

Pedagogy (and Practice) of Care **by Daisy L. Breneman**

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Note: we are sending this Toolbox a little early so that it will not come during [Fall Break](#), for those able to take a break this week (breaks are so important!)

On Monday, October 30, [Chis Foss](#), a University of Mary Washington professor, and disability studies scholar, will visit JMU to offer an [evening lecture](#) on disability in Oscar Wilde's fairy tales, and a [CFI roundtable](#) on Universal Design and the Pedagogy of Care(taking) based on his article in the journal [Pedagogy](#), "Individual Redemption Through Universal Design; Or, How IEP Meetings Have Infused My Pedagogy with an Ethic of Care(taking)." Foss uses his experience as a parent to explore the Pedagogy of Care(taking), a disability-inflected pedagogy that "recognizes and values the individuality and the fundamental humanity of one's students"—and the very important reminder of students' "fully adult humanity but also of their important status as somebody's kid" (480).

Like parenting, teaching from a place of care doesn't mean, necessarily, ignoring rigor or accountability. Learning and growth require challenge and corresponding support. (Though, of course, it doesn't hurt for us to be, continually, [questioning our definitions—and worship—of rigor](#).) Our students are capable of more than they realize, but there are also ways, as we've explored in previous Toolboxes (such as [Soft Places to Land](#)), to offer scaffolding and support. [Universal Design](#) is one way to support learner mastery, and practice care: by removing barriers, we actually allow students to learn and achieve more. We take [collective accountability for care](#) and ensure people have access to what they need.

Recent events have reminded us of the urgency of collective accountability for care. (Unfortunately, this seems to be a statement that's perpetually true.) Care is [an action](#), a practice, and an ongoing need. [Ethics of care](#) is rooted in valuing each person as inherently worthy of dignity and care and prioritizes [relationship](#). We don't need to love someone to practice care. Care is an [obligation](#), one we carry with us into the classroom too.

There's no one way to enact a pedagogy of care or UDL: they are not checklists, but are truly ways of being in the world. But, building on insights from Foss and other scholars, here are a few possibilities for striving toward creating a [compassionate classroom](#):

- Prioritize the human in our students, and ourselves, and actively work to build community and connection in the classroom. [Kim Samuel](#), an activist and social connectedness scholar, writes that “[a caring university classroom](#) rests on a new kind of ‘Three R’s’: Respect, Recognition, and Reciprocity.” Practices that build trust and relationship, such as early-semester [community-building](#) and frequent [check-ins](#), can let students know we care about them as whole human beings.
- Listen well and [deeply](#). We’re often so rushed—to answer an email or that “quick” question a student asks after class, which turns out to be more complicated. Sometimes what a student might be asking for (an extension, for example) is really about something else (like a loss or struggle in their personal lives). We, of course, are not, and shouldn’t try to be, counselors, but we can listen to what students are really trying to tell us. We can invite and make space for their stories.
- Communicate well and deeply. Practice [transparency](#)—and consider attending Emily Gravett’s talk, “[Creating Transparent Assignments](#),” on Tuesday, October 24, or Friday, October 2, to learn more. By being clear and transparent with students, and willing to explain the reasons behind our choices as teachers, we can expose [the hidden curriculum](#). Yes, I know, it’s so easy to get frustrated, and defensive, when students ask questions about a policy or requirement (especially if they do so in a way that feels disrespectful). But we can assume good intent and work with our students to help them understand not just the whats, but the whys and hows of our classrooms.
- Consider the role of time and what time means in the classroom, and beyond. Think carefully about the timing of major assignments, taking into account things like [religious holidays](#), breaks, special campus events, etc. Explore and experiment ways that we might be flexible with time and change our relationships with it. Consider adopting the beautiful notion of [crip time](#), a disability-centered approach to time that prioritizes adaptability, relationships, and a multitude of human needs, including for care.

In [his Pedagogy article](#), Foss offers many powerful ideas for care-infused, and effective, teaching strategies, including flexibility and individualization, an openness to change, an emphasis on process, and letting students know we value their opinions—and them. If you'd like to continue this conversation, join Chris Foss at [our CFI roundtable on October 30](#), request a teaching consultation, or send me an email. Let’s all care for and with each other to create the kinds of spaces that allow us all to thrive.

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