

mayah n. wheeler

Educating with Care

As humans, we communicate with one another based on our socialization patterns, which form cultural norms. These norms vary depending on a variety of social identities and often affect the success of our communication amongst ourselves. In order to engage students and cultivate knowledge in a multicultural environment, teachers must incorporate culturally relevant care practices into their instructional patterns. These patterns include, but are not limited to, incorporating the languages and cultures of the students, investing in students as people, creating a rigorous program to challenge students academically, and discussing the social implications of students' social identities. While culturally relevant care is complex, curriculum which introduces educators care practices will allow students to be more successful in the future.

One of my theories is there is a lack of care for students as people because there is a fear we are “babying” them. I do believe it is crucial hold children to high enough scholastic and moral standards, loving them is not “babying” them. When I’ve worked at two preschools, both of which had stricter policies about holding children for any duration of time due to the fear it will foster attachment and stop students from participating in classroom activities. In my experience, I have found a middle ground where I am able to be nurturing and stern depending on the situation. Every student has different needs and especially at tender age of four, and they may need extra love that day, or every day. After a few weeks of working in a four-year-old classroom, I was complaining to my mother about how some of the children’s behavior seemed to be very random and not make such sense. She explained to me how children really want attention so occasionally they act out and I should just ask them if they wanted a hug. I incorporated asking them if they wanted hugs when they seemed upset and to my surprise every

child at one point wanted a hug. One day something happened, and I told them if they wanted a hug, they didn't have to act out, they could just ask me. After that, they would ask for hugs at random times and often when one wanted a hug, many others would as well. They would ask for hugs right before nap time and went to sleep much faster. To me, "babying" children is enabling behavior that may be harmful to them or prohibit their development, such as temper tantrums or pouting whereas loving children and being affectionate towards them is a necessity.

Students, no matters their age, have a desire to feel important and loved because desire for affection is innately human. Within the classroom, students need to understand the importance of their presence which is parallel to their achievement. In short, students need to feel loved by their teachers. The concept of loving children intentionally is explored in *The SAGE Handbook of African American Education* and is referred to as "other mother/father"¹. By fulfilling the role as a second or third parent, students know that their teachers love and care about them similar to how their parents do, fostering a connection between their home life and school life. By being able to see the connection of two worlds which are often separated, students will then feel more connected with material as well as feel more supported by their instructor. As an educator, I have found by leaving space for conversations about students' feelings and showing concern for their well-being has helped me better evaluate what they are going through. For example, I worked as a third grade Spanish teacher in Ann Arbor, where a significant portion of my students were bilingual, meaning Spanish would be their third language. There was one day where one of the students expressed to me, after an outburst, how the language learning process was a lot for her, and it was already hard enough for her to have to speak/learn in

¹ Irvine, Mari Ann Roberts & Jacqueline Jordan. "African American Teachers' Caring Behaviors: The Difference Makes a Difference." Tillman, Linda C. *The SAGE Handbook of African American Education*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009. 140-152.

English. Understanding her emotions has helped me tailor what type of response was appropriate for her behavior and this process is applicable to most other situations. With this knowledge, I was able to figure out ways to encourage her and reiterate to her that the language learning process may be difficult, but she is capable of mastering it.

Additionally, schools should care about maintaining diversity within the student population. Culture plays a huge role in the socialization of children and should be regarded as a resource, instead of a burden. Why is it in higher education it's almost a requirement to learn a second language but for elementary school students they are sent to the classroom for "others"? Inclusivity expands much further past a "food day", it's making sure educators are dismantling the hierarchy of languages and cultures². Students within ESL, English as a Second Language, courses are often excluded and spend a lot of time separated from their peers. I believe the inclusion of English language learners starts from within the educational certification program. At Georgia State University, ESL is an integral part of the graduate school program and students receive ESL certification as well as certification to teach elementary school, spanning from preschool through fifth grade. After receiving the certification it is not mandatory to become an ESL teacher, but rather the expectation is classroom teachers can partner with the ESL teacher to help with the language learning process.

Language inclusion will help students become more successful academically and allow them to retain their native language. As mentioned earlier, being bilingual can be beneficial in academia, therefore students should have the space within the classroom to expand their knowledge of standard English without feeling as if their native language/dialect is incorrect. For

² Li, Goufang. "Subject Matters of Language, Culture, Identity and Power." *The SAGE Guide to Curriculum in Education*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2015. 61-69.

example, in Li's "Subject Matters of Language, Culture, Identity and Power", Li discusses how current policies in place reflect the "English only" language policy, ultimately not only hurting students who are bilingual but also those who speak different dialects of English, mentioning black and native American peoples. Teaching staff must understand the complexities of their students' cultures and their social norms. By tapping into the knowledge bilingual students have, it will be easier for students to connect school and home, again promoting academic success.

As globalization continues, educators have to be prepared to teach in a multicultural society. If teachers are trained to teach ESL, they can use these strategies within their classroom to help the language learning process for all students, even native speakers. Similarly, a diverse staff will help students. The rate of white teachers is exceeding 90%, while the rate of black teachers is declining³. The lack of diversity is an issue because black teachers incorporate a variety of inclusive practices in order to create an inclusive classroom environment. Without the inclusion of diverse educators, diversifying educational curriculum will be more difficult. Teachers who reflect the social identities of their students are beneficial for they allow students to see themselves. Diverse teachers also offer perspective and suggestions to curriculum based on their experiences, which may parallel the experiences of students. While all identities may not match, teachers should be representative of the qualities which children aspire to have (being compassionate, understanding and kind) and ultimately work to cultivate spaces of learning and love for their students.

One of the tactics which black educators tend to do is educate their students to ensure they understand the social implication of their identities, often referred to as "color-talk"⁴.

³ Irvine, Mari Ann Roberts & Jacqueline Jordan. "African American Teachers' Caring Behaviors: The Difference Makes a Difference." Tillman, Linda C. *The SAGE Handbook of African American Education*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009. 140-152.

⁴ Ibid

“Color-talking” makes sure students truly understand racism on a micro (microaggressions) and macro (institutional) scale and white supremacy, in order to dismantle it. Whether teachers share the all of same identities as their students or not, they should be invested in their student’s well-being, meaning they should be invested in the issues which affect their students (i.e. racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, xenophobia, etc.). Over the summer, I was a lead teacher in a third through fifth grade classroom during their summer camp program. Since Juneteenth is celebrated outside of the school year, students often never have a chance to learn about it. So my teaching partner, who also was a black woman, and I decided to take the opportunity to make sure our students understand the importance of Juneteenth, for it was the liberation of enslaved black peoples and my class was black. We played a video and the students were very engaged, asking questions and truly trying to understand why fourth of July was not *our* Independence Day. Then when fourth of July came, they were able to reiterate that the *true* day of independence was Juneteenth. Inclusion of important days within cultures which are not within the curriculum is not always done but it needs to be so students can understand.

Another tactic used by black teachers is create high scholastic yet achievable standards for their students. By being, “warm demanders” students are aware of the goals their teachers have for them along with how to achieve them⁵. Balancing high expectations and love creates a space for engaged learning, a process which should be adopted by all teachers. As an educator, I work to maintain high standards while providing the support necessary for the students.

Classrooms should be student centered; if they are not it may lead to students feeling isolated,

⁵ Irvine, Mari Ann Roberts & Jacqueline Jordan. "African American Teachers' Caring Behaviors: The Difference Makes a Difference." Tillman, Linda C. *The SAGE Handbook of African American Education* . Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc. , 2009. 140-152.

uncared for by their teachers and discriminated against⁶. By incorporating tactics such “warm demander”, “other mother/father” and “color-talking” it will lead to students feeling more cared for and ultimately work to improve their performance in school⁷. Increase in achievement, especially for black and brown students, can increase their access to more opportunities, which are sadly often limited due to systemic racism, ultimately improving their lives.

Students must be recognized and treated as people because they are. Many behavior children are a reflection of human nature. If an adult is doing something that they view as pointless, they are more likely to put less effort—children are the same. The connection between school and home has been lost after the integration of schools; prior to the integration of schools black teachers were regarded as pillars within the community⁸. Teachers today are not regarded the same, but gaining community recognition would be beneficial. First, educators need to be passionate about what they do and creating social change. It is my theory that education needs to be rebranded as important and intellectually stimulating, creating respect for education as a field thus improving the quality of teachers. An increase in pay along with more recognition will make it so that education is more selective, allowing children get the best teachers possible. Education is often referred to as the “key” for our youth. Education is not a key, it’s a pillar—a building without a pillar may stand for some time, but eventually it will fall. Education is crucial for the success of our children as a nation; teachers need to be educated to teach in an inclusive matter so that students feel included, no matter their background.

⁶ Irvine, Mari Ann Roberts & Jacqueline Jordan. "African American Teachers' Caring Behaviors: The Difference Makes a Difference." Tillman, Linda C. *The SAGE Handbook of African American Education* . Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc. , 2009. 140-152.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

Bibliography:

- Irvine, Mari Ann Roberts & Jacqueline Jordan. "African American Teachers' Caring Behaviors: The Difference Makes a Difference." Tillman, Linda C. *The SAGE Handbook of African American Education*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009. 140-152.
- Li, Goufang. "Subject Matters of Language, Culture, Identity and Power." *The SAGE Guide to Curriculum in Education*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2015. 61-69.