


Chapter 29

Caring as an Authoritative Act: Re-Thinking Respect for Students and Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter serves to discuss common perspectives of respect in the classroom and highlight ways to re-conceptualize authority in student-teacher relationships so that respect can be grounded in both authority and caring. The authors believe that through the framework of critical race theory, teachers can learn how to express caring respect in ways that will be validating to their students. Furthermore, because of this reframing of authority, teachers will be able to accept non-authority-based respect. Finally, this chapter encourages teachers to experience and understand respect in the ways that validate their students as people and honor their own abilities as teachers. Rather than using ideas of respect to exhibit and reinforce institutional authority, teachers can instead promote caring respect in their classrooms by highlighting students' voices and reflecting on their own roles as both an educator and a person.

INTRODUCTION

Respect is like boundaries. And some boundaries are not meant to be crossed. (Black Female High School Student)

I think [students] show respect by doing what's supposed to be done, even when others are not. (White Female Middle School Teacher)

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Caring as an Authoritative Act

I think teachers, when they raise their voice they try to make like the...make it clear like they're in charge. So um, that's why they raise their voice, 'cause they're scared of like losing that control. (Latino Male High School Student)

What makes a teacher effective? When pre-service teachers are asked to write about an effective teacher they remember from their years in school, often they do not recall the teacher whose lesson plans were well organized and engaged their previous knowledge. They do not discuss assignments that required deep learning, nor critical thinking, nor their former teachers' carefully facilitated discussions and activities. Most (if not all) pre-service teachers write about a teacher who *cared*. This perception of effective teaching extends beyond those engaged in the teaching profession to students themselves; research suggests that students are successful – academically and personally – when they perceive their teachers as caring (Wentzel, 1997; Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009). Not surprisingly, many who enter the field of education enter because they care about children and their learning. Once in the classroom, however, teachers often put caring aside and instead focus on creating an orderly and efficient classroom (Weinstein, 1998). Why does caring cease to be a pedagogical tool when a teacher first enters the classroom?

One possible explanation for overlooking the necessity of care is that novice teachers find it difficult to navigate their dual roles as both caring and authority figures (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schultz, 2009). Novice teachers describe caring as important (Laletas & Reupert, 2016) but antithetical to authority (McLaughlin, 1991). Thus, novice teachers often conclude that they can either be a caring figure or an authority figure, but not both (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009; Weinstein, 1998). As teacher education programs and professional development modules promote authority-based classroom techniques, such as SLANT (Sit up, *Lean* Forward, Ask and Answer questions, Nod your head, and *Track* the speaker), it becomes professionally risky for teachers to care, as best practices in pedagogy do not include caring. Yet, teachers can integrate, rather than oscillate between, caring and authority by engaging in *caring respect*.

Respect is a fundamental, but understudied, component of positive and healthy interpersonal relationships (Frei & Shaver, 2002). Although respect relies on the given, recognized, and accepted power differential among persons (Piaget, 1932/1952), people do not have to express respect in this manner; respect can also be a caring response to the unique attributes of personhood (Dillion, 1992). That is, respect can be conceptualized and practiced as the integration of caring and authority.

The focus of this chapter is three-fold. First, it introduces pre-service and novice teachers to thinking about classroom interactions through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework and highlights the importance of teachers' understanding the impact of their social location on classroom interactions. As the US teaching population is primarily White, middle class, and female, expressions of respect to and from students may go unrecognized in diverse classrooms and schools. Given the structural racism that exists within the power structure of the school system, students may not feel comfortable explicitly respecting the authority of the teacher. Thus, teachers may miss opportunities of experiencing respect from their students if they expect authoritative respect behaviors such as obedience.

Second, this chapter serves to discuss common perspectives of respect in the classroom and highlights ways to re-conceptualize authority in student-teacher relationships so that respect can be grounded in both authority and caring. The authors believe that through the framework of Critical Race Theory, teachers can learn how to express caring respect in ways that will be validating to their students. Furthermore, through this reframing of authority, teachers will be able to accept non-authority based respect.

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