

## Community, Collaboration, and Care in Practice

A CONVERSATION WITH COLLEEN RENIHAN, JOHN SPILKER-BEED, AND TRUDI WRIGHT, COEDITORS OF *SOUND PEDAGOGY: RADICAL CARE IN MUSIC*

In light of the toxicities of academic labor,<sup>1</sup> collaboration and community have never been more crucial to our work, a reality experienced viscerally during the years of isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> But collaboration is not at all straightforward in academic environments. In our experience, the tightly drawn borders of our respective music disciplines do not encourage interdisciplinary collaboration. There are also very real challenges concerning time and resources that hinder any truly collaborative work, as well as the strengthening of community.

In this conversational piece of collaborative writing, we share insights into both the challenging and rewarding aspects of coediting *Sound Pedagogy: Radical Care in Music* during the turbulent period of the early 2020s.<sup>3</sup> In the spirit of Carol Gilligan's ethics of care, we wish to lay bare the details of our collaborative journey, thus resisting the traditional (and artificial) distinction between public and private matters.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, we argue for collaboration and care as tools of resistance that might counter the perpetuation of endemic disconnection, emotional exhaustion, and divisiveness in academic culture.

We also aim to continue conversations begun by the American Musicological Society's Pedagogy Study Group that took place during "Pedagogy Fridays" online meetings in the fall of 2022. Specifically, we discuss how aspects of

1. See John Smyth, *Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rock Stars and Neoliberal Ideology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); and Mie Plotnikof and Ea Høg Utoft, "The 'New Normal' of Academia in Pandemic Times: Resisting Toxicity through Care," *Gender, Work & Organization* 29, no. 4 (2022): 1259–71.

2. See Grace Gao and Linna Sai, "Towards a 'Virtual' World: Social Isolation and Struggles during the COVID-19 Pandemic as Single Women Living Alone," *Gender, Work & Organization* 27, no. 5 (2020): 754–62; and Michelle Newcomb, "The Emotional Labour of Academia in the Time of a Pandemic: A Feminist Reflection," *Qualitative Social Work* 20, no. 1–2 (2021): 639–44.

3. Colleen Renihan, John Spilker, and Trudi Wright, eds., *Sound Pedagogy: Radical Care in Music* (University of Illinois Press, 2024).

4. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

collaboration are key to a pedagogy of care, particularly during times when neoliberal ideals are being prioritized by academic administrations, and when politics of difference are dividing communities.<sup>5</sup> By drawing on aspects of our individual teaching practices, we explore ways that our learnings about collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic years have in turn informed our pedagogical approaches and tools for teaching. Finally, we consider why and how it remains necessary to be radical in our centering of pedagogies of collaboration.

The three of us first met in 2017 in Boston at the Teaching Music History conference when presenting on a panel that explored different expressions of care for our students and colleagues. Our experiences at that conference, along with feedback from its many generous attendees, inspired us to coedit *Sound Pedagogy*, a book that would include the brilliant work of many members of the American Musicological Society's Pedagogy Study Group. The journey our book took from idea to publication is a complicated but beautiful one, and we are especially proud of our care-filled collaborative process that valued difficult conversations, time to take care of ourselves and our families, respectful dialogue, mutually defined deadlines, slow work, and a celebration of the unique strengths that each editor brought to the table.<sup>6</sup>

We have learned that, now more than ever, there is much to be gained through collaboration. In our estimation, collaboration *is* care. But collaboration and care are especially difficult at the present moment as the increased emphasis on scarcity and efficiency in higher education strains institutions and people more and more each year.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, some college and university administrations have even resorted to “toxic positivity” and bids for emotional labor with students to extract more care-based work from staff and faculty, while at the same time reducing faculty and staff support resources, compensation, and benefits.<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding Beckie Supiano's bold declaration, in 2022, that

5. See Beth Mintz, “Neoliberalism and the Crisis in Higher Education: The Cost of Ideology,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 80, no. 1 (2021): 79–112.

6. Our impetus and model for slowing down is inspired by the collaborative work of Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber in *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (University of Toronto Press, 2016).

7. See, for example, Melanie Lawrence and Goli M. Rezai-Rashti, “Pursuing Neoliberal Performativity? Performance-Based Funding and Accountability in Higher Education in Ontario, Canada,” in *Discourses of Globalisation and Higher Education Reforms: Emerging Paradigms*, ed. Joseph Zajda and W. James Jacob (Springer Cham, 2022).

8. For a discussion of the risks of touting toxic positivity in the context of crises in higher education, see Jeffery Aper, “Calling Dr. Pangloss: The Self-Defeating Logic of Forced Positivity,” *Journal of Educational Thought* 56, no. 3 (2023): 211–30. See also Virginia Moran and Talia Nadir, “The Caustic Power of Excessive Positivity: How Vocation and Resiliency Narratives Challenge Librarianship,” working paper, Association of College & Research Libraries National Conference (virtual), 2021, <https://alair.ala.org/items/a641c058-018b-4f9a-96be-bc9cb427e28e>. The paper explores the risks of toxic positivity and what the authors term the mythology of *vocational awe*—a term that certainly also applies to work in music.

“Student Success Requires Faculty Well-Being,” such a call too often falls on resistant administrative ears in scarcity environments.<sup>9</sup>

In the conversation that follows, we each share aspects of the collaborative process that challenged us, but from which we also learned a great deal. We also share some of the practical takeaways that we have incorporated into our pedagogy as the result of our collaboration. The conversation below reflects our first tentative steps to transform our work in music by envisioning collaboration as care.

**Colleen:** To start, I’ll consider the intersection between collaboration and one of my frequent intellectual preoccupations—time and temporality. One of the biggest lessons I learned from the process of coediting this book is that collaborative work takes a great deal of time because it is often messy. This realization emerged from the most frustrating point in our collaboration: summer 2020, a time of anger, confusion, stress, and disorientation. The weight of that period combined with (or in tension with) the ways academics in Western culture have been socialized to work, to produce, and to organize their time was incredibly taxing. Disciplinary habits and ingrained expectations of producing work at a certain rate, coupled with the evolving complexity of the collaborative parts of the project, caused dissonance and anxiety. As the book’s threads got longer and more tangled, we also felt the center of the project shift. The three of us found ourselves in different stages of “not-yetness,” a process of growth in knowledge without having fully arrived at mastery.<sup>10</sup> We ultimately came to understand that care pedagogy was inextricably linked to intersectional equity.

The need for our continual self-education brought many frustrating conversations that revealed numerous holes in our knowledge, which in turn caused us to question our expertise (never easy) and reconsider the shape of the discipline that we thought we knew so well. We also came to recognize that (aha!) care pedagogy is at its core an interdisciplinary act while musicology is intrinsically pedagogical. If we hadn’t allowed ourselves the time and messiness to explore and read about, say, the feminist roots of care,<sup>11</sup> the intersections

9. Beckie Supiano, “Student Success Requires Faculty Well-Being,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 26, 2022, <https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/teaching/2022-05-26>.

10. See Amy Collier and Jen Ross, “For Whom, and For What? Not-Yetness and Thinking Beyond Open Content,” *Open Praxis* 9, no. 1 (2017): 7–16; and Amy Collier and Jen Ross, “Complexity, Mess, and Not-yetness: Teaching Online with Emerging Technologies,” in *Emergence and Innovation in Digital Learning: Foundations and Applications*, ed. George Veletsianos (Athabasca University Press, 2016), 17–33.

11. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 (1989): 139–67; Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99; Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture*,

between care and race,<sup>12</sup> and the ways neoliberalism complicates notions of care,<sup>13</sup> we wouldn't have understood the full ramifications of what we and our contributors were dreaming up in this book. In fact, it was astounding to see how care as a topic blew open the project and its disciplinary parameters in ways we hadn't at all initially anticipated.

As I think back on what I experienced as a certain messiness in the process, I realize now that this experience had to do with my preconceptions about time and work: how long should something take? How long *does* something take? Collaborating on *Sound Pedagogy* made me realize how much *time* is bound up in the ways we are socialized to work in academic contexts: think of the implied temporality in deadlines, timeframes, the tenure clock, and pace of publication, not to mention the doomsday aphorism “publish or perish.”

To put it directly: these ways of organizing time are all constructs of white supremacy culture. Inspired by Tema Okun's work, we assert in our book that music as a discipline is heavily invested in these priorities (competition, isolation, timeframes, etc.).<sup>14</sup> Once we learned about the complex and uncontainable nature of care and collaboration from scholars of care and critical pedagogy, we came to embrace the reality that this important work should take longer.<sup>15</sup> In short, my biggest learning from this collaboration was that work that engages

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*Society, and Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1993); Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics* (Westview Press, 1995); Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford University Press, 2006); Joan Tronto, “Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgments,” *Hypatia* 10, no. 2 (1995): 141–49; and Joan Tronto, “Care as the Work of Citizens: A Modest Proposal,” in *Women and Citizenship*, ed. Marilyn Friedman (Oxford University Press, 2005), 130–45.

12. See bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, 1994); bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (Routledge, 2004); bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (Routledge, 2010); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2012); and Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). See also Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” and “Mapping the Margins.”

13. See, for example, Alex Usher, “What People Mean When They Talk about Neoliberal Universities: Part I,” Higher Education Strategy Associates, November 20, 2017, <https://higherstrategy.com/what-people-mean-when-they-talk-about-neoliberal-universities-part-1/>; and Rebecca Lund, “The Social Organization of Boasting in the Neoliberal University,” *Gender and Education* 32, no. 4 (2020): 466–85.

14. Tema Okun, “White Supremacy Culture,” updated February 2025, <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/>. Her original 1999 collaborative article of the same name is found here: [https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/okun\\_-\\_white\\_sup\\_culture.pdf](https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/okun_-_white_sup_culture.pdf).

15. The need for “slow” is also embraced in disability studies. See, for example, the work of Ellen Samuels, who writes about the nonlinearity of crip time, and that of Ashley Shew, who suggests that, given our experiences teaching in the COVID-19 era, “clocks should bend to our bodies.” Ellen Samuels, “Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017), <https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/5824/4684>; Ashley Shew, “Let COVID-19 Expand Awareness of Disability Tech,” *Nature* 581, no. 7806 (2020): 9–10.

us in true self-reflection, significant personal transformation, and interdisciplinary thinking just takes longer. And we need to be mindful of this reality when we ask our students to engage in the same.

**John:** Colleen, to bounce off of your story of key learnings, I'm going to discuss some teaching applications of interdisciplinarity, care, equity, and slowing down. These are takeaways from our publication collaboration that I use in my classroom, and I would suggest that any instructor could easily adapt them for use in theirs. In my senior capstone course, for instance, students used to present a traditional research project; students' topics were determined during the course's second week and their projects followed the customary timeline for proposal, bibliography, outline, and final presentation. But since 2018, music students at my university have shared with the campus community just how exhausted and anxiety ridden they feel by the beginning of their last year in the music program. So, I adjusted. Looking back from the vantage point of the present moment, the best changes I have made to my teaching came during the pandemic years.

I now have my students read *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown, a BIPOC author, community leader, and scholar of leadership, a field unquestionably dominated by white cisgender men.<sup>16</sup> Adaptive leadership tools are the *first* thing students learn in my classes. The genre as listed on the book's back cover is "self-help"—a problematic and revealing term, for it is a pejorative, racist, and sexist microaggression that diminishes brown's BIPOC queer work in adaptive leadership. The "self-help" label invites dismissal, whereas a more accurate label such as "leadership" or "adaptive leadership" might have invited the more dubious reader to think twice. brown demonstrates that collaboration requires processes of adaptive leadership, and that adaptive leadership requires collaboration. When reading each chapter, my students discuss examples of how to embrace adaptive leadership strategies and bring them into our work as musicians to create something new or make changes in our field. At its core, the students' scholarship of integration and application is interdisciplinary.

As for changes to the research project, a student's topic now emerges much later in the semester, between weeks five and nine. The capstone presentation

16. adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (AK Press, 2017). Many understandably experience a culture of white, upper-class, patriarchal dominance in the field of adaptive leadership as white colleagues commonly only reference the foundational work of Marty Linsky and Ronald Heifetz, all published by Harvard. See Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Harvard University Press, 1998); Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change*, 2nd ed. (Harvard Business Review Press, 2017); and Ronald Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Harvard Business Press, 2009). Certainly people with minoritized identities have been leading in adaptive manners for centuries, and could share their expertise with the field.

is no longer a report of finished work but a roadmap for a future and provisional project they will undertake and develop further after they are settled into their careers. As part of this presentation, students discuss the beginning-stage research needed to chart the course for the postgraduation career project. The instructions read: “Design a SMALL project that applies principles of *Emergent Strategy* to create more possibilities in the work you want to do in the world (perhaps thinking about your immediate career environment?). Perhaps you identify problems that need collaboration to find adaptive processes to work together toward solutions.” By design, the assignment gives students permission to pursue a slow research process and generate a small research product. To share a concrete example, one student interested in vocal pedagogy prepared a project to bring trauma-informed teaching practices into studio voice teaching. Pedagogical materials such as studio policies and procedures, a learning contract, and sample lesson plans will be developed after graduation as she works in her studio. This new take on the traditional semester-long research assignment models slowness and not-yetness, which Colleen and Trudi will discuss in more depth.

**Colleen:** Yes! This new approach respects the *time* it takes to do this work and allows for flexibility in the research timeline depending on what each student needs for their project.

**John:** As our work got tough during the pandemic in ways that none of us anticipated, I can now see, looking back, that the three of us assumed roles in the editorial process that kept us equitably at the table in nonjudgment and in nonviolence. Our work together exemplified how The King Center defines practicing nonviolence as a way of life.<sup>17</sup> In fact, there are many ways that we have been socialized to accept violence as normal. In addition to physical violence, we can all bring ideological, emotional, spiritual, and procedural violence to people, especially to those from minoritized groups. Marshall Rosenberg’s scholarship on and practice of nonviolent communication present another approach to nonviolence as a way of life.<sup>18</sup> All approaches to nonviolence could be adapted to enhance our collaborations, teaching, and learning.

I was the brainstormer of our group, with an emphasis on storm, or so it felt for me on the inside. It’s summer 2020. I started learning about race in depth during the spring of 2019. I’m angry, worried, afraid, and ashamed. I know

17. For information about Martin Luther King Jr.’s six principles of nonviolent living, see “The King Philosophy–Nonviolence 365,” The King Center, accessed June 15, 2023, <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>.

18. Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 3rd ed. (PuddleDancer Press, 2015).

I'm bringing up information about racial equity that is very uncomfortable for white people to say out loud, let alone engage with carefully with other white scholars and musicians in academic discourse. I'm scared I'm ruining our relationships. I'm ashamed I don't know the right words to say about what I'm seeing unfold in our society. I still have much to learn in this area of research and how it relates to care pedagogy. My work to this point was heavily rooted in the writings of Brené Brown and Parker Palmer. I'm embarrassed I don't know it all. I wanted to run away. In addition, I was taking on new life roles, daunting then, fulfilling now. At the time, I was two years into a divorce and coparenting, and four years into trauma therapy. I was (and still am) figuring out that I don't have to be ashamed to be a post-Catholic, post-Mormon, gay, divorced dad.

Colleen was the connector. She always saw how the pieces I brought to the table might connect to her personal and professional context for conceptualizing social justice: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.<sup>19</sup> Still today, no such cultural and educational cognate exists in the United States government, leaving Trudi and me at an experiential loss as US-based scholars. Colleen also noticed possible areas for incorporating tenets of racial justice in our book. However, each of these topics required time and space for further research to understand the connections and then to allow them to develop. Again, more slowness and not-yetness.

Trudi modeled the tenets of nonviolent love. She said, "John, these tough conversations only strengthen our friendship and our collaboration. Keep bringing everything you are bringing." With cultural and educational humility, she modeled the posture of "I don't know what this means, or I don't understand this uncomfortable sticking point about capitalism, or because of my positionality at a Jesuit institution, it is necessary for me to reconcile the best practices of Jesuit teaching with the difficult history of Jesuit conquest of Indigenous land."

**Trudi:** It was very difficult for all of us to reconcile with our moments of not-yetness. As Colleen mentioned earlier, as "experts," we are trained to be (or trained to appear to be) the sage in every room. It is so challenging to unlearn this expectation and to honestly admit to colleagues what you don't know. Such acknowledgement, however, is the very thing that strengthens our ability for continued learning and thus improves our teaching and our collaborations. Being open to admitting our "not-yetness" is an important part of a growth mindset, instead of a fixed mindset.

19. See "Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," Government of Canada, updated December 12, 2024, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>.

**John:** From our research, writing, and editorial collaboration, I took away fierce lessons and opportunities for growth around 1) listening to others in order to see gaps in our understandings without being reactive, 2) listening to learn from others, 3) being with and holding the experience of feeling misunderstood, 4) being comfortable with the fact that I might not know something or yet have words to describe it, and 5) noticing and managing embodied emotional responses. How must my students feel each day when they experience roadblocks to their learning and are afraid to speak up due to the socialization of control, the performance of intelligence, and perfectionism in the classroom? This reluctance to speak up is often intensified in the stifling dominant-group ideologies of music departments, where many music faculty and students still refuse to advance equity by, at bare minimum, noticing the impact of their behavior and working to mitigate the negative effects of whiteness, patriarchy, sexism, and ableism. Speaking up is the least we can do. As we work in a subdiscipline that still prizes the lone book author as better than the lone article writer, our cowritten introduction to *Sound Pedagogy* is, for me, the piece of writing that I am most proud of to date.<sup>20</sup> I would never have embarked on or achieved a book-like object in print without Colleen, Trudi, and our collaboration.<sup>21</sup>

**Trudi:** This fruitful collaboration with John and Colleen led me to a practice of collaborative teaching evaluation called “Teaching Squares,” about which I presented in a lightning talk at the 2022 Teaching Music History conference.<sup>22</sup> In this practice, educators form a teaching group in which all members observe each other’s classes in order to learn from one another. After the class observations have concluded, instead of giving critical feedback based on a traditional evaluative model, each member shares what they observed in the others’ classes and how their recollections can *positively* impact their own teaching. This exercise celebrates the best in each pedagogue’s classroom, while inspiring each member to try new things to enhance their teaching methods. I began this practice at my own university with a colleague in the philosophy department; she is now my regular teaching partner. As my colleague and I continue to grow in our teaching relationship, I’m mindful of the lessons I learned through

20. Colleen Renihan, John Spilker, and Trudi Wright, “Introduction: Radical Care,” in *Sound Pedagogy: Radical Care in Music*, ed. Colleen Renihan, John Spilker, and Trudi Wright (University of Illinois Press, 2024), 1–33.

21. Colleen Renihan, John Spilker, and Trudi Wright, “Acknowledgments,” in *Sound Pedagogy: Radical Care in Music*, ed. Colleen Renihan, John Spilker, and Trudi Wright (University of Illinois Press, 2024), xv–xvii.

22. For a great introduction to teaching squares, see Carol Berenson, “Teaching Squares: Observe and Reflect on Teaching and Learning” Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning Guide Series, June 2017, <https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/sites/default/files/Teaching%20Squares%20Guide%20Final%20v2.pdf>.

collaboration with John and Colleen. Particularly impactful is the simple practice of finding ways to bring your personal gifts and talents into the collaboration and to encourage others to offer theirs while also stretching and improving the many other skills you possess. When you are in collaboration, you always have teachers with you to help you grow. Be comfortable in the discomfort because they will have your back.

**Colleen:** Trudi, the collaborative approach you mention here recalls our experience with acknowledging and being comfortable with owning holes in our knowledge. A significant part of successful collaboration seems to involve making peace with this state of not-yetness, and with allowing others to teach you. This call to resist the isolation and monoculture of academia reminds me of my Black studies colleague Katherine McKittrick’s work on citational practice as both a form of resistance and central to community building. For McKittrick, the process of citation is inherently collaborative and effectively roots writing in the very act of collaboration. In her words, “the works cited, all of them, when understood as *in conversation* with each other, demonstrate an interconnected story that resists oppression.”<sup>23</sup> McKittrick positions Black studies as a postdisciplinary conversation that can “resist racial and gendered violence through the sharing of ideas.”<sup>24</sup> What is striking in this observation is the centrality of collaboration itself and the naming of community as essential to the integrity of academic writing. As John, Trudi, and I came to recognize how multidisciplinary and anti/counterdisciplinary the concept of care in pedagogy actually might be—especially in the field of music—the citational practices, both among our editorial community of three and in our writing of specific chapters of the book, became the place where we built and named the community in which we imagined/hoped/prayed our work would live.

**Trudi:** Indeed. A major lesson of our collaboration is that the three of us are constantly growing through our feelings of discomfort as we continue to learn new things. This is something we expect of our students all the time, but don’t encounter as much as teachers and scholars (unless you are writing your first book!). Although both John and Colleen have already brought this up, it’s worth reiterating. Throughout the process of writing our chapters and editing our book, I experienced feelings of inadequacy *many* times, especially in connection with tasks that were part of the publishing process, sources I had not read (and felt like I should have), and concepts I did not yet understand. Feelings of inadequacy are common, daily occurrences for our students and, unfortunately,

23. Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Duke University Press, 2021), 28 (emphasis original).

24. McKittrick, *Dear Science*, 30.

college and university music programs tend to complain about such perceived inadequacies instead of treating them as opportunities for learning. In the academy, we may label students as deficient (and they then internalize this feeling of deficiency or inadequacy), just as I labeled myself deficient at times during the collaborative process. To encapsulate what we learned in the process of creating this book together, I quote from our collaboratively authored introduction:

Kevin Gannon calls for a pedagogical orientation that eschews blame and judgment toward students who arrive with different academic experience or ways of knowing. Higher education socializes faculty to view students' struggles as deficiency, low effort, or lack of dedication. Instead of lamenting what we view as a lack of preparedness and placing blame on the student, he introduces a pedagogy of radical hope. Centered in Freireian thought, Gannon's teaching framework is "life-affirming, inclusive, and centers student agency and praxis." He builds on the scholarship of Amy Collier and Jen Ross, who celebrate the "not-yetness" or nascent skills students possess, a concept desperately needed for care pedagogy in music. Consider, for example, how often we shame and penalize students for not learning something we believe they were supposed to in a previous course. Gannon states, "Not-yetness urges us to encounter students as people in process, not as fixed and insurmountable deficits." "Students can't [sight read, hear chordal progressions, or use software to notate music]? Well, not yet. But they will. Can't [imagine the ways that music upholds systemic oppression]? Not yet, at least. But our job is to help them find the ways to get closer to yet." Together with Gannon, we believe care pedagogy can transform our learning spaces to serve as sites of potential and becoming.<sup>25</sup>

I also think "not-yetness" is something John, Colleen, and I are beginning to internalize for ourselves, because in our collaboration, we reminded each other of it a lot: "Don't know all the things you have to do to get your book published? Not yet, but we're working on it!" We also used this concept when we discussed how to frame difficult topics and difficult language in our book. We knew some colleagues would be very comfortable with identifying and working toward dismantling systems of racism and oppression, for example, while others may be uncomfortable even reading the word "racist." As we developed an understanding of our own "not-yetness," we began to write more inviting prose so others might begin to identify and celebrate their "not-yetness" too.

**John:** Trudi, thank you for laying bare the tensions of discomfort and necessity inherent in embracing not-yetness in our research. It's hard to accept such thoughts as "I don't possess a full understanding of specific key concepts," or, "I

25. Renihan et al., "Introduction," 18. All direct quotations in the excerpt derive from Kevin M. Gannon, *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto* (West Virginia University Press, 2020), 24–26. Additional citations in the excerpt include Collier and Ross, "For Whom, and For What?" and "Complexity, Mess, and Not-yetness."

can only continue to learn, to wait for understandings to ripen, for connections to form, and for next steps to emerge in a nonlinear process.” The difficulty, anxiety, and frustration involved in such processes are only exacerbated when we don’t yet have exhaustive control over the bibliography, as so many important sources are just being published or have not yet been released. The discomfort and necessity of not-yetness also extends to our teaching, especially when we can sense that something isn’t working and that we need more guidance, but don’t yet know where or how to identify the resources that will revitalize our pedagogical tools. Collaboration absolutely helps, but we still have to wait for new resources to present themselves, ideas to take root, practices to develop, and understandings to ripen.

**Colleen:** Trudi, your work with not-yetness has not only been a really affirming part of our work on the book, but it’s also something that has powerfully impacted my own teaching practice. And I think a lot of this has to do with the classroom culture I’ve become more thoughtful about. Though students are often resistant to leaning into a concept like not-yetness, I make a point in my courses to motivate them to embrace and leverage it as an exciting state of possibility. Just like we were required to do in our coediting and cowriting, I now talk to students about change and growth: I tell them that, ideally, the people who start the course will have become fundamentally different by the end of the course!

This point brings me back to time and temporality. In fact, the two biggest stumbling blocks in embracing not-yetness for my students are assessment and (again!) time. Students are reluctant to explore alternative positions and ideas, to bring research from other fields into their projects, to test out something new and have to start again, etc., not just because taking such risks could negatively affect their grades, but also because they are so overscheduled that they don’t have adequate *time* to spend on such exploration. This is why I am drawn to self-, peer-, and un-grading strategies in my classes, and it is one reason I have pared down the number of assessments in all of my classes.

What does embracing not-yetness mean in practice from the instructor’s perspective? It entails: asking students whether the material they are learning does or does not connect with their lived experiences; framing class discussions as spaces in which they are allowed to be wrong, to be confused, and to change their minds; instructing students to respond to one another by building on or making reference to a classmate’s thoughts; reassuring students of not just the discomfort but also the freedom involved in changing one’s mind; and creating a classroom space that is supportive and safe enough for students to feel able to do each of these things.

## Conclusion

Post-pandemic, after years of isolation, masks inhibiting our in-person communication, and diminished cognitive bandwidth from overloaded stress capacity, we are learning anew how to communicate and collaborate. And it's hard, especially given the backdrop of scarcity and efficiency that so many of us in higher education are forced to navigate. We reaffirm Sonya Renee Taylor's invitation to promote stronger, more equitable communities and processes. In April 2020, she said,

We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate[,] and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.<sup>26</sup>

We believe Taylor's vision has become ever more important in the current political climate of 2025. While it may seem like an audacious claim to make, perhaps now more than ever, we need to reinvest in relearning and re practicing collaboration using a beginner's mind. We also need to rethink ways to teach our students how and why to collaborate, given transformed priorities and understandings of our work in light of care. We agree with artist and writer Johanna Hedva, who states,

The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care.<sup>27</sup>

As we confront and challenge years of a musicological discipline that values individualism, competition, and, in recent years, scarcity, due to the current political-economic climate, we seek to model collaboration as a form of anti-racist feminist leadership—in our research *and* in our classrooms.

26. Sonya Renee Taylor, Instagram, April 2, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-fc3e-jAlvd/>. Quoted in Jazmin Vega, "The Breathing Room: Envisioning a More Just Post-Pandemic World," April 17, 2020, <https://today.uic.edu/events/the-breathing-room-envisioning-a-more-just-post-pandemic-world>.

27. Johanna Hedva, "Sick Woman Theory," accessed July 25, 2023, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/johanna-hedva-sick-woman-theory?v=1643032424>. The essay was first published in *Mask Magazine* in 2016 and then revised in 2020.