

Pedagogies of Care: Student & Instructor Wellness

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What are Pedagogies of Care?

Pedagogies of care are educational practices that recognize students as people first and acknowledge the experiences they bring into the classroom. These practices place care at the forefront of teaching, focusing on those being cared for (students) and those exercising care (instructors and teaching assistants). Caring pedagogies require relationships between students and educators that can be developed through dialogue, practice, and validating student experiences at the individual and community level (Velasquez et al., 2013). Examples of exercising care in the classroom include accommodating individual needs, fostering positive and respectful interactions, and providing support for learners. When care and empathy are used in the classroom, educators create an environment of safety, understanding, and trust for all members.

Why Are Pedagogies of Care Significant?

A pedagogy of care recognizes the role that the educational environment can have on student well-being. For example, it identifies how students experience increased rates of distress and mental health concerns that can be related to or exacerbated by their academic responsibilities. Therefore, care-based pedagogies are essential in ensuring that courses are designed to minimize stress and promote supportive and inclusive learning approaches.

Experiences that Exist in Our Classrooms

An essential practice in care-based pedagogy is developing a deep understanding of student experiences by acknowledging their concerns and perspectives (Gorny-Wegrzyn & Perry, 2021). For example, students have unique experiences of family, relationship dynamics, and socioeconomic (in)securities. Care-based practices require educators to contextualize their own and students' experiences and understand how they shape teaching and learning. Examples of student experiences include:

Family and Relationship Dynamics

For example:

- The health of loved ones
- Caregiving responsibilities
- Bereavement
- Relationship stressors
- Conflict with others

Personal Routines

For example:

- Disruption to routines
- Making time for self-care

Social and Economic In/Securities

For example:

- Financial in/security
- Food in/security
- Social supports (lack of)
- DEDI-related injustices
- School/work/life balance

Migration and Immigration

For example:

- Immigration
- Relocation
- English language learning

Mental and Physical Health

For example:

- Mental health issues
- Isolation
- Social anxiety
- Trauma
- Abuse
- Social disconnectedness
- Physical health issues

Examples of Care

Exercising care means taking the time and effort to create a learning environment that is free from discrimination and one that values learners. As educators, our capacity for care will vary based on our unique and intersectional lived experiences. However, care-based practices are iterative and systemic. They require educators to engage in a continuous process of contextualizing and personalizing care for students and learning communities. Examples of care practices can include:

- Ensuring a strong instructor presence throughout the course.
- Making an active effort to know students and their learning needs.
- Providing expectations, tools and resources that will help students succeed in the course.
- Building in time for care (e.g., breaks) within the course design.
- Engaging in co-construction with students.
- Addressing student concerns.
- Verbal and nonverbal expressions of care.
- Knowing and referring to students by their names and/or pronouns.
- Fostering community and belonging between students.
- Making time to connect with students non-academically.
- Ensuring all students are equally valued and respected.

Why is this significant to DEDI?

Care-based practices are critical for addressing and realizing Decolonization, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (DEDI) in teaching and learning. When we design courses with students' unique and intersectional experiences in mind, we can create more opportunities for access. These practices are important to help students address equity-related needs including:

- Accessibility
- Anti-oppression
- Allyship
- Decolonization
- Disability justice
- Ethnocultural equity
- Gender and sexuality equity
- Indigenization
- Linguistic equity
- Racial justice
- Religious equity
- Social justice
- Wellness and more

Balancing Care for Students and Instructors

Care-based practices can benefit learner outcomes by nurturing learning environments where students feel safer, respected, valued, and belonging. However, a pedagogy of care also acknowledges how instructors might balance their care. Strategies to help instructors exercise care in sustainable ways include:

- Start small, and value small wins.
- Focus on what you can do and expand slowly.
- Seek student feedback on what is working and what is needed.
- Remain cognizant of the current context.
- Consider your own capacity.

- Determine your own equity and care needs.
- Seek resources and support.
- Reflect and revise.

Links to Additional Readings & Resources

Pedagogies of Kindness

[Inspiring Educators and a Pedagogy of Kindness](#)

[The Pedagogy of Kindness \(Podcast with captions\)](#)

Care Resources for Faculty

[Self-Care Resources for Faculty](#)

[Balancing Care for Students with Your Own Self-Care](#)

York U Resources

[Accessibility, Well-being, and Counselling \(Glendon\)](#)

[Better Together](#)

[Mental Health and Wellness \(Glendon\)](#)

[Personal Counselling \(Glendon\)](#)

[Positive and Safe Spaces on Campus \(Glendon\)](#)

[Student Counselling, Health, and Well-being](#)

[Well-being at York](#)

[Well-being resources at York](#)

[Wellness Wednesdays Archive](#)

[York University Community Safety + Security Services](#)

Mental Health Resources

[Anti-Black Racism & Mental Health Resources](#)

[Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health Resource Finder](#)

[Good2Talk](#)

[Quality Mental Health Care Network](#)

Health & Safety Resources

[Francophone Health and Social Services](#)

[Keep Me Safe \(international students\) \[French available\]](#)

References

Communications, NYU Web. "Balancing Care for Students with Your Own Self-Care." *NYU*, New York University. <https://www.nyu.edu/life/global-inclusion-and-diversity/learning-and-development/toolkits/faculty-digital-inclusion/faculty-self-care.html>.

Gorny-Wegrzyn, E., & Perry, B. (2021). Inspiring educators and a pedagogy of kindness: A reflective essay. *Creative Education*, 12(1), 220-230.

Velasquez, A., West, R., Graham, C. and Osguthorpe, R. (2013), Developing caring relationships in schools: a review of the research on caring and nurturing pedagogies. *Rev Educ*, 1: 162-190. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1002/rev3.3014>