

# **Faculty and Student Perspectives of Critical Pedagogies of Care in Higher Education**

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## **Abstract**

Culturally and historically sensitive material challenges educators in the higher education classroom. This challenge becomes more complex with highly diverse student bodies. Pedagogies that promote transformative and empowering learning help to address how different types of learners may experience sensitive material.

Critical pedagogies of care are integral to productive educational experiences. Deployment of pedagogies of care creates supportive educational environments, compassionate teaching practices, and empowers students through diversified content. When applied correctly, the pedagogy promotes critical thinking and transformative action, and creates a resistance to the neoliberal, patriarchal, and white supremacist values that often exists within the classroom (Mehrotra, 2021).

A valuable subset of critical pedagogies of care is the pedagogy of discomfort, which acts on the need for educators and students to step outside their comfort zones, recognize the non-neutrality of educational processes, and confront the discomfort associated with challenging knowledge (Boler, 1999; Waks, 2015). Using extensive survey data and in-depth interviews, this research studies the question: to what extent are critical pedagogies of care enacted and experienced at global liberal arts university?

This research demonstrates that students and faculty both perceive the classroom as a space for challenging cherished beliefs and transformational learning. Students express a desire for discomfort that is bridged with caring practices, particularly the engagement of faculty in vulnerable discussions and the building of student-faculty relationships. Faculty were proactive in incorporating both caring and discomforting practices in the Core, and prioritized building relationships with students through humanizing themselves and shifting the power dynamics in the classroom. However, students and faculty differed when it came to the extent to which discomfort was encouraged and specific practices within a pedagogy of discomfort, indicating a need for faculty development with regard to establishing guidelines for incorporating productive discomfort for transformative learning in the classroom.

**Keywords:** empathy, global liberal arts, pedagogy of care, pedagogy of discomfort, transformational learning