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Pedagogies of Care, Dignity, Love, and Respect: An Epistle to Our Future

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EDITORIAL

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Why we speak

> "*To live our lives based on the principles of a love ethic (showing care, respect, knowledge, integrity, and the will to cooperate), we have to be courageous.*" (hooks, 2001, p. 101)

> *It becomes imperative for those of us teaching and educating that we perform love in ways that combats erasure and dehumanization of one's self and historically marginalized populations that we serve.* (Brooks, 2017, p. 109)

> *A biracial seven-year-old came home from her elementary school crying after having had her curly hair cut, first by a white classmate and later by one or more white teachers, without her or her parents' permission.* (*Washington Post, 2021*)

> *Feeling harmed, a Native American student films his white math teacher wearing a feathered-headdress grossly (mis)appropriating Indigenous dance, war hooping and tomahawk chopping as a way to teach a mnemonic device.* (*Newsweek, 2021*)

> *Black children in a Georgia daycare are made to wait until after white classmates finish their lunch before being served their meal. The incident is caught on camera and described by the company owner as a "random" and "isolated" event.* (*Newsweek, 2021*)

To whom we speak

Dear Readers,

The incidents referenced above and countless other dehumanizing encounters have long been a part of the storied narratives of Black diasporic and Indigenous youth and their families in and out of school for generations. Settler colonialism around the world has necessarily meant strategic and violent erasure of indigenous land, onto-epistemologies, histories, heritage knowledges, and mother tongues, as well as centuries old ancestral cultural and spiritual practices. So, this cutting of *unruly* hair is both a traumatic linkage to the genocidal experiences of first nations peoples forced into boarding schools and an incisively sobering reminder of anti-Blackness. Similarly, making twenty-first century suburban Black children wait, as second-class citizens, on their white peers to eat lunch is, as Keisha's 5-year-old daughter describes (after reading about Rosa Parks), *minimally* "unfair." We are *still* fighting for the rightful and humanizing place of care, dignity, love, and respect in education as foundational equity imperatives. Our Black, Brown, and Queer children (and teachers and parents) have a right to be, know, and feel loved now, today in our ever-aspirant and still elusive beloved community and in our classrooms.

Communities on the margins have struggled to cultivate, sustain, and assert semblances of pride, dignity, love, and respect. Above, opening this editorial, Brooks (2017) reflects on the role of love in social justice education inviting us to consider a critical theory of love as justice work and a restorative pedagogy. Similarly, gay liberation rights activist Marsha P. Johnson reminds us that "No pride for some of us without liberation for all of us." As we continue to navigate life (before) during and after a health, racial, and economic pandemic, we find ourselves continuing to call forth a need for authentic

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care for educators and youth. Education scholarship has highlighted the benefits of engaging in caring relationships with students or emphasized the imperative for teachers to love students, thereby loving who they are and from where they come, embracing the plurality in histories, languages, traditions, and cultural practices that make up our classrooms and, by extension, our worlds. In this editorial, we name the work still to be done on understanding, theorizing, (re)membering, and practicing a love for students and teachers, respect for the parents and profession, dignity for teachers of color, and care for humanizing contexts, policies, and practices. This work begins with affirming the lifegiving and embodied ways those of us on the margins are part of a legacy, a continuum of insisting on "love as the practice of freedom" (hooks, 2006).

The work also requires refusing and dismantling the ways neocolonial ideologies and inequitable practices effectively get in the way of our realizing teaching and learning as deeply humanizing and relational work (Patel, 2016). By design, formal educational spaces remain contested spaces in which education activists are embattled around issues related to excessive market- (not self-development) driven testing and assessment, punitive and racially disproportionate discipline policies, as well as spirit murdering spaces (Love, 2016). For those of us working inside classrooms and in partnerships with schools, we know the dismal statistics related to the well-being of our students and teachers, both empirically and experientially.

Before COVID-19 uncovered and exacerbated inequitable conditions, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) emphasized in their report, "Cops and No Counselors: How the Lack of School Mental Health Staff Is Harming Students," that our school students are not well. Drawing from the US Department of Education, 2015–2016 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), approximately "14 million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker." State and district education funds are going toward the policing, criminalization, and surveillance of students in schools as places of containment and control while restorative justice models and life-saving Ethnic Studies programs continue to be novel exceptions to the rule. In addition to the harm experienced by students in schools, teachers of color contend with dehumanizing conditions expected to do more with less time and support. The deskilling of teachers has been a gateway to low morale among educators, high teacher turnover rates, and the disappearance of Black teachers. According to the Black Teacher Project's (BTP) *Landscape Analysis of Education-Based Racial Affinity Groups in the U.S.*, "educators of color in 2020 are still dealing with the effects of the 'outer-gration.'" In other words, despite BTP's slogan "every child deserves a Black teacher," we are still facing the overwhelming absence of teachers of color in public school classrooms, where these same "educators of color often have to fight, navigate, and negotiate microaggressions that target both themselves (Lynn, 2002; Kohli, 2016) and students and families of color (Warren-Grice & Parker, 2017)."

Despite these dismal state of affairs, we "maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite" (hooks, 2001, p. v). We are reminded by hooks (1994) in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, that:

> The academy [or school] is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207)

It is with this spirit of hope that we continue to speak about the ethical and equity imperative to cultivate love, care, dignity, and respect in education.

In community,
Keisha, Justin, Jamila, and Esther

Speaking of this issue: what we know, have learned, and must do

> I think care is the ability to see humanity in others (Nieto, this issue).
>
> . . . then caring also means being able to fully be our fullest self and allow others to do the same (Vilson, this issue).
>
> For me, care is critical love . . . where you offer compassion, empathy, perspective-taking, but not to bypass some harder conversations as well. Because sometimes those harder conversations, if we are not having, then we don't prepare people for what's about to come (Bhattacharya, this issue).

In this issue, we invite you to consider the fundamentally necessary commitments to cultivate care, love, dignity, and respect in education. For teachers and learners, teacher educators and educational researchers, as well as community-engaged scholar activists: We are called to consider all the ways our work contributes to what hooks (1981) describes as the "self development of people . . . over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires" (hooks, 1981, p. 194).

We begin with a *Kitchen-Table Talk*, where Sonia Nieto, Jose Luis Vilson, and Kakali Bhattacharya discuss what they know and have learned, challenging us toward cultivating an ethical praxis of care, dignity, love, and respect in education. After our *Kitchen-Table Talk*, we feature our first contribution to the *For the Culture* section by scholar and artist, Grace D. Player, who in her artwork invites us to visually consider the ways our communities of color have "through the multiplicities and prolific genius of being us, we have continually engaged in flight toward worlds we desire and deserve—worlds that center and cultivate our care, dignity, love, and respect." Finally, the articles in this issue expand upon some of these themes, helping us think further about the radical choice to love and desire wholeness, healing, and liberatory experiences in education. Across the authors, there is a refusal of that which oppression suppresses and a call for love as justice work, dignity as our way of being, and care as essential practice. We hope these articles help us have the "harder conversations" with love, care, dignity and respect for our textured lifeways.

In "Collective (Re)constructions of Linguistic Surveillance at Home: Transfronterizx Families as Cultural and Linguistic Guardians," Idalia Nuñez uses critical multiple case study to draw on the way literacies of surveillance and translanguaging is embodied and rationalized in the homes of three Latinx, transfronterizx families. Specifically, Nuñez examines how the linguistic practices of three transfronterizx bilingual children and their parents demonstrate a strategic resistance to linguistic surveillance, which is uncovered through the ways parents and children demonstrate a repurposing of linguistic surveillance at home rooted in love and care. Nuñez argues, "when surveillance is embraced critically and collectively to counter-hegemonic ideologies about language and culture, as demonstrated by these families, it can potentially change its meaning" (this issue). Through this article, we are able to understand the ways the homes of these families function as sites of resistance that played a key role in protecting these youth from the hegemony of English monolingualism.

In "Navigating Emotion Work by Using Community Cultural Wealth: Student Teaching Experiences of Teacher Candidates of Color," Jihea Maddamsetti calls our attention to the complicated and racialized emotion work of teacher candidates of color as they begin to teach in the field. Drawing on critical race theory and counter-narrative methodology, Maddamsetti's case study of three teachers of color stories the harmful expectations for teachers of color to maintain emotional distance and silence about their own and their students' oppressive experiences in schools. These contentious "emotions were often key triggers and catalyst for participants to activate their community cultural wealth." Maddamsetti emphasizes that "teacher educators and different stakeholders of the practicum need to explicitly inquire into how emotional rules, shaped by and grounded in racial power dynamics, engender emotional labor of TCCs [teacher candidates of color], rather than focusing on merely emotional management or maintenance of safe (or polite) spaces." By documenting the emotion work felt by teacher candidates of color, this study confirms that our desires for racial justice in education, diversity among teachers, and equitable classrooms for students has to be connected to (re)framing the use of emotions as a powerful source resistance, survivance (Vizenor, 1998), and transformation.

"You were not always just a You" (Machado, 2019, p. 14). At every time in the past, present, and future, and in every place, You always exist(ed) in relation to another You, Me, She, He, Hir, They, Zie, and It. The notion that recognizing human (and more-than-human) interdependence as essential to humane, humanizing, and essentially enlivening pedagogy is explored by Mia A. Sosa-Provencio, Magdalena Vázquez Dathe, and Omkulthoom Qassem in *"Tu eres mi otro yo"*/You Are My Other Me: An *In-the-Flesh* Ethic of Care Centering Body and Emotionality as Speaking Subjects Fostering Dignity, Interconnection, and Racialized Healing." With New Mexico—a state "composed predominantly of people(s) of color: 23 sovereign Indigenous nations, diverse Mexicana/o and Black communities, and African, Middle Eastern, and Asian immigrant and refugee groups"—as the research setting, the authors explore interconnection as both dependent upon and generative for pedagogical practices that foster humanizing dignity and promote sorely needed racialized healing in a racist and therefore inequitable school system. The invocation and interrogation of the dimensions of what the authors describe as "life-giving" and, ultimately, healing pedagogy that is premised upon attunement to the materiality and emotionality of interdependence, dignity, and respect—and then practiced in an often maligned context —is a beautiful recasting of a type of school ("socioeconomically disadvantaged)," student ("youth of color"), and family ("low-income"), painted as ugly in much educational literature. The authors seem to be saying, Pedagogues, this here is not only how, but also why, you *need* to treat dehumanized persons and communities with dignity: because it fosters healing. Moreover, this here is how and why we *need* you to #PutSomeRespeckOnOurNames.

The innate human need for dignity is a theme investigated in Zinnia Mevawalla, Kathy Cologon, Jacqueline Hayden, and Fay Hadley's "Behavior as Communication: Counterstories of Resistance and Dignity Work." The authors weave together narratives that link the human need for dignity to behavior that can be perceived as *un*dignified when, as he authors state, "defined using language such as *rule-breaking, aggressive* (Michail, 2011), *interfering*, and *antisocial* (Dunlap et al., 2006)." What is the relation between perception and truth? How do we make room for multiple truths in our praxis while also practicing being human relationally? If we are (considered) adults, then how do we learn to parenthesize our judgements about children based on our decontextualized understandings of their behaviors? Do we recognize the power of our labels and interpretations of children's behaviors? Do we fully understand how much power we have to rob all children of dignity? Do we recognize how our language and (in) actions in the classroom can make a sense of dignity a fleeting feeling for some, particularly those most in *need* of it? Are we aware of if and how we are "listening to behavior"? Can we recognize how "young children (ages 3–8)"—the subjects of the study reported on in this article—resist and subvert our "adult-centric" pedagogical practices in an effort to protect and preserve their human dignity? These questions cohere the authors' explorations of "an educational setting run by a nongovernment organization for children living on the streets in Mumbai, India." This setting is the site of research conducted. Authors report on that research in this article, using (counter)storytelling as a tool to tell tales that affirm dignity as every human's birthright in all spaces of teaching and learning.

Dana Nickson's "The Democratization of Educational Care: Spatial Imaginaries, Demographic Change, and Black Families Continued Educational Advocacy" invites us into the advocacy of Black families on behalf of their children in schools, where racialized power relations continue to create inhabitable conditions for Black lives. Nickson pushes us beyond racial discourse that relies on institutional and empirical knowledges and turns us to the wisdom of Black families' educational agency, which offers positioned knowledge "counter to curricular and institutional norms that fail[s] to adequately represent not only Black history, but the histories and identities of other marginalized families and students." Nickson breaks down the role of spatial imaginaries in racialization to highlight the urgency of socio-spacial exclusion in educational and racial injustice. We are reminded that "in discourse about US education, *urban* is typically deployed to describe a predominantly Black and/or Latinx under-resourced school, while *suburban* is used to describe a predominantly white [one]." Black families' educational advocacy in a demographically changing suburb of Detroit, Michigan is the site of inquiry for Nickson's explication of how the policies and practices that emerge from dominant spatial imaginaries are resisted in the fight for the educational resources and quality of life that Black children deserve across all spaces.

In "Nobody's Mule": Black Womanist Caring-Agency, Urban Charters, and the Choice to (Not) Teach," coauthors Tracey A. Benson, Spencer Salas, Tia Dolet, and Bianca Jones take us on a journey with Nina Sinclair, a Black woman educator, reflecting on her decisions to teach, or not to teach, as a form of agentive care. The authors engagement with Nina Sinclair is a "Project in Humanizing Research (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017)" as their analysis of the professional pivots made by Sinclair are representative of many Black women for whom "it was not enough just to teach." In the context of urban charter schools, the few Black teachers hired, like Sinclair, rarely are retained due to spirit murdering work conditions and racial battle fatigue. Thus, this article is an opportunity to affirm and understand more deeply the choice to love oneself as a respectable form of agentic care.

The relation between the politics of care(lessness) and the injustice experienced by many young children with disabilities in US schools is at the core of Margaret R. Beneke, Shayla Collins, and Selma Powell's "Who May Be Competent? Mothering Young Children of Color With Disabilities, and the Politics of Care." Making reference to an incident reported on a news station in Washington, a state in the US pacific northwest region, the authors write about "8-year-old Jaleel, a young Black child with a disability attending school in Seattle, repeatedly locked in an outdoor fenced area when he became overwhelmed or upset, without his mother's knowledge." This incident was not simply an enraging example of school as a site of humiliation for young children with disabilities and their caregivers; it was a clear example of how the practice of educational injustice is underpinned by racism and ableism. At this intersection, Jaleel's

> behavior was interpreted as so outside normative notions of socioemotional competence that the district approved the outdoor space, where Jaleel often ate his lunch alone on the concrete floor, to be a part of his special education plan. (Dornfeld, 2020)

Jaleel's illustrative story is the point of departure from which the authors ask "how Mothers of Color who have young children with disabilities make meaning of underlying constitutions of competence within schools and how they conceptualize possibilities for justice in early childhood." It's well known that in what the authors term "US (white supremacist, cisheteropatriarchal) society," the indignities experienced by students like Jaleel are rampant and pervasive, making this a pressing inquiry with implications for educators, researchers, caregivers, and all who care about realizing the dream and possibility of schools serving as a location for social change.

In "Loving Lumpen Masculinities: Teaching to Transform Heteropatriarchy, Toxic Masculinity, and Urban Misogyny," Patrick Roz Camangian explores the ways educators can better address heteronormativity, toxic masculinity, and misogyny through acknowledging and lovingly addressing lumpen masculinities. Pulling from a range of interpretations, Camangian defines lumpen masculinity as referring "to the many young men who turn to underground economies or adopt notions of self that manifest in a localized form of outlaw culture" (this issue). Entering this research as a Filipino educator teaching majority Black youth, the article centers on Black boys primarily, with implications for other boys of color and girls who may experience oppression at the hands of lumpen masculinities. Through classroom exchanges in an urban schooling context, Camangian analyzes critical moments where gendered conflict—fueled by lumpen masculinities—played out in his classroom, managed by what he refers to as critically democratic interactions.

Letters on cultivating care, dignity, love, and respect in education

> To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential (hooks, 1994, p. 13).

As we call for restoration and centering of care, dignity, love, and respect as ethical values in education, we end this editorial by writing brief letters to a few important people in our education community—namely parents and guardians, youth workers, students, language arts and literacy teachers, and teacher educators. Our letters are rendering visible our scarred humanity and imagining the hopeful and sacred possibilities available to us when we choose to love, care, respect, and dignify our collective and inherent worth.

From Keisha

Dear Parents,

You matter. We care deeply about you and your health and sanity, quite frankly. You are surviving one of the most challenging and seemingly unrelenting times of our lives. In the midst of racial violence and public health crises, y/our children are still deserving of teachers who care about their well-being and self-development. These teachers are warm demanders enacting critical care that refuses to let y/our children fail. The kind of care these supportive and encouraging teachers have for you and y/our children create spaces for radical healing, social justice, and high expectations. Parents, you are welcome inside these transformative and transgressive classrooms with open minds, hearts, and arms. We embrace you and your family—authentically caring about all of you including the histories, languages, cultures, and ways of being and knowing that you and y/our children embody. And for those of you who are not able to meet us in the schoolhouse or the PTO/A events or the school committee meetings, we are not assuming or conflating your absence with a lack of care for your children's futures. As a mother-scholar of two beautiful Black children who are five and under, my heart is intertwined with yours as we juggle working and parenting, all while engaging or disengaging schools and curriculum that do not care for or center our Black children. Y/our struggle will be ongoing, but you are not alone in the fight. Remain present. Caring for you and y/our children is not an option. You matter. Your children's lives matter.

With the utmost care,
Keisha

From Justin

Dear Youth Workers,

As a scholar committed to uncovering the ways youth's lived experiences help inform more equitable and justice-oriented schooling environments, I write this note to all those working with youth in schools and outside of schools. In particular, I write this letter for those working with minoritized youth within and across a variety of social categories (e.g., race, language, ethnicity, sexuality, dis/ability, socioeconomic status, skin complexion, etc.). As we work towards equity and excellence in education, it is imperative that we engage with the youth who are our present and future in ways grounded in love.

> And when I speak of love, I am not referencing a type of neo-liberal idea—affect turned into a commodity emptied of meaning, vulnerability, and the power it brings about. Not love as unrequited grace without justice, or prayers for those who harm us while denying our anger and hurt, or a fight without arms. Love, as I imagine it, is political. (Moore, 2018, p. 325)

Aligning with Moore (2018), I, too, believe that we must be about, and many of us are already are, a political type of love with our youth. If minoritized youth are existing in a context that is wholly political, characterized by their minds and bodies being subjected to policies and processes that create the conditions for their marginalization, how can we say we are youth workers for justice while avoiding political aims?

When I think back to the first class of eighth grade students I taught in my teaching career, my memories always seem to be centered around love or, rather, driven by love. I remember standing in front of a beautiful and energetic class of predominantly Black and Latinx students not knowing what to expect on the road/s we would all journey on ahead together, but somehow knowing that love as an action and a state of being would get me/us to where we desired to go. I needed to deeply love these students, I needed to know and love their entire being—as students made vulnerable by policies and processes. I think particularly for the racial makeup of my students, I knew that the love they received in the world was all too often a love that came with conditions or sometimes a love that did not come at all. What would it look like to launch a teaching and learning space where love was not conditional? What things might be achieved in a classroom where love was a (political) method of engagement? You, youth worker—at whatever level you are engaged in moving us closer to equity and excellence—how are you centering love? What is required of you to make sure that those around you are transformed in ways that embody love that is always moving us closer to justice?

From Jamila aka Dr. J

Dear Students,

I have chosen to respect your silence as much as I respect your voices. I respect the parts of you that are absent from our present chaos. You are protecting and serving the worlds inside of you that are too often policed and prodded and punished in a space where you deserve to be nourished. This is refuge. This is wisdom. This is you respecting yourself enough not to offer You as a sacrifice. I respect the places you turn to for education. The pizza shop. Your grandma's kitchen. The digital worlds you inhabit. I have chosen to respect what you refuse to erase. The things you author in ways that are not legible to those who refuse to listen.

Respectfully,
Dr. J

From Esther

Dear English/Literacy Teachers and Teacher Educators,

The subject matter you teach requires you to have robust knowledge of vocabulary. Therefore, you may already know that "dignity itself has proven very difficult to define … [R]esearchers have struggled to pin down what is in essence an ethical concept that varies according to the cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts in which it is discussed" (Rathore et al., 2018, slide 5). So, respectfully, I ask, what is dignity to *you*?

I wonder, too, about your pedagogies of dignity. Do your pedagogical practices and curricular materials promote human dignity and cultivate deeper understandings of the connections between this concept and notions of (un)belonging and (in)justice? Do you curate your curriular materials carefully, ensuring that each text shared with your students reflects the multiplicitous cultures, heterogenous herstories, diverse philosophies, desires, beliefs, and values of individuals and communities most often denied dignity in a hegemonic social world that codes non-white people as non-human? Do your teaching materials foster dignified care for your most disrespected, marginalized, and maligned students, taking into account their and our individual and collective cultural, spiritual, psychological, physical, and social needs as well as their/our need for and (birth)right to social recognition? Do your pedagogies of dignity endeavor to recover knowledge stolen from us by the white Man (Wynter, 2003)? Do your pedagogical practices endeavor to facilitate our healing from the never-ending humiliations and violences of whiteness?

Let's think through these questions further using a textual example. Consider Akwasi Aidoo's (2020) poem, "The Clown Baobab of Bandia" (see Figure 1):

Teachers, how could you use this poem to teach about the multiple overlapping cultural, historical, philosophical, psychological, and social dimensions of dignity? How might you use this poem to restore dignity and a sense of respect to students most often robbed of both in classrooms, schools, educational settings, and society, broadly? Moreover, tell me, what might *you* learn about the cultural, historical, philosophical, psychological, and social meanings and manifestations of human (in)dignity from this poem?

Ever curiously, caringly, and lovingly yours.
Esther

The Clown Baobab of Bandia

(For Anta)

I am the Clown Baobab of Bandia
In this colony, enclave, reserve… well
Call it what you may… but in this land of
Indignities I am the sole one
With my dignity in hand and
Measures of laughter to hoot/boot

I am the Clown Baobab of Bandia
I stand slanted, half my roots in the air
Calling on the sauntering lizards who come
From a thousand and one places to kiss
My ass. I thump my nose flat at the angry sun

I am the Clown Baobab of Bandia
I invite monkeys to bare their tongues. To piss
In my mouth for your camera. My unfisted palms
Holding high half the sky from your head
I declare in thick lipset:
I am the Clown Baobab of Bandia.

Figure 1 "The Clown Baobab of Bandia" (Aidoo, 2020).

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