

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO GENDER AND AFFECT

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Chapter 18

AFFECTIVE PEDAGOGIES, AND PEDAGOGIES OF AFFECT

Gender, Solidarity, and the Classroom in the
Trigger Warning Debates

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Natalie Kouri-Towe

Introduction: Trigger Warnings

Triggering. I'm triggered. This triggered me. You should have warned us. This wasn't an adequate warning. You should never have shown us this work. This isn't appropriate for class. I'm giving a trigger warning...

Trigger warnings—once relegated to the women’s and gender studies classroom—have increasingly emerged in classrooms across disciplines since debates on the topic went viral in 2014. Whether explicitly requested by students, outlined in departmental or school policies, or part of the regular pedagogical practices of teachers, the anticipation of conflicts over triggering material and trigger warnings themselves have shifted the register of teaching in the classroom in recent years. While debates abound about the role, virtue, and practices around trigger warnings, this chapter traces my attempts to think about trigger warnings as pedagogical strategies amidst scenes of political contestation over the role of power and violence in the classroom, particularly in the face of gender and racial violence that underlies many of the debates on violent content in the classroom.

Much of the debate on trigger warnings, both inside and outside of academia, suggests that conflicts over warnings signal a generational shift in education, whereby student requests for warnings illustrate higher levels of dependency and less resilience in the current generation of learners. This perception is often extrapolated from data that illustrates increases in student accessibility requests for anxiety disorders, psychological distress, or other accommodations due to mental health. Some have used these arguments to lament a generation of learners they call “snowflakes,” while others have observed the impact of wider social shifts around mental health and violence that have empowered new generations of students to speak more openly about trauma. The popularization of discourses on trauma has certainly informed the debates on trigger warnings, especially as focus on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and cultural shifts that introduce trauma-informed and somatic approaches to healing outside of the therapeutic context, such as in yoga, astrology, or social movements (Haines 2019), have permeated popular culture through social media and in film and television. Against this backdrop, the classroom has become a scene where attention to trauma has taken a central role in debates on pedagogy. This is especially the case in the trigger warning

debates that were introduced in the early 2000s and came to a head after 2014 through a series of op-eds that circulated in blogs, magazines, papers, and scholarly trade journals (Ahmed 2015; Downes 2016; Duggan 2014; Gay 2014; Halberstam 2014; Heer 2015; Jaffe 2015; Jarvie 2014; Kipnis 2016; Lukianoff and Haidt 2015; Meshelski 2014).

My own interest in this topic emerges out of two conditions: first, in 2019, I was invited to be a co-investigator of the first national study examining the practices and perceptions of content and trigger warnings in higher education in Canada; and second, through my own ambivalent encounters with the trigger warnings debates and practices as a gender and sexuality scholar, which led me to reflect on what else these debates might be signaling to us about how we contend with gender and racial violence through education. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the first results from our national survey (conducted in 2020–21) illustrate that students and faculty alike are affected by both trigger warnings and the conditions through which these warnings are articulated. How we make sense of the anger, anxiety, fear, frustration, hesitation, hope, panic, and other registers of affect circulating around trigger warnings can tell us something about what is happening in the relationship between teaching and learning. Dismissing demands for trigger warnings or demanding their universal practice both misapprehend the problem and possible responses. Instead, taking a cue from the intensity surrounding the ongoing trigger warning debate, I am interested in what affect can tell us about the pedagogical frictions, tensions, and intensities in the classroom; and what pedagogy can tell us about the role of affect in learning. To conclude, I offer another kind of narrative for thinking about trigger warnings in the classroom, a way of thinking about the gendered and racial politics of affect and pedagogy through the concept of solidarity.

The Affects of Pedagogy: The Classroom

Articulations of the trigger warning debate largely anchor on the role of the teacher in making pedagogical choices that will affect students, and the struggle over the teacher's power to do so. What moves the teacher and student in the classroom? What informs the teacher's pedagogical choices? What motivates the student to demand a warning, and what shapes whether the teacher offers or refuses such a demand? The myriad ways that one can go about requesting and offering trigger warnings highlight the friction that is inherent in the navigation of such gestures within the classroom. Because the classroom, and education in general, is already a space prefigured by the tension between both the student and the teacher in the acts of learning and teaching, trigger warnings enter the picture through a much longer history of feminist thinking that has grappled with the relationship between gender, pedagogy, and trauma.

Pedagogy, the theory and method of teaching, attempts to compensate for the tension in learning through the deployment of strategies, approaches, and frameworks that convince both teacher and student to take a risk in learning. In her work on education and psychoanalysis, Deborah Britzman (1998) examines “how conceptualizations of teachers, students, and the excess knowledge between them are lived as dilemmas and as difficult knowledge,” manifested “as conflicts, as disruptions, as mistakes, and as controversies” in education (19). The classroom, and its attendant figures of teachers and students, is thus already a scene imbued with contestation, tension, and friction. The work of pedagogy compels the teacher to grapple with the difficulty of the classroom by confronting their own conflicts with learning (16); a confrontation that must happen in service of encouraging the student's capacity to overcome defenses and risk learning. Because “the work of learning is not so much an accumulation of knowledge but a means for the human to use knowledge to craft and alter itself”

(4), the challenge of pedagogy is the simultaneous conflict internal to the teacher's own attachments and those internal to students. It is against this dual scene that conflicts between teachers and students can be better understood.

Trigger warnings provide a new scene for the conflicts inherent in learning. On the one hand, teachers may choose or refuse to offer warnings as an attempt to make sense of their own conflicts over violent material in the classroom. On the other hand, students may draw on the demand for warnings to play out a conflict in the classroom: to resist learning that risks confronting the ego's own defenses (12). Further still, students may turn to warnings to help articulate themselves as learners, to compel the teacher to work harder to overcome conflicts, such as when students who come to the classroom with experiences of gendered and racialized trauma want teachers to teach in ways that are attentive to this violence (Bedera 2021). In the former case, the teacher presumes that warnings can or cannot prepare students to take a risk in learning; in the latter case, the student may presume that the classroom should be a space free of violence, and therefore, the request for a warning serves as a defense against the threat of being confronted with violence.

Although some psychological research on trauma has argued against the idea that post-traumatic stress responses are triggered in the classroom (Boysen 2017), I propose that the conflict over trigger warnings is centrally a scene of conflict over pedagogy, not trauma itself. This is not to diminish the very real ways that education can be a source of violence, such as through campus sexual violence, the genocidal legacy of the residential school system, rates of student suicide, and cases of harassment and abuse both between and across students and teachers. These forms of violence see corresponding social movements that demand justice, institutional transformation, and reparation for historic and ongoing violence in education. The conflict over trigger warnings, however, re-stages the conflict over violence in the form of pedagogy, whereby pedagogy itself can constitute violence. In this way, the encounter in the classroom serves as a scene where affective responses to experiences of trauma render the act of learning an even greater risk to students—a risk the warning signals to defend against. Nicole Bedera argues that reliance on warnings fails to address the underlying source and impact of trauma on the classroom for students, which she locates in the scene of institutional betrayal rather than the original scene of trauma: “Many of the responses educators label as triggers from survivors are better described as new traumas resulting from institutional betrayal in the classroom. . . . Inappropriate comments (e.g., victim blaming, normalizing or minimizing violence) can harm victims” (Bedera 2021, 3). Looking at this scene through the lens of affect shows us how the warning acts as a buffer for affective encounters with pre-existing trauma in the classroom; however, such gestures are a superficial compensation if there is a risk that encounters with violent content are introduced in a way that newly traumatizes students.

Debates on trigger warnings illustrate a wider “thematic anxiety . . . over which knowledge is important for which social subjects” in the domain of education (Britzman 1998, 3). Is learning from and about violence a valid pedagogical approach? Does teaching on violence re-traumatize students who have experienced violence? If the challenge is not the encounter with violent material itself, but the pedagogical frameworks used to stage that encounter, then trigger warnings become a pedagogical tool that attempts to better mediate encounters with violent material in the classroom. Put another way, if the problem of violence in the classroom is not that students are traumatized, but that our pedagogical approaches to violence generate difficult affective encounters with this material, then trigger warnings are better understood as responses to affects rather than trauma itself. From this perspective,

debates on trigger warnings are posing two questions. First, how do we grapple with negative or difficult affective encounters in the classroom, those intensities, emergences, and dynamics that arise and impede the capacity for students and teachers alike to take a risk in learning? And second, are warnings an effective pedagogical model for difficult learning? The first is a question of how we mediate affects in the classroom, and the second is a question over the role of pedagogy in this kind of mediation. If anxiety over trigger warnings is another site of conflict, disruption, mistake, and controversy in education, then the scene of the classroom is a space where specific pedagogies may or may not work to mediate negative affects when working with difficult content.

Thinking affectively, the trigger—or the object of learning imbued with affects that threaten to unsettle, disrupt, or (re-)traumatize—is the source of affective incitement; both an incitement to trauma in the post-traumatic response, but also an incitement to arouse students in the scene of the classroom. Through a relational understanding of affect, the emergence of affective intensities in the classroom can be understood as connected to, but distinct from, feelings through physiological and symbolic divisions, between sensations and the articulation of these in language in the transmission between the individual and the environment (Brennan 2004, 6), or as emergent intensities that move across bodily sensations (Massumi 1987, xvi), gaining coherence as emotion or feeling once these emergences become owned and recognized through language (Brennan 2004, 5; Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 28). The trigger itself can be a site through which affective intensities emerge, but I propose another kind of affect is circulating here: the affective intensities surrounding pedagogy itself. The conditions of trauma and violence, translated into the scene of the classroom, embed the relational intensity of affective registers onto the warning rather than the original scene of violence. This focus on the warning follows Bedera's argument that "despite the insinuation of much of the public debate on triggers, the discussion of sexual violence is not inherently hurtful for survivors" (2021, 3); rather, the harm emerges through the pedagogical encounter that denies recognition of such violence from the outset in the form of institutional betrayal.

The debate on trigger warnings becomes the affective site through which friction around learning takes place. Both the provision of the warning and the failure to warn are platforms for the psychic mediation of affects corresponding to anxiety and anger. In both cases, the demand or request for the warning is about more than trauma, it is about the process of learning against the backdrop of violence and the role of the teacher to mediate this process through pedagogy. Britzman argues, "for there to be a learning there must be conflict within learning" (5). Yet such conflict is often misapprehended in the performance of controversies between students and teachers. Because "the teacher is ethically obligated to formulate theories of learning that can tolerate the human's capacity for its own extremes and its mistakes, resistance, belatedness, demands, and loss without creating more harm" (19), the role of the teacher to impress authority on the student—and the role of the student to see the teacher as an absolute authority—can easily miss the pedagogical moment of conflict in the trigger warning debate. The pedagogical paradox in this scenario is tricky to navigate, since the imperative to protect students by shielding them from harm is necessary to relieve the tension and conflict that makes learning possible. At the same time, learners need affect to move and motivate the process of education; yet from a psychoanalytic standpoint on education, without conflict, such movement cannot occur. Sometimes the conflict occurs through encounters with the text, and other times the conflict occurs inter- and intra-personally in the classroom. The relationship between affect and pedagogy, therefore, is about our adaptation

to the intensities and emergences in classroom conflicts that do not foreclose the capacity to learn through this tension.

The Pedagogy of Affect: The Crisis

If the classroom is a scene of conflicts, of learning, of arousal, of anticipation, of anxiety, of refusal, of avoidance, of projection, of fantasy, of trauma—a scene where affects circulate—with whom and against whom are students and teachers aligning themselves? Across the scene of conflict in the classroom, affect sits at the edge of our thinking about the role of education through the figures of the teacher and the student. The relationship between teacher and student is created through friction that is paramount to learning, yet debates on trigger warnings assume that this friction is antagonistic rather than productive; primarily a struggle over power in the classroom rather than a struggle over what is circulating and what is being moved. Without diminishing the impact of the structural hierarchy that positions teachers and students asymmetrically, thinking about what we can learn from and through affect can help us better understand the conflicts, defenses, and attachments that shape encounters in the classroom.

Teaching and learning is as much an affective activity, as it is a cognitive or disciplinary one. In the classroom, both teachers and students are affected through encounters with one another and with texts, objects, etc. Teachers can never quite know what, why, or how a difficult or good experience in the classroom emerges, nor how to replicate such an encounter. Beyond knowing that conflicts lead to bad feelings and difficult affective emergences, there is an intangible quality to the affective unraveling of a crisis in the classroom. Why does a crisis emerge in one section of a course, but not another? In *Education and Crisis*, Shoshana Felman (1991) reflects on a unique and unexpected experience teaching a course on testimony at the moment of breakdown when “the class itself broke out into a crisis” (59). Felman recounts the gradual unraveling of her students following the screening of two Holocaust testimonials. Receiving calls from her students in the middle of the night and discovering a growing obsession that built about the class (60), she issues a diagnosis: the crisis is “an *anxiety of fragmentation*,” consisting of “both emotional and intellectual disorientation” (61, emphasis original). Through individual and group conversations with students, and making time to work through the impacts and effects of crisis, Felman recovers the pedagogical reigns of the class. The story of crisis resolves through pedagogy in the form of class discussion and a reflexive final assignment; however, the heightening of excitement, anticipation, anxiety, panic, and other affective registers signals something important about the role of affects in the classroom. The students in her class did not immediately unravel, rather the intensities surrounding the class emerged in the ensuing days, and even among people outside of the class. In other words, the resonant intensities of affect originated in the scene of the classroom but exceeded the space of the class itself. The scene of the encounter with difficult material triggered an affective cascade of responses that surprised, excited, and unsettled the students.

The excess of affect in the classroom crisis in Felman’s story signals the limits of the teacher’s authority and the power of affects to transform the classroom encounter. Disrupting the presumption that pedagogy can direct affects, the crisis illustrated how affects can transform the pedagogical possibilities of the classroom by rendering the authority of the teacher inadequate to the emergent encounters with difficult material. Felman brought the class back from the crisis through pedagogy, giving them a reflexive assignment for their final paper in the course. In this way, pedagogy becomes the tool for reorganizing the flow of affects through classroom practices. For Britzman, education must

address the affects if teachers and students are to attach to knowledge and each other. But the teacher, in this view, can be more like an artist to consider her or his work as crafting the conditions of libidinality in learning as opposed to hardening her or his authority.

(27)

If the teacher's role is to craft new ways of encountering the material for learning to happen, then pedagogy requires an affective component—not as a way to create affects, but to help both teachers and students alike make sense of the affective resonance that emerges through learning, especially with difficult material.

In the case of trigger warnings, perhaps what is being navigated is the teacher's inadequacy to the task of responding to the preconditions of violence and trauma in the classroom. In offering a warning, the teacher attempts to use authority to guide students through the pedagogical encounter, to try to divert students from the possibility of crisis. While Felman concludes that crisis is necessary for learning to occur (68), if we think of crisis as simply a scene of affective intensity, then perhaps what is really necessary for pedagogy is an attunement to the circulation of affects within the class. This demands a teacher who is much more creative at recognizing, interpreting, and adapting to affects than a teacher who "gets it right" by offering warnings at the outset of class. But what makes for this kind of teacher? The imperatives for being good at teaching—while highly gendered and racially inflected—remain an amorphous parameter for education. Beyond popularity, charismatic performance, or expressing empathy and care for students—what Lauren Berlant calls the "charismatic mentorship model" of pedagogy (1997, 143)—what divides good teachers from the rest of us is something ephemeral and intangible in the way affects always move in unconscious ways.

In their writing on feminist pedagogy and teaching, Berlant (1997) describes the utopian fantasy of education in the 1970s that saw a "revolution in the scene of teaching, turning it into a public, collective, and politically accountable practice" (147). This fantasy, for Berlant, promised both a transformation of power in the classroom and more broadly in the world, one that shifted the teacher from authority to collaborator and charismatic mentor. However, the construction of the queer/feminist teacher as a figure of intimacy in the performance of both intellectual and emotional mentorship for students obscures the institutional reality of gendered labor within education (148), and I would add, racialized and classed labor (Ferguson 2012; hooks 1994). The "triangulation of intimacy" that shapes conceptions of pedagogy "*dominated* by the tableau of charismatic teacher/desiring student... relies on euphemizing or denying altogether the routinized aspects of its institutional situation" (149, emphasis original). Thinking back to their relationship to their own charismatic mentor, who later committed suicide, Berlant grapples with the tension that comes from the feminist classroom, whereby the figure of the queer/feminist teacher serves a paradoxical function in service of the increasingly extractive demands of the university *and* in bringing about the radical potential of social transformation through education (153). This paradox persists in the trigger warning debate through the demand for a model of education attentive to trauma and the expectation that the teacher can and should be responsible for this.

The transformative anticipation of the figure of "teacher" as "collaborator" or "charismatic mentor" faces a limit in Berlant's reflection on the paradox of feminist teaching under the emergent neoliberal institution of education, which has now come to full fruition in the twenty-first century. Mirrored in the anxiety and friction in the classroom—between the role of power in education and the expectation that the feminist classroom should not be a stage for violence—the terms of gender inclusion through warnings depends on the teacher's

pedagogical choices as an individual, rather than education as an institution. Writing more than a decade later, Berlant (2011) turns to affect theory to make sense of the scene created by neoliberalism in the pursuit of the “good life.” While not a reflection on teaching, *per se*, Berlant’s thinking on the role of fantasy and “optimistic attachment” (2) resonates with their thinking on feminist pedagogy. Through the lens of optimistic attachment, the teacher who provides a warning is holding onto a desire to make teaching and learning a scene where good learning happens. Implicit in this dynamic is an assumption that the teacher is responsible for mediating violence and trauma through pedagogy. But the desire for the classroom to be a good space, or even a safe space, for learning, is not without its risks for both teachers and students. Robyn Wiegman (2016) critiques the institutionalization of feminist pedagogy, warning that “the affective has emerged as both a diagnostic and a cure, giving the academic left a way to embrace the utopianism of the future while insisting that its rejection of modernity’s most cherished temporal promise remains secure” (84). The imperative to develop a pedagogical approach that recuperates and mediates trauma through the classroom, as the practice of trigger warnings promises, risks misdirecting our political focus in the field of education. Wiegman argues that the affective turn in feminist education is

a way to repeat the attachment to political transformation that continues to compel us without incurring the risk of the condemnation of a future failure. To be sure, one of the distinct consequences of this affective disposition is an aversion to addressing the kinds of institutional power we already have and work, often aggressively, not to lose.
(92)

As feminist pedagogies are called on to reckon with the multiple subjectivities produced by violence through trigger warnings or trauma-informed approaches to teaching, the classroom becomes a space that is caught between the political commitment to combat violence and the constant threat that violence will be enacted through the scene of the classroom. Such a contradiction takes place within a wider context in which the appeal to safety comes to define contemporary pedagogical directives (Byron 2017; Wilkerson 1999).

Teachers and students alike may aspire to see the classroom as a “safe space” or a space that prioritizes safety. In their comments as part of a dialogue assembled on trigger warnings, Aniruddha Dutta critiques ideas of safety and safe space, which “gather contrasting valences—an aspirational tool for equalizing higher education, a neoliberal ruse that tokenizes diversity, a feared capitulation to hegemonic morality—rather than functioning as a coherent logic or discourse, neoliberal or otherwise” (Hanhardt and Puar 2020, 58). Conversely, scholars working on trauma-informed pedagogy argue for models of teaching that center trauma in the classroom as imperative for inclusive teaching and learning (Bedera 2021; Laguardia et al. 2017), an approach that follows the radical inclusive models of education that have been advanced by disability justice frameworks (Carter 2015; Rae 2016) and mirrors the model of feminist pedagogy advanced by bell hooks in thinking of the role of teaching in healing (1994, 16).

Beyond the critique of “safe space” or attempts to use trigger warnings to pre-empt the capacity for harm, an affective approach to pedagogy instead asks us to consider what we do with our attachments in how we respond to harm. Taking cue from Britzman, I am interested in how we “can begin with a generous curiosity toward the subject’s passionate capacity to attach to the world” (20), and how the risk around harm is an integral part of what pedagogy must mediate, especially against the backdrop of gendered and racialized violence. This is primarily an ethical response to the anxiety caused by the threat to the

ego that learning poses within an already hostile environment for gendered and racialized learners. For Britzman, the imperative is “to do less harm in uncertainty, to risk the love of learning” (43). Affect’s frictions, tensions, and intensities that circulate around the trigger warning debates in the classroom may be one such scene that can help us understand how the risks of learning and political discourses around trauma and safety find grounding in the role of pedagogy. As ideologies around education shift away from models of pedagogy that value discipline, obedience, and conformity, toward adaptability, flexibility, and autonomy—a shift that also mirrors the flexible skills of neoliberal labor markets—pedagogical approaches must grapple with the conundrum posed by the mandate to make the classroom safe embedded in consumer-models of education. For students coming to the classroom with experiences of gender and racial violence, affective approaches to feminist pedagogy may offer better ways for teachers to adapt to the circumstances around crisis in education that do more than rely on trigger warnings themselves. Put another way, how can teachers learn how to teach *through* affects, rather than trying to avoid or manage the risk of crisis.

Conclusion: Solidarity as a Tool for Pedagogy

Thinking affectively about trigger warnings helps us dislodge the discussion on pedagogy from the debates that circulate on the validity or usefulness of the warnings themselves. Instead, we can ask questions about what affects are circulating in difficult classroom encounters, and about how we can better navigate these encounters in the classroom in ways that do less harm and encourage students to take risks in learning. Because the classroom is never free of trauma, either because it is the scene wherein violence is enacted through overt forms of discipline and punishment (e.g. late penalties, failures, suspensions, and expulsions), or through the exposure of systemic forms of violence re-enacted through class interactions (e.g. racist speech, sexism in the classroom, implicit bias), we must contend with the effects of violence in pedagogy. At the same time, the classroom is also a space where students and teachers carry other kinds of traumas with them: family illness, death of loved ones, breakups, fights with friends, workplace conflicts, etc. Because affects do not circulate in logical or predictable ways, we cannot know if what instigates a crisis is a specific text or a set of circumstances that render the class vulnerable to the intensities of affects. Instead of trying to avoid these encounters, a model of pedagogy that takes affects centrally opens us to the possibility of thinking about how to mediate the classroom rather than direct it.

In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick (2003) proposes a methodological and theoretical model of relationality through the preposition *beside*. *Beside* “comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations” (8). These textures figure into what Sedgwick calls the middle ranges of agency (13). Interested in how to think alongside rather than inside of non/dualism (8), Sedgwick draws on Silvan Tomkins’ work to make sense of the “freedom and complexity” (21) that renders affects autotelic: “one can be excited by anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy” (19). Thinking of affect as something that is both triggered by encounters—through affects that pass by and stick (Ahmed 2004)—as well as something that can emerge autonomously—a feeling that one carries and cannot shake—can lessen the pedagogical imperative to predict and manage affective risk. Thinking in this way instead invites us to attend to, mediate, and reorient the affective circulation and intensities that arise in the classroom. To do this, we can draw on Sedgwick’s nondualistic approach, which attends to the texture of daily life and to the

affective processes through which we encounter the world (17). The question is thus not “to warn or not to warn;” rather, what is needed to take the risk in a given context?

Britzman suggests that the teacher might better be served by “taking the side of the learner,” drawing on the logic of the student to guide education.

Teachers might then see a great deal of their work as a problem of redirecting the address of anxiety (beginning with their own), as opposed to viewing the circulation of anxiety as an interruption of education. But in doing so, the teacher must become interested in embodying, purposefully, an ambivalent position, entertaining some promises, fore-closing others.

(1998, 46)

Rather than orient pedagogy to a desire for stable truth, Britzman suggests that the teacher should start by reflecting on their own psychic conflicts in learning, which are transferred to pedagogy (134). Thus, rather than a universal practice, we can think of trigger warnings as one of many tools that teachers and students can mediate to make sense of learning. This means that when students request warnings, what they may be requesting is not the warning itself, but a willingness on the part of the teacher to come into relation with them and work through the risk of learning. This requires a different orientation to pedagogy, one that centers on building solidarity between teachers and students in the classroom.

In the two publications holding the same title, “Beyond Trigger Warnings” (Beder 2021; Hanhardt and Puar 2020), the authors all insist that we draw on alternative strategies to simply issuing warnings. Beder argues “survivor-supportive comments can heal... and universities can show solidarity to survivors by acting with courage around discussions of sexual assault and improving the treatment of survivors on campus” (3). This requires a relationship of negotiation between institutions and the classroom itself. In the classroom, Fatima El-Tayeb proposes working

with community agreements instead, which means we proactively and collectively take ownership of the class room experience, focusing less on avoiding triggers than on strategies to deal with the anger, trauma, and sadness that invariably surface when addressing the experiences of communities of color under racial capitalism

(Hanhardt and Puar 2020, 55)

Shifting focus from the trigger to the relational is key for rethinking the pedagogical role of responding to crises in the classroom. Rather than prevent the crisis, or the trigger, an approach that develops solidarity in the classroom makes possible a textured, adaptive, and affectively attuned pedagogy.

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) argues for a model of pedagogy rooted in collaboration, “seeing the classroom always as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community” (8). hooks sees the role of collectivity as essential for overcoming difficult encounters in the classroom. If the call for trigger warnings is actually signaling something to us about the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom, then responses that debate the usefulness of the warning itself miss the possibility of interpreting these scenes as places where the communal and collective conditions of learning are unsettled. How do we return to collaboration after the disruption created by the crisis in the classroom? Rather than simply attempting to prevent a crisis in learning, both teachers and students have the potential to collaborate

to take risks in learning. An affective approach to pedagogy helps us see that a crisis is not so much a rupture in education, but a scene where students and teachers alike can reorient the flow and circulation of intensities through solidarity. While a traditional model of education may view the teacher's role as shaping encounters and resolving conflicts, an affective approach to pedagogy asks instead how we can reorient both students and teachers as collaborators in learning, to collectively work through affective encounters in learning. This is what I hope the debates on trigger warnings are actually signaling to us: that we need better solidarity in the classroom to be able to grapple with the effects of violence that we carry into education.

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