

PANDEMIC PEDAGOGY

PRACTICAL & EMPATHETIC TEACHING PRACTICES

From a bibliography of feminist and radical pedagogy, as well as a working understanding of surveillance and control in today's neoliberal university, I will share perspectives on teaching I have developed in Spring, Summer, and Fall 2020. This discussion privileges *pandemic pedagogy*, and may not work for all semesters, formats, or courses. I hope to start a dialogue about teaching and learning during these past 9 months.

My discussion focuses on 3 key elements of pandemic pedagogy:

- 1) Don't Police or Surveil Students
- 2) Recognize Instructors' Role in the Neoliberal University
- 3) Decenter Instructor Feelings

"In effect, the neoliberal structuring of the university is also a racial strategy of management of an increasingly diverse student population, as increasing numbers of minority and immigrant students have entered public higher education."¹

"School budgets are increasingly spent on surveillance equipment and policing, including surveillance cameras in corridors and classrooms, metal detectors for entranceways, and security personnel. Systemic underfunding, a reliance on highly regimented and disciplined regimes, and a culture of surveillance and control have led activists and scholars to decry the emergence of a 'school to prison pipeline.'"²

1) Don't Police or Surveil Students

- Computer lockdowns, eye tracking technology, live anonymous watchers, and invasive information gathering about students' homes discriminate against neurodivergent³ students, as well as poor students
- Classification of students, disclosed without their knowledge, creates skeptical, hostile relationships between faculty/staff & students⁴
- Reporting students to campus police or other university agencies may result in violence or dismissal and should only be done if the student is an imminent threat to themselves or others.

2) Recognize Instructors' Role in the Neoliberal University

- Instructors are often in charge of maintaining the status quo of the academy and report non-normativity
- We must resist the surveillance ("panoptic gaze") culture of schools that has proliferated, profitably, since Columbine & 9/11⁵
- Yanira Rodriguez advocates a "pedagogy of refusal" to interrupt the neoliberal university⁶
- Instructors as the floor managers in the factory model of the neoliberal university

"When a teacher is progressive pedagogically, but conservative / traditional in terms of assessment, there is an incoherence that tells students the teacher is not really as progressive as their pedagogy suggests."⁷

"In the classroom, teachers must also resist the internalization of the panoptic gaze as a viable pedagogical optic for viewing and interacting with students. With these components, critical surveillance literacy rebukes hyper-surveillance as a safety option and questions the connections between safety politics, school, surveillance equipment, and the social technologies of late capitalism."⁸

3) Decenter Instructor Feelings

- Marnie Twigg's 2019 article discusses how professors & staff use "covering allyship" to say they support students of color (and I argue, poor and disabled students) without doing the work.⁹
- A true collaborative kindness works in acknowledgement of power imbalances¹⁰
- Instructors must recognize, and interrupt, their own socio-emotional needs while teaching in the pandemic with an honest self-assessment of what we "normally" get from teaching, and how to tend to those feelings without leaning on ineffective pedagogy.

"...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 us, how, and by whom matters."¹¹

"...instead of a hyper focus on the current repressive administration all of us should already be shocked into action by the demographic composition of our classrooms, shocked by how so many students struggle to meet basic needs . . . shocked into action by the curricular changes meant to depoliticize (and police) our pedagogies . . . When the shock comes after 20something-year-old white male students are marching on college campuses with tiki torches, it signals that we have missed intervening at the incremental moments that build on each other to create the conditions for a fascist state."¹²

What comes next?

- Intersecting privileges mean instructors sometimes overlook how their own needs and assumptions drive pedagogical choices. A non-hierarchical review process (such as a conversation about pedagogy between trusted peers) can help instructors identify ableist, classist, racist, and sexist attitudes and policies.
- Instructors must deprogram themselves, through the practice of refusal, from knee-jerk reaction reporting, surveilling, and tracking of adult college students. A culture of trust can begin by refraining from policing students.
- Resist white saviorism and similar impulses; keep students' confidences; recognize our place in enforcing or tacitly recreating / not-resisting a harmful institution.

Carmen Kynard (from *Notes on Racial Realism*, originally accessed in Yanira Rodriguez's 2019 article): "It should be unconscionable to think that your little assignment or assessment strategy is offering a radically transformative end-game in this social system. That's academic marketing and a catering to white comfort. It's not anti-racism. Your pedagogy is not unshackling 400 years of Jim Crow lynch law, past or present, for any Black bodies that have hung from trees. And you are not breaking down today's prison walls and borders. So comfort and a feel of ease are not options. All that we have – when we think in terms of racial realism – is struggle. That's it. The hope is in the process of the struggle. It is in the constant work, not the end result or an eventual sign of progress because that is not forthcoming...not in the lifetime of anyone in this room. Being a racial realist changes the way you approach and politicize the work."¹³

Emily Brier
Western Carolina University, U.S.
ebrier@wcu.edu

Footnotes

1. Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira, *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
2. Julia C. Oparah, "Challenging Complicity: The Neoliberal University and the Prison-Industrial Complex," In *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, ed. Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 111.
3. The term neurodivergent, first coined by Kassiane Asasumasu, describes people whose brain function differs from neurotypical people, considered "normal" by societal standards. Neurodivergent people may have many different diagnoses and experiences; two examples of neurodivergent populations include autistic people and epileptic people.
4. Dylan Rodriguez, "The Disorientation of the Teaching Act: Abolition as Pedagogical Position," *Radical Teacher* 88, (2010): 9, <http://proxy195.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/disorientation-teaching-act-abolition-as/docview/755429721/se-2?accountid=14968>.
5. Tyson Lewis, "Critical Surveillance Literacy," *Critical Studies, Critical Methodologies* 6, no. 2 (2006): 268, <https://doi-org.proxy195.nclive.org/10.1177/1532708605279700>.
6. Yanira Rodriguez, "Pedagogies of Refusal: What It Means to (Un)teach a Student Like Me," *Radical Teacher* 115 (2019): 6, DOI:10.5195/rt.2019.672.
7. Eric J. Weiner, "Sequestered Spaces, Public Places: The Responsibility of Intellectuals Who Teach Within the 'Safe Zones' of the Neoliberal University," *Taboo* 19, no. 2 (2020): 150, <http://proxy195.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/sequestered-spaces-public-places-responsibility/docview/2367752923/se-2?accountid=14968>.
8. Lewis, "Critical Surveillance," 265.
9. Marnie Twigg, "Last Verses, Same as the First? On Racial Justice and 'Covering' Allyship in Compositionist Identities," *College Composition and Communication* 71, no. 1 (2019): 8, <http://proxy195.nclive.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/last-verse-same-as-first-on-racial-justice/docview/2302393781/se-2?accountid=14968>.
10. Shoshana Magnet, Corinne Lysandra Mason, and Kathryn Trevenen, "Feminism, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Kindness," *Feminist Teacher* 25, no. 1 (2014): 17, <https://doi-org.proxy195.nclive.org/10.5406/femteacher.25.1.0001>.
11. Magnet et al., "Feminism, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Kindness," 2.
12. Yanira Rodriguez, "Pedagogies of Refusal: What it Means to (Un)teach a Student Like Me," *Radical Teacher* 115 (2019): 9, DOI:10.5195/rt.2019.672.
12. Carmen Keynard, "Notes on Racial Realism by One of the 'Problem People.'" *Education, Liberation, & Black Radical Traditions for the 21st Century*. Last modified October 19, 2017. <http://carmenkynard.org/notes-racial-realism-one-problem-people/>