaline, etc. Emotions are also 'cognitive,' or 'conceptual': shaped by our beliefs and perceptions" (17).

2. The brilliant phrase "culture of diminishment" comes from a personal communication received at the Canadian Women Studies Association conference in 2009.

3. See, for example Susan Wendell.

4. This is a deeply problematic narrative that has been complicated by disability studies and disability rights advocates who argue that integrating disability rights into our world more broadly can help to liberate everyone's position to their body, helping to promote values of interdependence rather than neoliberal independence, and furthering feminist theory by challenging notions that individual achievement is the only laudable goal (Wendell; Thomson; McRuer; Clare).

5. Following bell hooks, we use the term "white supremacy" to point to the larger system of racism, one that can include, for example, racist people of color, even though they may organize their thinking differently than racist white people (hooks, *Teaching Community*).

6. In 2009 the Ninth Annual Critical Race and Anti-Colonialism Conference interrogated the policies and practices of "doing good" (Razack et al. xv). RACE convenors called for papers on "do-good" actions and specifically focused on humanitarian interventions.

7. In giving feedback to a graduate student named Sarah Lawrence, Shoshana suggested that instead of using "cited in" to note references in her MA thesis, instead Sarah go back to the original text to demonstrate that she had read it. Sarah pointed out, however, that this type of citation strategy erases conversations scholars are having with one another, thereby erasing the traces of intellectual process. Before Sarah's intervention, we had not even noticed how this academic strategy privileges individual ways of thinking. Following Audre Lorde's wise words on the insignificance of originality, in which she argues that "there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt," we are attempting to think about how we might collectivize intellectual process, including through bibliographic practices.

8. James Carey used the metaphor of "conversation" to theorize how scholars engage with one another, rather than through the language of "assertions" and "rebuttals" (qtd. in Hardt). Here, we extend Carey's analogy to thinking about how a pedagogy of kindness might inform curriculum.

9. As Indigenous activist and author Jessica (Yee) Danforth asserts: "Fuck the waves of feminism, we're the ocean."

10. Of course, we can theorize pedagogical relationships of care and caretaking without idealizing the "loving world between care-takers and the ones they care for" (Puig de la Bellacassa; Cvetkovich). A methodology of kindness also will fail, and sometimes fail spectacularly. We detail some of the failures of

kindness as a strategy below. And yet we argue that it remains an important start.

11. hooks's pedagogical commitment to hopefulness goes hand in hand with Haraway's pedagogical opposition to cynicism, in which Haraway argues that "Corrosive scepticism cannot be midwife to new stories" (qtd. in Puig de la Bellacassa).

12. We might argue for another word that does not reflect ableist assumptions. For example, we would prefer "terribly low self-esteem" to the expression "crippling low self-esteem."

13. We do argue that we must be committed to doing our own emotional work as a strategy of kindness. The emotional strategies we learn there would help us to work things out with students rather than just avoiding them when things go awry (Magnet and Diamond).

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