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Pedagogy of Care: Building a Teaching and Learning Community

Introduction

In March 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 virus a pandemic, the lives of people were turned upside down.¹ The most drastic measure might have been the lockdown, which stemmed from the request for so-called social distancing. This was actually about establishing and maintaining physical distance, which, at least in the first step, thus led to social distancing.

¹ For detailed information about the COVID-19 pandemic in different countries, see COVID-19 (n.d.). For the chronological order of events, see AJMC Staff (2021).

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The pandemic also shook the educational system to its core.² Teaching moved from the classroom to the private space of teachers and students. It is not accurate to describe the process of leaving the place where teaching usually occurs as establishing a “digital classroom” or practicing “digital teaching”. Both require careful planning and preparation, but this was lacking. That is why it is more correct to say that, in March 2020, teachers and students were left without classrooms; teaching – at least initially – was held however possible. Institutional support regarding how to teach and learn in a digital environment (which platforms are appropriate for specific forms of teaching; how to modify syllabuses according to the new situation; and how to talk to students if they show signs of low mood, confusion, depression) was mostly non-existent in the spring of 2020. It took time for educational institutions to handle the new situation. So, both teachers and students were put in a situation of *learning* how to behave in a crisis.

Many teachers, especially those who base their pedagogical practices on the principles of critical pedagogy and/or other critical and progressive approaches, believe that the best way of learning is the one that requires direct interaction, i.e., “in-person” or “face-to-face” conversation. Many years before the pandemic, Mark Edmundson wrote:

Because the student and teacher need to create a bond of good feeling, where they are free to speak openly with each other. They need to connect not just through cold print but through gestures, intonations, jokes. The student needs to discover what the teacher knows and what she exemplifies about how to live; the teacher needs contact with the student’s energy and hopes. That kind of connection happens best in person; perhaps it can only happen that way. (Edmundson, 2013, p. 46)³

This is a guideline for both critical and progressive pedagogues. The holistic approach of bell hooks can also be taken into consideration: in the classroom, we are all whole human beings with a head (mind) and a body (hooks, 1994, p. 173). The position of the body, a look, gestures, the tone of voice: for an experienced teacher-pedagogue, these are all signals about the atmosphere in the classroom. Conversation and conflict (see Graff, 1992), as a crucial part of

² For basic information about the influence of COVID-19 on education, see *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Schools* (n.d.); Meinck et al. (2022); *The state of education during the COVID pandemic* (n.d.); UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (2020).

³ It is not surprising that Nel Noddings invokes precisely these words of Mark Edmundson in her text on care ethics and education. See Noddings (2017).

a critically oriented classroom, also imply direct contact and a level of intellectual as well as physical/corporeal spontaneity.

The unexpected and thus unprepared move to digital teaching and learning rendered such interaction impossible, forcing all of us working in education to reconsider what responsible pedagogy should look like during a crisis. What is more, the new situation forced us to once again pose basic questions about the educational process. In April 2020, Beatriz Acevedo raised several questions:

As classes migrate online and we deal with the potential and limitations of technology, are we forgetting what really makes learning possible? Is it the technology? The content? The whole institutional structure of the university? Or is it actually a basic acknowledgement of fellow human beings, concern for their well-being, and the reaffirmation of working together as a community, including having a mutual respect, promotion of co-learning, as well as enacting shared values and objectives. (Acevedo, 2020)

Like some other educators who have been re-examining education during the COVID-19 pandemic, Beatriz Acevedo turns to the ideas and experiences of the pedagogy of care that are related to the basic postulates of critical and feminist pedagogy. Acevedo finds a link between conversations with colleagues in the scientific community and the literature on care in order “to step back from the urgency of online teaching and learning, and focus on the basic values of our work as educators” (Acevedo, 2020). Acevedo knows that the educational system during the pandemic was forced to use new and different methods of work, which is why she asks how these methods and tools in teaching and learning influence content/curricula. Aside from that, she emphasizes that the crisis resulted in fundamental questions about the sense, purpose and value of higher education, i.e., that it has become necessary to explicitly link care with education:

COVID-19 is not only accelerating the way we work and teach but is challenging us to return to the basic principles and values of education. To question, what type of education are we needing now? If the key jobs are those related with care, how are we enhancing care as one of our learning outcomes? How is care a co-creating process of learning and teaching? How can we care for each other in our academic community? (Acevedo, 2020)

In scholarly literature and everyday speech, education is also described as an “act of care.” This care usually relates solely to students, especially in pedagogical discourses, which are rightfully student-centered. However, considering the new educational context brought about by the pandemic, Acevedo takes a step forward compared to the earlier rhetoric: instead of rhetoric focusing exclusively on students, she proposes the idea of a humanity that encompasses the vulnerability of the teacher and the students. In papers published during the pandemic, some

of which will be mentioned later, we find similar thoughts that focus on care for others and care for oneself as the preconditions for a pedagogy of care.

In the first part of the essay, we will outline briefly the basic ideas of care ethics and pedagogy of care, which stems from it or is closely connected to it. In the second part of the essay, we offer a string of examples. These examples relate to 1) the teaching of literature in a digital environment at the Faculty of Philology, University of Serbia, with a focus on the spring semester of 2020, although some examples will be from 2021. 2) The teaching of Polish as a foreign language. In this case, the focus will be on courses which were held like traditional online courses before the pandemic as well as courses which moved to the digital environment because of the pandemic. All examples are intended to illustrate the ethics of care, that is, the pedagogy of care. Also, examples are taken from our personal experience with teaching and are not necessarily representative of the institutions and organizations in which we work as teachers and pedagogues.

The fact that one of us lives and works in Serbia and the other in Poland is purely circumstantial. However, these two countries have different political, cultural and educational contexts, which affect our approaches to teaching. In the essay, we use the pronoun “we” to indicate a shared theoretical and methodological framework; however, in the examples each of us speaks for herself and thus uses the pronoun “I” (with the exception of using “we” when talking in the name of the group of teachers we worked closely with during the pandemic).

Finally, in the essay the focus shifts from the initial question “How did we teach during the pandemic?” to the question “What did we learn during the pandemic, and how and to what extent can we use this knowledge in the future?” In other words, with this essay we combine our attempts to use our experiences from 2020–2022 as a basis to think about the post-pandemic future, that is, teaching and learning when the pandemic is over.

Care ethics in education and pedagogy

Care ethics is a moral theory that states that relations among people, as well as the fact that people depend on one another, are morally important. Care ethics is also often understood as just a practice or virtue – not a theory. However, here it will serve as the framework for an analysis of our experience in the classroom during the pandemic crisis. The formation and development of

care ethics are tied to the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan and philosopher Nel Noddings from the mid-1980s. Although care ethics and feminist ethics are not synonymous, care ethics in literature is often linked with feminine and feminist ethics, and the experience of motherhood is seen at its center. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the sharpest – and perhaps most well-founded – criticisms of care ethics has come from anti-essential positions, with the intention of warning of the erroneous establishing of a firm link between care and allegedly innate female qualities, that is, virtues, which are especially visible during motherhood. Of course, not all feminists who deal with care ethics support the same positions – there is truly essentialism in the works of some of them. On the other hand, feminists who focus on care ethics, who are also more critically oriented (mainly based in the constructivist approach), have successfully responded to the objections about essentialism, criticizing it with a banal claim: women are different, many do not show care; men are also different, many do show care. In other words, although women and men position themselves differently in relation to care practices due to numerous contextual – historical, political, economic, cultural – reasons, that does not mean that care is founded in sex/gender.⁴

From the general statements on care ethics, its use in education and, consequently, in conceptualizing pedagogy of care can easily be deduced. Even though commonsensical in many regards and at times essentialist, Nel Noddings' ideas regarding care ethics, as well as the link between care ethics and (moral) education, represent a starting point for most authors who write about care pedagogy during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ We will briefly reflect on the key elements of Nel Noddings' approach. In a text published in 2017, titled "Care Ethics and Education," Noddings starts with a banal but nonetheless

⁴ For the most common objections to care ethics, as well as the most frequent responses to those objections, it is worth seeing a simple introduction into care ethics, modelled after entries from a dictionary of terms, see Sander-Staudt (n.d.).

⁵ When it comes to care ethics, aside from Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, it is worth mentioning authors such as Annette Baier, Virginia Held, Eva Feder Kittay, Sara Rudick, Joan Tronto. Nel Noddings' ideas faced justified criticism a long time ago, especially from the point of view of feminists, because they favor so-called feminine qualities/virtues and motherhood in understanding and theorizing care, as well as an unequal power balance between the carer and the cared-for. Since this paper does not aspire to become a philosophical discussion, the authors will not engage in dialogue with the existing criticism. We approach the ideas of Nel Noddings critically and selectively, relying on those insights we need to understand care ethics in education, reflected in the pedagogy of care, while dismissing naïve and essentialist insights.

important insight: educators usually claim that they care about students; on the other hand, students usually claim that no one cares about them, not the school, nor the teachers, nor the school administration (Noddings, 2017, p. 183).⁶ Noddings defines care ethics as a relational approach to life, and this relation consists of the carer and the cared-for:

The carer in an encounter is *attentive*; he or she listens receptively to what the cared-for is expressing through language, posture, and facial expressions. [...] Attention is followed by feeling, reflection, and perhaps internal deliberation, and then motivational displacement. [...] [The cared-for] shows somehow that the efforts of the carer have been received as caring. (Noddings, 2017, p. 183)

Care ethics is founded in needs, not rights, Noddings explains. It is often supposed that students are meant to master the program in the curriculum, but it is also important to pose the question of what students think about the curriculum and what their actual needs are. Noddings discerns *caring-for* and *caring-about*. While *caring-for* includes a direct and specific relation, *caring-about* is a type of indirect concern that does not necessarily need to be materialized: “We can, for example, be concerned for (care-about) starving children in faraway lands, but we cannot care-for them unless we go there and work with them face-to-face” (Noddings, 2017, p. 184).⁷

Noddings, expectedly, favors specific care for another. However, care about someone and/or something is important because it includes the abilities to identify, imagine and empathize, as well as a sense of (in)justice. Let us take a current example into consideration: even though most citizens from European countries will not go to Ukraine to help the endangered population, especially the elderly, women and children, the concern for their wellbeing and future can be materialized as a clear political and anti-war stance. The opposite applies as well: lack of care for persons whose lives are in danger but are physically far away from us can lead to (explicitly or implicitly) offering support to oppressive regimes and policies, and it can be an indicator of personal moral weakness, that is, lack of compassion for another.

Noddings also mentions another element of care ethics: physical contact. Most of us remember at least one, much needed, friendly hand squeeze in a difficult

⁶ In this text, Noddings speaks of secondary education. However, most of her insights can be applied to higher education.

⁷ Of course, a person can in various ways support an organization that does charity work in a distant country.

situation, or a hug when we needed consolation. Such physical contact between teacher and students has been strictly forbidden for at least two decades, mostly in the classroom, but also – it goes without saying – outside of it.⁸ Noddings says that in educational institutions, instead of interpersonal relations embodied in care, success has come to the forefront – on a test or exam, and then outside of school (for instance, sports and other extracurricular activities, work) (Noddings, 2017, p. 185).

This text provides specific proposals for the implementation and practice of care ethics in secondary schools. Some of them can easily be applied in higher education institutions. For example:

Listening to the expressed needs of students may impel a teacher to set aside the day's stated learning objective and engage, instead, in a discussion of some urgent social/moral problem. Such well-motivated diversion often makes later pursuit of the learning objective easier because teacher and students are working together on it. (Noddings, 2017, p. 187)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, even in higher education institutions, such intentional diversions were particularly challenging. In a digital environment, teachers and students discussed controversial topics, such as vaccination, within a wider philosophical-ethical debate on free choice vs. the wellbeing of the community (see, for example, Dinić, 2022, in this issue). These topics require careful and thought-out moderation for a productive dialogue, and even conflict between students or between teachers and students, but digital platforms such as Zoom are not best suited for such a conversation.

Authors who write about education and, specifically, pedagogy during the COVID-19 pandemic are aware of the numerous limitations of teaching and learning in a digital environment. Here is an example from a recently published collection of texts on Resilient Pedagogy:

Zoom is, quite literally, tiresome, and there is now copious research about 'Zoom fatigue.' When we're in rooms together (or even in traditional online courses), we aren't generally staring at close-ups of heads and torsos for hours on end. Being constantly framed by a camera (and in personal spaces) is exhausting, as is seeing ourselves in a sea of boxes arranged neatly and tidily into rows and columns. (Stommel, 2021)⁹

⁸ Even though the reasons for and against such an educational policy could be analyzed, this text is not the place for that.

⁹ The author of the foreword is correct in claiming that "resilient pedagogy" is not a new approach: "So many students were struggling before the pandemic, and those are the students who were most likely to have faced particular difficulties over the last year. There is nothing new – there should be nothing new – about a call for 'resilient pedagogy.' That this feels new is, perhaps, the greatest evidence we have for how ill-prepared teachers and educational institutions

Instead of being uncritically thrilled about the technological possibilities of the digital environment or, on the other hand, desperate and completely giving up on teaching due to unfavorable circumstances, numerous educators have called – and are still calling – for the response to the educational disruption caused by COVID-19 to include the humanization of education and practice of humanizing pedagogies, such as pedagogy of care. In a brief overview of pedagogies of care, Hiba Barek, Immaculate Namukasa and Sharon M. Ravitch point out that the experience of teaching and learning during the pandemic could be invaluable to the future:

The COVID-19 pandemic and the educational disturbances it engenders have opened our eyes to the harmfulness of unjust traditional pedagogical practices and the possibilities for ethical and equitable schooling; they remind us what matter most: relationships, care, and compassion. As a result, care for others – particularly students – and care for self, as dimensions of humanizing pedagogy, are currently foregrounded in educational discourse. This emergent understanding must be actionized and internalized, not forgotten, as we return to routines. (Barek et al., 2020)

This is similar to the writings of Mary Frances (Molly) Buckley-Marudas and Shelley E. Rose, who founded the interdisciplinary group Cleveland Teaching Collaborative (CTC) in May 2020. This network is made up of teachers and other persons who are in indirect contact with teaching (e.g., administrative staff). These authors talked and wrote about their own experiences of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic with the goal of offering support and tools for critical, available, and high-quality learning during the crisis. The authors say:

This work has implications for how educators and school administrators could create more connected, innovative, and humanizing spaces of learning in the future by normalizing pedagogies of care and supporting instructors to implement new strategies to enhance learning for all students. (Buckley-Marudas & Rose, 2021)

Buckley-Marudas and Rose also think about the possible characteristics of post-pandemic pedagogy and the necessary characteristics of post-pandemic teachers. They believe that each crisis, in this case the COVID-19 pandemic,

were for the pandemic. That this work feels new is the greatest evidence we have for how much harm was done to marginalized students for all the years preceding the pandemic.” However, that does not mean that a collection of papers on “resilient pedagogy” is not needed: “What we need, and what this collection offers so vibrantly, is a thoughtful discussion of exactly these things that students need, how students have been failed by our educational systems, and how we all need to respond in this and every other future moment of crisis.”

brings the existing problems or inequalities in education to the surface and can serve as a starting point for essential change. The three main ideas, which Buckley-Marudas and Rose rightly claim could be of use even after the pandemic, that stemmed from the work of the Collaborative during the pandemic are cross-collaboration, prioritization of people and risk-taking (Buckley-Marudas & Rose, 2021).

While *cross-collaboration* calls for closer cooperation within a single educational institution, between different institutions, or between persons and groups that seldom work together (people from different generations, people with different titles, people from different disciplines and organizational units), the *prioritization of people* refers to practicing the pedagogy of care. Even though many elements of the pedagogy of care are evident and were known even earlier (such as student-centered teaching or seeking student feedback on a regular basis), during the pandemic it became clear that they should be taken into consideration more often. Buckley-Marudas and Rose add that, aside from individual teachers, educational institutions practiced one type of humanizing pedagogy. For instance, some universities offered students the option of choosing between a letter grade and the pass/fail system, and teachers were advised to be flexible when setting deadlines for papers. The authors conclude: “Instead of seeing these options as ‘easy’ or ‘soft’, pandemic pedagogies recognize these modifications as responsive, attentive, and humanizing. They reflect an ethos of care and flexibility” (Buckley-Marudas & Rose, 2021).

When it comes to *risk-taking*, Buckley-Marudas and Rose write that teachers, who are experts in content, found themselves in the role of those who are learning and “it is as learners that instructors have taken risks in their pedagogies that would have seemed unimaginable prior to March 2020” (Buckley-Marudas & Rose, 2021). The biggest challenge for teachers during the pandemic, and especially for those who were not supportive of critical and progressive pedagogies in the past, was to renounce their sometimes detached and solely expertise-based approaches: “The risk is to position yourself as part of the community of learners in your course, be transparent, and share your experiences of success and failure” (Buckley-Marudas & Rose, 2021). Therefore, teachers found themselves in the situation that they should be “human first, professor second” (Buckley-Marudas & Rose, 2021).

Based on their teaching experience from the period of the pandemic and their work with their colleagues within the Cleveland Teaching Collaborative, Buckley-Marudas and Rose conclude that the main lesson for the future

is reflected in awareness of the role and strength of a group/collective, which the authors describe as “collective care”:

(1) caring for one another (e.g., as professionals, educators, humans) by being engaged in the writing, talking, thinking of this group; (2) a group that supports and works to develop pedagogies of care; and (3) a group that believes educators and educational institutions are better off when we do this work together. (Buckley-Marudas & Rose, 2021)

This conclusion, which also represents a recommendation for (post-pandemic) teachers, might seem idealistic or utopian, especially from the perspective of individuals who worked during the COVID-19 pandemic in educational contexts in which institutional support was either ostensible (exclusively of a technical nature, burdened with tardiness and oversights) or completely lacking. Of course, there were teachers who formed groups within courses, with students and/or colleagues from other institutions or other environments/states. So, it did turn out that the group was important to them too, and that the group’s composition was, of course, contextually conditioned.

From this brief overview, it is evident that two key things are important for the pedagogy of care: taking into consideration the needs of students, and forming a group in the educational process whose members (teachers and students alike) will take care of one another. From these two assumptions, other important characteristics of the pedagogy of care are deduced: from shaping the curriculum, to actual work with students – in the classroom or online.

Caring for each other in a digital environment

Teaching in a digital environment, especially if there is no time for planning and preparing its execution, represents a huge burden for teachers and students, and, indirectly, for parents. In the spring of 2020, the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development missed the chance to secure the necessary equipment for such teaching for students and teachers in primary and secondary schools.¹⁰ What is more, the Ministry did not even try to gather information on who

¹⁰ Dejan Ilić wrote continuously about education in Serbia during COVID-19 on the Peščanik web portal. For the needs of this paper, I have summed up some of his analyses and conclusions. See <https://pescanik.net/author/dejan-ilic/> or <https://pescanik.net/tag/korona-virus/> (*Korona virus*, n.d.; “Peščanik”, n.d.).

needed help and how in order to implement such forms of teaching. Let us assume that all teachers and children have a computer and a good internet connection. This leads to the question of how big the dwellings of the teachers and children are and whether they can work peacefully or attend class in those conditions. Did the Ministry take into consideration that many teachers are also parents who share their space with their children? When the Ministry asked employers to let employees work from home, did anyone ask whether those dwellings have separate spaces for employees and their children, so they can all work? And what are those jobs that can be done at home, and how many people in Serbia actually do them?

No one at the Ministry posed these questions. What is more, even when these questions were posed in public, the Ministry avoided answering them directly, claiming to have things under control. But the consequences of such behavior were felt by teachers, students and, indirectly, parents. The Ministry relied on the private resources of teachers and students and did not try in any way to compensate the unjustified expense (by increasing salaries or procuring equipment). In such conditions, social differences increased, and the disparities between children were more prominent; moreover, privileged students from well-off families had a better chance of “getting the hang of” remote learning.

Things were a bit different with higher education. The Ministry gave recommendations, while the responsibility for implementation rested on universities and their faculties. Also, higher education is significantly different than lower levels of education in one aspect: students are of age, so their parents – at least formally – are excluded from agreements on teaching. Leaving aside the particularities of individual faculties which stem from specific fields,¹¹ one can say that, in the spring of 2020, teaching at the University of Belgrade was relocated to a digital environment, seemingly without any major issues. But these appearances were deceptive, as students from various faculties later indicated numerous problems: some teachers sent lists of literature instead of organizing some form of teaching; the books were not available since the libraries were closed; and some teachers did not show the necessary flexibility. After such a response from students, employees at faculties received instructions about

¹¹ For instance, practical exercises at the Faculty of Medicine are different from practical exercises at, let us say, the Faculty of Philosophy: aside from the fact that the former includes certain work conditions and equipment, while the latter needs only participants to the discussion, this practice is necessary for future doctors because they cannot – and should not – work as doctors without it. In other words, each faculty organized remote teaching in its own way. Only the measures of protection from COVID-19 were the same at all faculties.

what “remote teaching” or “teaching in a digital environment” does (or does not) include (for instance, a list of books is not and cannot be a replacement for classes in a digital environment). However, adequate implementation of these classes depended exclusively on the personal responsibility of the teacher.

In the spring semester of 2020, I taught four courses: two mandatory and one elective in undergraduate studies, as well as one in doctorate studies.¹² Considering that I stand by the principles of progressive pedagogues in my work as a teacher – especially the ideas and practices stemming from feminist pedagogy – instead of imposing a certain manner of work I reached an agreement with the students about the format of the teaching that suited them the best. However, before talking to them I had to explain to myself what I expect from teaching in these new circumstances and envision a few possible scenarios in advance. In his adapted syllabus for the course “Religion in America,” religious studies professor Brandon Bayne excellently summed up the doubts and uncertainties that I and numerous other teachers in the world faced that spring. Bayne shared his proposal on social media, so his brief pedagogical manifest went viral in the (American) academic community. I list it here in its entirety:

No one signed up for this. Not for the sickness, not for the social distancing, not for the sudden end of our collective lives and collaboration together on campus. Not for an online class, not for teaching remotely, not for learning from home, not for learning new technologies under duress, not for limited access to learning materials.

The humane option is the best option. We will prioritize kindness and supporting each other as humans. We will prioritize simple solutions that make sense for the most. We will prioritize sharing resources and communicating clearly.

Don’t try to do the same thing online. Some assignments are no longer possible. Some expectations are no longer reasonable. Some objectives are no longer valuable.

Foster intellectual nourishment, social connection, and personal accommodation. Accessible asynchronous content for diverse access, time zones, and contexts. Optional synchronous discussion to learn together and combat isolation.

Remain flexible and adjust to the situation. No one knows where this is going and what we’ll need to adapt. Everyone needs support and understanding in this unprecedented moment.¹³

¹² The four courses focused on Literary Theory, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies, and Periodical Studies.

¹³ This “instruction” is also listed by Sharon M. Ravitch in a text in which she explains the fundamental dimensions of “flux pedagogy” in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (these are: Inquiry Stance Pedagogy; Trauma-informed Pedagogy, which includes Radical Compassion

These five points perfectly describe the priorities and sentiment in higher education in March 2020. The key question was how to adapt teaching and learning to the new situation so that students would have a sense of meaning and purpose while preparing for classes and participating in them with the help of a digital platform. This also included revising one's own expectations: from what goes into the grade (for instance, how to evaluate regular attendance and active participation in discussions when certain students do not have a good enough internet connection or physical conditions for that at home) to what the exam, namely the final essay, looks like (how to write the essay if students cannot do the research and use literature in the library but have to conduct research exclusively online).

In my case, it turned out that each course required a somewhat different solution, and all five of Bayne's insights had a role in that. This is not unusual since these courses were attended by different groups of students: from eighteen-year-olds who returned home from Belgrade dorms and lived during "lockdown" with the members of their families in various conditions, to PhD students who were mostly all employed, and one student even had a baby. As someone who has been practicing feminist pedagogy in the classroom, I am used to student-centered teaching, intense discussions of important social and ethical questions that stem from the literary and critical/theoretical texts we read for classes, my self-reflexive use of authority in the classroom, and even displays of vulnerability if a situation demands it. Not only did remote teaching and learning in the pandemic emphasize all these practices, but it also brought to light issues that are not necessarily visible or present at first sight in a traditional, physical classroom: 1) issues of class (e.g., where students come from; what kind of social/economic background they have; how their family/local community perceive their studying of comparative literature, which sounds very intellectual but is clearly unprofitable); 2) everyday politics (e.g., confusing and contradictory cri-

and Radical Self-care; Emergent Design, Student-Centered Active Pedagogy; Critical Pedagogy and Storytelling; Racial Literacy Pedagogy; and Brave Space Pedagogy) and suggests specific things that teachers might do regarding each of these dimensions. This approach is also not new but integrates numerous existing approaches and adapts them to the new situation. What is particularly interesting is the insistence on "radical self-care" which Ravitch plainly explains in a letter to the readers of the journal *Perspectives*: "As educators, we must take intentional care of ourselves for many reasons, among them so that we have the energy and focus needed to truly see and support our students, families, and each other. To do this, we must speak to the ways that social identities, in terms of their proximity to structural power, are central to our students' – and our own – experiences of the pandemic." See Ravitch (2020). Her text first appeared on Sage Publications' MethodSpace, in March 2020, and then in a somewhat different version in the journal *Perspectives on Urban Education*.

teria for the “lockdown”, the economy (profit) vs. safety (health) argument, poor social and health care services – all consequences of bad political decisions). Also, although teaching/learning was not happening “face-to-face” via digital platforms, we went to each other’s homes, saw books on the shelves, plants in the windows, posters on the walls, full laundry drying racks, parents, siblings, partners and children accidentally passing by and sometimes even smiling for the camera. At some point, we all learned how to blur the background, but, interestingly enough, my students and I did not use this option.

Before I describe the adapted method of work for all courses, I would like to circle back to the claim that both teachers and students were put in the position of learners. This also proved to be true. I will give a clear example. Since I did not have experience with digital platforms for teaching and learning, an undergraduate student helped me pick a platform and test its abilities. I knew she was skillful in that regard, so I asked her for help, and she readily agreed.

1. Mandatory courses, bigger groups. Many students did not have adequate conditions for synchronous classes, that is, classes at the scheduled time (for various reasons, e.g., weak internet connection; too many people working from home, thus not enough physical space for remote teaching and learning; some students had to find part-time or full-time jobs because their parents were laid off at the beginning of the pandemic). Once a week, always at the same time, students received materials for the teaching unit (the lecture and the literature). Once they had processed that, they would send their written commentaries and questions to me and other students. Consultations were held once a week. Students had several time slots available: fixed time slots for one group of students, and flexible time slots for students who were unable to attend the group consultations. Exam preparation was a mandatory part of written and verbal communication.

2. Elective course, undergraduate studies. Since this group was relatively small and we could find a time slot that suited everyone, the classes were held regularly, once a week. One student could not attend the class, so I send her summaries of the lecture and additional literature. I sent the same material to the rest of the group, since this proved to be useful. Everyone received the mandatory literature in advance, in the form of a scanned course reader. The exam was adapted to the situation: instead of an essay on a topic of their choice, for which research needs to be conducted and additional literature needs to be used, students wrote an essay on one of the several topics offered, with the help of the texts from the course reader and literature that is available online, if they were able to access it.

3. Elective course, doctoral studies. The organization was the same as in the elective course in undergraduate studies. The exam was different: the PhD students formulated the topics of the essays themselves and wrote research papers with the help of the literature that I scanned and sent to them, or that they found online, or that they found at the library during the rare periods when the libraries were at least partially open. The classes were held in the evening, when the “lockdown” would start. Looking at it from this perspective, it seems to me that conversation during a time when we could not get out of our homes meant a lot psychologically to all of us. These conversations often lasted longer than the set hour and a half and exceeded the scope of the topic in the syllabus in many ways.

In the case of both the elective courses, intense communication was carried out outside of the lectures and the mailing list. We exchanged individual and group messages about music, shows, films, as well as texts/books that we had read. It sometimes happened that I/we would receive a message on the group Google Hangouts chat late in the evening about the text we were going to discuss in class, or about a film someone had watched. I believe none of us thought was inappropriate or burdening as the evenings were difficult – we spent them all in our homes, alone or with our family. Also, some messages were congratulatory – due to birthdays, holidays, or the beginning of the exam period.

I will describe a few pedagogically interesting situations here. The first two situations relate to the spring semester of the 2019/2020 school year. The third situation relates to the winter semester of the 2020/2021 school year. There is an important difference between these situations. It is perhaps because COVID-19 caught us all by surprise in the spring semester that the enthusiasm and dedication of the students I worked with at the time were commendable. On the other hand, the winter semester of the following year was marked by dejection and lethargy. Students wanted to go back to the classroom because teaching in a digital environment no longer had any point. To some extent, this had something to do with the specific circumstances in Serbia: teaching was remote even though there were no other bans. For instance, all cafés and restaurants were open. In other words, you could have coffee with your colleagues, but you could not attend class together. It was hard to ignore this absurdity.¹⁴

¹⁴ Cafés and restaurants, as well as other participants in service industries, were open for at least several reasons: 1) the government did not have enough resources to provide monthly financial help for all people who worked in service industries before pandemic and thus were forced in spring 2020 to stay home because of the COVID-19 measures; 2) the money which comes from the taxes which service industries pay is important for the state budget; 3) psycho-

Even though it would be more interesting if I used specific messages I exchanged with students, including abbreviations, emojis and all other things that make these messages “digital,” this would potentially violate their privacy. That is why I will retell all three situations. One risk is evident: the rest of the text will sound like a journal entry from a period that most of us, as it seems to me, have largely repressed by now.

1. At the start of April 2020, protests were organized in Novi Pazar.¹⁵ The gathered citizens protested because of the lack of basic (protective) equipment in healthcare institutions. The lack of protective equipment led to a large number of COVID-19 infections, as well as a high mortality rate. The protests were also ultimately directed at the authorities in Serbia. One student of mine was from Novi Pazar. After several disturbing reports from this city in the media, I sent a message on the group Google Hangouts chat to ask him how he was. He told us what the situation in Novi Pazar was like and added that he hoped that the political situation would be different and better after the pandemic ended. Daily politics is not a topic in my classes. However, at that moment, it seemed to me that avoiding the question about the situation in Novi Pazar would jeopardize the idea of establishing a group within that course whose members would take care of each other. The question about the situation in Novi Pazar, therefore, stemmed from care for the wellbeing of the students and, consequently, other people living in that city. At the same time, that question underscored the fact that at moments of crisis we cannot ignore everyday problems just because they stem from specific (poor) political decisions.

2. One student went to the countryside when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. She attended classes regularly. However, one day, she “logged in” to the class from a local store. Various products could be seen in the background. For instance, I remember cleaning products, most likely because the media kept telling us to regularly clean our spaces, clothes and bodies. She said that her internet at home was down, so she asked her neighbors if she could use their internet at the store because she was meant to speak about a text from

logically, citizens felt better and less angry with the government if they had at least an illusion of “normal” social life. On the other hand, public education was a place where the government could demonstrate, if only allegedly, responsibility and care.

¹⁵ A city located in southwestern Serbia, populated with Muslims and Orthodox Christians. See “Novi Pazar” (n.d.).

the syllabus that day. At that moment, she showed a sense of commitment towards the group and towards herself. I believe this was the result of our previous work and of fostering a feeling of togetherness. Also, this student could have turned off the camera. The fact that the camera was on speaks of established mutual trust.

3. During one class, several students did not turn on their cameras, even though we had agreed we would all be present that way, “in person.” I asked them why they would not turn on their cameras. One student, who was otherwise a kind and well-mannered person, responded quite rudely that he was at the dorm, that he shared a room with his roommate, and that his camera was not working. It was clear to me that after half a year of teaching in a digital environment and endless (self)reflection on that teaching, I forgot for a moment about the different conditions we all worked in. I apologized to that student and continued with my class. After the class, I found an email in my inbox: the aforementioned student agreed with me that it was better when we all turned on our cameras and apologized for his tone. He added that he was sending the message just to me, to my email address, because it seemed more “personal” than a group Google Hangouts chat. I responded that he did not have to worry: his response had been spontaneous and justified, and my insistence on everyone turning on their cameras had been somewhat inconsiderate. I added: “Together, we demonstrated what some limitations of remote teaching look like; that’s not a bad thing as it sheds light on what is changing.” We both had the need to explain to each other why we behaved in a certain way and to apologize. That is also testament to the established mutual trust and care for each other.

That summer, as soon as it was possible, I met in person with the students of the two elective courses from the spring semester of 2020. It was then that the PhD students met in person for the first time. I still collaborate with some of them. When it comes to undergraduate students, it was also their first meeting in person after several months. Two years later, I am still in touch with most of them. I know they have kept in touch amongst themselves. I wrote letters of recommendations for some of them for master studies abroad. They got in. One student that attended the elective course in undergraduate studies told me that they had started regularly meeting after our first meeting in person. The group was, therefore, formed during remote teaching and continued to function when things, to put it this way, returned to their usual normal state. I see that partly as the result of the pedagogical approach during the crisis.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I was finalizing my manuscript about the use of periodicals in the feminist classroom. Part of the manuscript referred to theoretical and methodological assumptions of feminist pedagogy, so I tried to show how a feminist classroom within literature studies can look and function. The book was published in 2021 (see Kolarić, 2021). Remote teaching and learning were not in my focus, but that experience influenced my argumentation in the book. Although it might sound unusual, this disruption in education confirmed to me that critical and progressive pedagogies, such as the feminist one, are necessary in the classroom because, regardless of crises, they foster conversation, negotiations, and agreements, as well as principles of togetherness and solidarity. At a time when the educational system caved under the pressure of an educational policy based on standardizing knowledge and tests, and success was reflected solely in numbers and competitiveness among students,¹⁶ which we have seen for the past two decades at least, pedagogy that questions such “values” is invaluable. In that sense, to me, reading and thinking about care ethics and the pedagogy stemming from it were a logical step. There is hope that teachers – as well as students – who do not favor these pedagogies changed their opinion during the COVID-19 pandemic. If that happened, we could call it a post-pandemic pedagogical twist in Serbia.

Caring in different ways as a teacher of Polish as a foreign language: from commercial courses to language lessons for refugees

1. Commercial courses in private companies that employ foreigners (or in private language schools)

Before the pandemic, language lessons used to be conducted in person in private international companies. The teacher would come over to a company and conduct lessons on site. When the pandemic started, companies relatively quickly moved their lessons online. Both students and teachers were highly

¹⁶ The same goes for teachers; this is not about tests and grades, but the number of published works, the category of the journal in which scientific papers are published, citations and the like. There is almost not a single word on teaching and pedagogy in the requests placed before teachers.

motivated to continue the language courses. In addition, companies employed people from all over the world, so they were already familiar with using various video conferencing and messaging tools to facilitate the daily work of their teams. Thus, the only thing they needed to do was to choose the best software or select one of the tools that had been already implemented within the organization. Teachers and students did not need any special equipment, just computers. Online learning proceeded without major obstacles in such groups. The timing of the lessons took into account the fact that the students were located in different time zones. The students quickly switched to this mode of learning and used it willingly. They were able to quickly log into the lessons before or after work and fit them into their daily schedule. In the case of this type of course, even when it was already possible to return to in-person learning, many companies stayed with the remote option. It turned out to be convenient for adult students who are motivated, willing to cooperate, and want to learn a new language in their free time, often just for fun. So, if they have enough time and money to participate in lessons, they take advantage of this form of learning. In principle, such lessons may not be very burdensome and can function as a form of after-work entertainment in which the educational content is incorporated into enjoyable meetings – the lessons.

This example is very different from the other examples I will give. It illustrates that the manner of teaching and learning (“in person” or in a digital environment) does not matter very much when “students”, that is, employed adults, choose to learn a language for fun, curiosity, or to advance their already good professional and personal conditions. However, even in that case, teachers may choose the pedagogy of care, which I am inclined to do. In such cases, students may show more appreciation for the course and the teacher. However, this particular way of teaching and learning will not necessarily affect students’ sense of self or foster a feeling of togetherness in a group.

2. Specialized language courses for students in specific socio-political situations

1) The case of Belarus

The learning process is very different in the case of people who are in difficult socio-political circumstances. For example, such a group are Belarusian students who had to leave Belarus after the presidential election on 9 August 2020 because of the growing repression against anyone questioning the legality of the elections. In response to the situation, the Polish government instituted

special scholarships for Belarusians under the Konstanty Kalinowski Scholarship Program, which was first introduced in 2006. Program III (*Solidarity with Belarus*) was launched in August 2020 as assistance for Belarusian students and scientists. A great number of intensive language courses were launched in 2021.¹⁷ Their main aim was to prepare Belarusian students to pass the B2 Polish language exam, which would allow them to start studying in Poland in autumn 2021.

Such intensive courses were conducted by, e.g., the Centre of Polish Language and Culture for Foreigners Polonicum. They were offered every day, except weekends, via the Zoom platform and the Kampus e-learning platform. Aside from the Polish language itself, students also learned specialized terms and phrases related to the fields of study they wanted to explore in the fall. Due to the pandemic and great interest in the course, nine groups were created at Polonicum alone. The Center convinced many teachers cooperating with the institution to get involved in the program, despite the difficult conditions and short timeframe. Students had to pass the language exam in June 2021 to have a chance to take part in the Polish university recruitment process.

The course participants had to deal with many difficulties. Online-only teaching and learning was still quite new – for both teachers and students. Its intensity was very tiring as it consisted of 3 or sometimes even 4 lessons a day (with one lesson lasting 90 minutes). The need to pass the exam was both a motivation and a paralyzing factor for the students, who had to be very engaged and focused. Aside from the learning process, there was also the issue of the specific nature of language courses that require students to talk about personal matters, experiences, feelings and emotions, as they learn how to express themselves in a foreign language. In this context, it should be remembered that the people who received scholarships had suffered repression in their home country and had been forced to leave Belarus. Therefore, teachers had to, on the one hand, prepare an intensive language learning program and organize remote classes in such a way that the students' progress could be effectively measured; on the other hand, teachers had to prepare themselves, basically on their own, for teaching young people who had undergone many difficult experiences.

At the basic level, as teachers, we tried to check that our students took part in the lessons every day. We asked them to let us know in advance if they were aware of any planned absences. We regularly reminded them that if they needed to get in contact with us on an individual basis, they should write to us and we would

¹⁷ Support programs for Belarusians have been continued in Poland until today.

always find the time to discuss the issue in question with them. We were unable to protect them or to solve the problems they faced, but we wanted them to know that they could feel safe during our lessons – that we, as teachers, were there for them. Even though we were the ones who checked and evaluated their knowledge, we were on the same team. We wanted them to achieve their goals. In difficult situations, they could also contact us by phone. We wanted them to know that, despite the difficult linguistic challenges they faced, they could count on our support or at least us as human beings, acting as sympathetic listeners and directing them to the appropriate person or institution. Despite various tensions resulting from the learning process and social interactions, none of the students abused our trust, while our support and kindness were received with much surprise (i.e., disbelief that teachers could be so open and understanding) and joy.

Crises and doubts are embedded in the learning process, especially in the case of intensive courses. In this case, even though the online learning mode itself did not allow for direct contact between the students and the teachers, the teachers had to be highly sensitive to their students' emotions, locations (for example, to check whether they were in Poland, in a dormitory, or trying to come back home) and general safety. These students were always looking for solutions since their families very often still remained in Belarus. We tried, as teachers, to take these factors into account in our daily activities, also by showing how language reacts to social and political changes (e.g., discussions on the use of prepositions *na* and *w* with the word “Belarus”, and later on also with “Ukraine”) (see Puculek, 2022).

2) The case of Ukraine

As teachers, we were able to use the good practices developed during the courses organized for the Belarusian students in the next edition of the Konstanty Kalinowski Scholarship Program. Lukashenko remains in power, so many political emigrants from Belarus continue to arrive in Poland. Meanwhile, the global situation has changed quickly once again, this time because of the war in Ukraine, which took a dramatic turn as a result of Russian military aggression in February 2022. Numerous refugees began to seek shelter in Poland, requiring all kinds of assistance. Of course, it would take a separate study to discuss the situation in full, so here I would like to focus only on describing the problems related to learning the Polish language.

The people of Poland were shaken by the military aggression against their neighbor, Ukraine. For a moment, it seemed that the pandemic was completely

forgotten. Many Poles tried to help fleeing Ukrainians as quickly and effectively as possible, in many different areas, and this issue became the main focus for society. The number of refugees grew every day, and the ability to communicate with them was essential to be able to adequately respond to their needs and problems. Despite the geographic and linguistic proximity of the two countries, which was of some help, Polish and Ukrainian remain fundamentally different languages. Russian was also a problematic factor in this context as it was the mother tongue for some of the Ukrainians and could be more familiar to Poles than Ukrainian. Russian used to be taught in Polish schools much more often than Ukrainian. Meanwhile, during the war, Russian was considered by many to be primarily the language of the aggressor, therefore its use could evoke extreme emotions among Ukrainians. It turned out relatively quickly that teaching Polish would be an important way of helping the refugees.

Preparing a language course requires a lot of work, organization of activities, and development of an appropriate curriculum. In the ensuing war situation, there was not much time for thinking. What is more, state institutions, which are always part of a multi-level structure, needed more time to take appropriate actions. Non-governmental institutions, which often operate in the here-and-now mode, were fastest to react because their decision-making processes are less hierarchical and complex. Therefore, the effects of their work could be seen very quickly. As far as teaching Polish is concerned, in this text I would like to look at the example of the Bente Kahan Foundation in Wrocław, which began to offer Polish courses as early as in the second week of the war. The Foundation works to foster mutual respect and human rights, so it was no surprise that it was committed to helping the refugees. The Foundation has a screening room which can be used as a meeting space. Even more importantly, the Foundation cooperates with qualified teachers, who immediately agreed to conduct language lessons for the refugees. It was clear from the outset that the lessons would have to be organized in-person and that it was very important to provide the refugees with a quiet place where they could concentrate on language learning. We also wanted to help the refugees to calm down and take their minds off the war, even for a moment. From the very beginning, as a Foundation, we tried to show the Ukrainians that they came to Poland with great linguistic potential, meaning that the Ukrainian language contains words that are similar to Polish, and that, if we are open to each other, we really can learn to communicate. The language lessons were not a therapeutic process, but the aim of the lessons was to make the students regain a sense of agency in their own lives, at least to some extent. Thus, the course was more than just a language course, although the language and linguistic needs remained the teachers' and students' main focus.

As a participant in online courses

During the pandemic, many activities were moved online. Because of that, we had an opportunity not only to conduct lessons online but also to take part in various events and courses which had not been available to us in the pre-pandemic times. I would like to describe one such course here as I find it particularly interesting in the context of the pandemic-era teaching.

The course in question was entitled *Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Holocaust Memory* and was run by Western Galilee College. Offered online in the 2020/2021 academic year, it was aimed at people interested in the issue of commemorating the Holocaust. Its originators, Dr. Boaz Cohen and Dr. Edna Pasher, invited people from all over the world, at different stages of their professional careers (students, doctoral students, researchers, activists), to participate in the course. The final outcome of the course was to be a group project that would reflect the postulates contained in the title of the course: innovation, entrepreneurship and commemoration of the Holocaust.

The teams that worked on the project were international and the vast majority of the suggested ideas were intended to be implemented in a digital form. As a participant, I felt quite uncomfortable during the course. We talked about the Holocaust, a very difficult topic, with people for whom it is associated with a wide spectrum of issues; we met on Zoom once a week, so we remained strangers to each other for most of the course's duration; and we were supposed to talk about commemorating the Holocaust in an entrepreneurial way. The organizers put a lot of effort into making the course interesting and inspiring, which I noticed, but I felt alienated anyway: I as a participant, and I as a practicing online teacher. After some meta-level considerations, which included reflections from my own teaching experience, I was driven to the idea of implementing a simple course project in which I could include both the lessons from the course and my emotional reactions to this course. This is how the idea of creating *Holocaust Emotion Cards* was born.

The project focuses on memory, but it also demonstrates that there is a direct connection, a link, between the past and the present. This link is formed by emotions. I chose emotions as the connecting element, because in today's world – the world of pandemics and ecological catastrophes, one in which life has largely migrated online – it is emotions that cause a lot of problems for people. Together with Kamila

Pałubicka from NGO KULTURERBEN e.V., I created teaching materials that can be used as an aid in working on/with emotions. In this project, we wanted to evoke the memory of the past (the Holocaust) and offer materials (cards and exercises) for working on/with emotions during various classes and workshops.

The project materials consist of a deck of cards that can be used as teaching materials with people of different ages. Each card in the deck represents one emotion. One set of cards is decorated with artworks depicting various emotions (with the description of the pictures and information on the authors). The other set contains the names of the emotions. All the images presented on the cards are works (drawings, graphics) created by concentration camp prisoners. We wanted to show that, despite horrific, unimaginable conditions, people still experienced a whole range of emotions during the war. Looking at these emotionally charged images in the present, we can try to better understand their authors, find a way to connect with them, and maybe learn something about ourselves as well. These emotions – theirs, depicted in the images, and ours, evoked by the art – form a thread connecting us with historical events and letting us understand fragments of the past, while at the same time allowing us to talk about what we experience and feel here and now. The *Holocaust Emotion Cards*

are a suitable tool for teaching students about, foremost, the history of antisemitism and the Shoah. We believe this approach would be a great supplement to teaching based on written sources as it makes it possible to create additional personal connections with people who lived in this historical context. The materials stimulate discussions about discrimination, democratic values and human rights. Students are encouraged to express themselves and deepen their awareness of this intense topic. The project was completed in May 2022 with the printing of the cards (see Fig. 1, 2, 3). We are currently working on promoting this simple tool for working on and with emotions.



Fig. 1. *Holocaust Emotion Cards*
(photo: Katarzyna Taczyńska)



Fig. 2. *Holocaust Emotion Cards* (photo: Katarzyna Taczyńska)



Fig. 3. *Holocaust Emotion Cards* (photo: Katarzyna Taczyńska)

Conclusion

In this text, two principles of ethics, that is, pedagogy of care, are crucial: 1) a voluntary relation between the carer and the cared-for (this relation goes both ways); 2) forming a group and developing a sense of togetherness. During the COVID-19 pandemic, both teachers and students were in the position of learners because no one was able to prepare in advance for the spring of 2020. Many teachers who favored student-oriented pedagogical approaches relied on – whether consciously or intuitively – the fundamental principles of pedagogy of care, and they implemented them in remote teaching and learning. Various experiences and conclusions stemmed from that pedagogical practice, and some of them could be useful for the post-pandemic future. We will conclude with those that matter most to us, despite their simplicity:

1. Central to education is the relationship between teacher and students.
2. Inequality is a persistent problem in education, and we need to continuously work towards more than just education.
3. In crises (pandemic or war), education can offer a safe space, encouragement, empowerment and knowledge. The human option is always the best option.

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Pedagogika troski. Budowanie społeczności nauczania i uczenia się

Pandemia COVID-19 wstrząsnęła systemem edukacji do głębi. Nauczanie przeniosło się z klasy do prywatnej przestrzeni nauczycieli i uczniów. Nieoczekiwane przejście na cyfrowe nauczanie i uczenie się uniemożliwiło „osobistą” interakcję, zmuszając nas wszystkich pracujących w edukacji do ponownego przemyślenia, jak powinna wyglądać odpowiedzialna pedagogika w czasie kryzysu. W prezentowanym artykule najpierw omawiamy główne idee pedagogiki troski. Następnie przedstawiamy przykłady nauczania i uczenia się podczas pandemii płynące z naszych osobistych doświadczeń literaturoznawców i filologów z Serbii i z Polski. To doświadczenie zostało ukształtowane przez nasze pedagogiczne wybory i wsparte naszymi epistemologicznymi i etycznymi punktami widzenia.

Słowa kluczowe: pandemia COVID-19, zdalne nauczanie, zdalne uczenie się, pedagogika troski, pedagogika feministyczna

Pedagogy of care: Building a teaching and learning community

The COVID-19 pandemic shook the educational system to the core. Teaching moved from the classroom to the private space of teachers and students. The unexpected move to digital teaching and learning rendered “in-person” interaction impossible, forcing all of us working in education to reconsider what responsible pedagogy should look like during a crisis. In this article, we first elaborate the main ideas of the pedagogy of care. Then, we offer examples of teaching and learning during the pandemic from our personal experience of literary and language scholars, based in Serbia and Poland respectively. This experience has been shaped by our pedagogical choices and informed by our epistemological and ethical standpoints.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, remote teaching, remote learning, pedagogy of care, feminist pedagogy

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