HONORING VOICES: UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATING RESPECT IN ADULT ESL CONTEXTS

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HONORING VOICES: UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATING
RESPECT IN ADULT ESL CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

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Mark Timothy Van Ness

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how adult English as a Second Language (ESL) students conceptualize respectful teaching and respectful classroom communication within ESL contexts. The researcher also sought to include ESL students’ voices in the discussion of what defines respectful teaching. In addition, the study was designed to elicit the ESL teacher’s perspective on respect and examine incongruity between students’ and teachers’ conceptualizations of respect.

The qualitative research methodology for this study involved 42 in-depth interviews and 22.5 hours of participant observation. Participants consisted of ESL teachers and students in two different educational settings: a private, intensive English program (IEP) and a community college ESL program. The researcher observed ESL classrooms representing a variety of levels and ESL skill areas.

Findings of this study indicated a type of “mindful respect” comprised of four key concepts: respect as intentional appreciation, respect as caring relationship, respect as supportive help, and respect as comfortable space. Additionally, the study showed that
students felt they were treated disrespectfully when aspects of mindful respect were missing from their learning experiences. The findings also revealed incongruity between teachers’ and students’ understanding of respect, as well as specific types of attitudes and behaviors that communicate respect/disrespect.

Using Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter’s (2003) prototype teacher roles, the researcher found that an analogous patron-client role was generally associated with a “respectful teacher.” The findings demonstrate that student and teacher participants constructed a “respect exchange” to negotiate the giving and receiving of respect.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: BEGINNINGS AND BACKGROUND

First: all humans are sacred, whatever their culture, race, or religion, whatever their capacities or incapacities, and whatever their weaknesses or strengths may be. Each has an instrument to bring to the vast orchestra of humanity, and each of us needs help to become all that we might be. (Vanier, 1998, p. 14)

On countless occasions, as I sat and contemplated my dissertation, I could not help hearing The Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, singing “RESPECT” in my ear. Franklin’s request for “a little respect” is derived from the common human need to feel and receive respect from those around us. In these times when accounts of bullying, incivility, and disrespect seem commonplace, the need for “a little respect” appears even more apparent.

How I Came to This Study

My journey to this topic was birthed by a strong belief in the dignity and value of humankind, a love for and interest in people of all cultures, and research interests concerning adult learning and “good teacher” conceptualizations. Observations of both ESL and EFL (ES/FL) classroom interactions, conversations with instructors, and participation in professional conferences and meetings within the field also played contributing roles. As I witnessed ways ESL instructors taught and interacted with adult students that seemed similar to the ways teachers sometimes interact with much younger
students, this aspect became my focal point, and respect/disrespect became both the means and the ends of researching this phenomenon.

As an instructor of adults for more than ten years in China and the United States, I began to wonder if adult students found their ES/FL instructors to be respectful. Although it would appear commonsensical that a teacher should never treat adult students as if they were adolescents or children, at times I had witnessed teachers, missionaries, and other cross-cultural workers engaging with adults as if they were children. In educational contexts, this seems not only detrimental to the learner and the learning process, but also unethical.

In the process of trying to determine if others had found this to be a problem, I came upon Li Mingsheng’s research examining teachers’ role assumptions and expectations in China. In Li’s (2002) case study of EFL teachers, Li discovered:

Chinese students were often disappointed with expatriate teachers who treated them like pre-teens by using course materials appropriate for pre-school or primary school children in their home countries and by forcing them to engage in conversation. …Most [students] felt they had been cheated and humiliated. (p. 24)

From my own experience and Li’s research, particular questions of concern within the field of TESOL emerged: Do students perceive ESL methods and pedagogy as respectful? Do students conceptualize respectful teaching, instruction, communication, and classroom environments similarly? Do students ever find ES/FL instruction to be disrespectful? What suggestions do students have to make the classroom environment more respectful? Had ES/FL teachers assumed they were more respectful than instructors in other fields because of their work with those from diverse cultural backgrounds? If so, was this a good assumption? And finally, is there room for improvement? These
questions, and the lack of research to answer them, led me to this topic for this research inquiry on respect/disrespect.

Statement of the Problem

The Open Doors 2009 Report on International Educational Exchange shows that 671,616 international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities during the 2008-2009 academic year (Open Doors 2009 Report on International Exchange). After a brief decline following the events of September 11, 2001, the number of international students has only continued to increase. In the 2008 version of this report, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Goli Ameri, states:

In today’s competitive international environment, the increase in enrollments noted in this year’s Open Doors data demonstrates again that the U.S. remains the premier destination for international students. U.S. higher education is unparalleled in its vitality, quality, and diversity. The U.S. government joins the U.S. higher education community in a commitment to welcome international students to the United States. (Open Doors Report on International Exchange, 2008)

Although international college and university students represent a growing number of students in the United States whose native language is not English, these numbers pale in comparison to other non-native speakers of English in America. According to the Census Bureau, 47 million people in the United States speak a language other than English at home (Language Use and English-Speaking Ability 2000). Not that all of this population will become ESL students, but this group remains the most significant part of the American ESL demographic landscape. The growing numbers of international students, refugees, or immigrants who study English in the United States bring with them their own unique perceptions of the world and how it works. This
population often lacks essential tools for traversing the ins and outs of American academic culture. At times, they may also have different views of what constitutes good teachers, good teaching, and good schools. To this population, the American ESL classroom becomes new territory that needs to be properly navigated to ensure academic success.

Instructors of such a diverse student population are therefore presented with a unique challenge. In many cases, ESL teachers’ roles in the United States involve more than English instruction. Teachers are frequently called upon to assist students in their adaptation to American life and culture as well. In intensive English language programs (IEPs) in particular, teachers are often students’ primary support system while they acclimate to their new surroundings. As an IEP instructor, I was acutely aware that teachers were not only instructors, but also tutors, tour guides, counselors, friends, social coordinators, and surrogate family members. Although community college ESL instructors are generally not expected to perform the same duties as IEP teachers, many responsibilities extend beyond mere English instruction. Furthermore, the majority of ESL teachers in the United States have degrees in applied linguistics, TESL, or TESOL; however, many teachers do not have specific cultural training that would allow them to have the background knowledge of their students’ home cultures. Therefore, the instructor may often have a limited understanding of what students believe constitutes good teaching/teachers and respectful communication.

Like other instructors, ESL teachers are expected to create respectful learning environments and communicate respectfully with their adult students. Some academic TESOL programs effectively prepare future ES/FL teachers by providing the appropriate
coursework and teaching practicums that enable teachers to instruct in respectful ways. At times, however, instructors arrive at their classrooms with only a K-12 teaching background. Others teachers have little knowledge of adult learning theories or adult teaching methodologies. Hilles and Sutton (2001) state:

Without question there are numerous differences between adults and children; much too frequently, however, an inexperienced adult ESL teacher may interact with his or her students as if they were children, perhaps because of their limited English proficiency. The results are often a disastrous paternalistic attitude, one symptom of which can be baby talk. At the very least, this presents an unnatural, not to mention insulting, model of spoken English when addressed to adults. (p. 387)

Higher education and IEPs generally do not require teacher certification. TESOL and applied linguistics programs require subject matter mastery, often without formal student teaching and at times with limited real-life teaching experience. In spite of the fact that TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2003) clearly states that ESL teachers should teach in ways that takes into account the principles of adult learning, some instructors revert to ways of instruction that are more appropriate of child learners. I have noticed dedicated, well-meaning instructors reverting to teaching techniques they experienced when they were children. As a result, they appear to ignore the great importance of honoring their students as fully-functioning adults with limited English proficiency (see Appendix A, “Is The Field of TESOL Truly Respectful?”).

Few would deny that disrespect in any classroom situation undermines learning and creates additional stress. For ESL students, the vulnerability of learning a new language, often in a new culture, intensifies the need for an instructor and classroom climate that fosters respect. What is required, then, is an understanding of how ESL students conceptualize respect and respectful communication from within these contexts.
Textbooks traditionally provide scholars’ and educators’ views of what constitutes respectful instruction to ESL teachers. What is also lacking, and therefore needed, is to hear the voices of ESL students and their ideas of what constitutes respectful ESL teaching. For a more global understanding of respect and respectful communication in the ESL classroom, dialogue is required regarding the issue of respect and an opportunity to ascertain if instruction has been respectful. The ESL teacher does not solely own a definition of respect and what constitutes a respectful classroom environment. The assumption that ESL teachers and students share the same understanding of respect is naïve. In order for true respect to exist in the ESL classroom, the definition of respect must also include the voices of ESL students. Hence, this study is designed to elicit and include the ESL student’s perception of respect, disrespect, and respectful communication within the ESL context.

Why This Study? - Significance

Although respect is mentioned in ESL and adult learning literature, it is rarely explicated. However, the role of respect in the education of adults should be a primary concern of all educators. Wlodkowski (2008) states,

"Respect seldom appears in the indexes of most psychology and adult education textbooks. Nonetheless, its importance to human beings is irrefutable. To be free of undue threat and to have our perspective matter in issues of social exchange are critical to our well-being and learning." (p. 102)

Abraham Maslow made it clear that esteem, which includes respect, is one of the basic needs of humankind. To grow into one’s potential, humans require respectful human relationships. The student-teacher relationship is no exception, especially if the student is to grow and learn. Carl Rogers (1969) in Freedom to Learn wrote:
The higher levels of understanding, genuineness and respect a teacher gives to students, the more the student will learn. The initiation of learning rests not upon the teaching skills of the leader, not upon his scholarly knowledge of the field, not upon his curricular planning, not upon his use of audio-visual aids, not upon the programmed learning he utilizes, not upon his lectures and presentations, not upon an abundance of books, though each of these might at one time or another be utilized as an important resource. No, the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner. (pp. 105-106)

In *Qualities of Effective Teachers*, Stronge (2007) states that affective characteristics play a vital role, or perhaps an even more significant role than pedagogical practice, in students’ perceptions of effective teaching. In a global society, the need for respectful communication becomes even greater. Realizing the importance of respect in our increasingly connected world, educators have begun to make respect a key area of curricular focus. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, an organization that works toward the preparedness of all students for the 21st century, cites the following as essential life skills for the community and workplaces of today:

1. Respect cultural differences and work effectively with people from a range of social and cultural backgrounds
2. Know when it is appropriate to listen and when to speak
3. Conduct [oneself] in a respectable, professional manner
4. Respond open-mindedly to different ideas and values
5. Leverage social and cultural differences to create new ideas and increase both innovation and quality of work (“Framework for 21st Century Skills,” 2004)

Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner’s most recent work, *Five Minds for the Future*, demonstrates the importance of “the respectful mind” for a world of accelerating globalization. According to Gardner (2006), the essence of “the respectful mind” is a capacity to appreciate the differences that exist among people. Tolerance is not enough; respect requires more than just recognition of differences but a sincere acceptance and valuing of those who belong to different groups. Gardner holds that where the capacity to
respect others from different cultures may have been an option in the past, it is now a vital capacity—one that educators must seek to develop in themselves and inculcate in their students.

Internationalization of both the teacher and student populations continues to rise, and with that, the need for more global views of what constitutes respectful teaching and respectful classroom environments. Although respect is pivotal to teacher-student relationships and social relations in general, the concept of respect has received relatively little attention in research literature. Among the studies that deal with the issue of respect in the context of education, few explore respect using adult participants, and even fewer examine the issue of respect from a multicultural perspective. As Shono’s research (2004) concerning international students’ and ESL teachers’ “good teacher” conceptualizations indicated, there appears to be a relative dearth of studies dealing with the role of respect and care in ESL contexts. She states, “The issue of respect and refraining from using condescending language when communicating with language learners is an issue that has not been—to the best of my knowledge—discussed in the literature on second/foreign language teaching of adults” (p. 170).

Shono goes on to say:

More research is needed in which language teachers’ and learners’ voices are elicited and heard with regard to their perceptions of good language teachers, particularly since this and other studies (e.g., Barcelos, 2000; Levey & Wubbles 1992) have demonstrated that teachers’ and students’ perceptions do not always match. (p. 190)
The Purpose of This Study: Questions to Be Answered

Respond to Shono’s suggestion for more research that explores the issue of respect in ESL contexts as well as other researchers calling for research that includes ESL students’ and teachers’ voices and perceptions, this qualitative study seeks to elicit and analyze the perceptions of ESL teachers’ and adult students’ conceptualizations of respect/disrespect. Specifically, this research will examine how teachers and students believe respect is defined, communicated, and experienced in adult ESL classrooms and in teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, this study is an exploration of teachers’ and students’ differing perceptions of respect and what constitutes disrespect.

The primary research question that guides this study is as follows:

1. How is respect/disrespect communicated to students in an ESL context?

Additional questions, which also guided this study, include the following:

2. How do ESL teachers and students differ in their understanding of respect/disrespect?

3. How do students respond to perceived disrespect?

4. How do the findings in this study compare to those in different contexts?

After my observations and hearing several students describe times when they felt they were treated as children, I decided to add this final question:

5. Do students find ESL instruction to be age-appropriate?

The Researcher’s Background: Baggage and Biases

He who knows others is wise.
He who knows himself is enlightened. (Lao Tzu, in Lichtman, 2006, p. 201)
We have only to speak of an object to think that we are being objective. But, because we chose it in the first place, the object reveals more about us than we do about it. (Bachelard, 1964, p. 1)

As the human lens, focusing and presenting a picture of what respect looked like in two schools, it is important to “come clean” and confess why I chose this subject. It is also important to reveal some of my story and provide a description of the lens that shaped my view of what transpired during the time of my research. As a participant in the construction of meaning in this dialogue on the topic of respect, I must also try to uncover my own assumptions and biases in order to give readers a clearer understanding of the qualitative instrument (i.e., the researcher). So let it be clear: my interest in this topic is both professional and personal.

I was born into a conservative, blue-collar family in central New Jersey. Both of my parents were and are professing born-again Christians. As such, I grew up going to church, reading the Bible, and believing that humankind was created in the image of God. Although I am not as conservative as my roots, I have a strong belief in the dignity of humanity and the respect that it should be duly afforded.

As a young student attending school in the suburbs of New York City, there were many times when my learning environment was far from conducive to my intellectual and personal growth. My desire to learn and my perception of learning were at times undermined by classrooms that were both physically and psychologically unsafe. At times, I felt disrespected by fellow classmates and occasionally by my teachers. In my adult years, I have, on occasion, experienced learning environments that have done more to weaken my drive to learn than cultivate my desire for knowledge. These “unsafe” places of learning have impacted both my experiences as a student and my role as a
teacher. As a teacher cognizant of the damage that certain types of environments can have on students, I feel I have the responsibility to create a safe, respectful environment for all my students.

Living, studying, and teaching in China also have played some role in the type of "research instrument" I am. I believe that those who live abroad and learn from these experiences have a greater number of tools (i.e., in a Vygotskian sense of the word) at their disposal to understand and make sense of the world. Learning a second language, and later a third language, has made me empathetic toward those in similar positions. I know first hand the vulnerability of learning a language from beginning to advanced levels of proficiency. The extent to which I was immersed in the culture and my ability to speak Chinese, have also made me privy to more intimate discussions and commentary on how Chinese students and educators perceived foreign English teachers and their teaching. Over the years, I have heard a number of positive accounts and seen exemplars of good teaching; but there have also been several occasions when I have heard students complain about teachers who caused them to feel disrespected or humiliated.

As an ESOL instructor in a community college, my research is directly connected to my work. I have been an educator for nearly 19 years and have taught cross-culturally for nearly nine of those years. With the exception of my first few years teaching middle school students, the majority my teaching experience has involved the teaching of adults. The privilege of teaching adults has become a passion of mine, and one I do not take lightly.

Throughout my life, I have had the chance to observe hundreds of educators instructing their students in the ways that they deemed best. From these teachers I have
learned invaluable lessons; ones which continue to shed light on the pedagogy (perhaps better termed andragogy) that I now espouse and seek to practice. Although I am grateful for the opportunity to observe educators playing out their roles on their classroom stages, I have witnessed pedagogues and andragogues failing to recognize the audience for whom they were performing. Particularly disturbing to me were the practices and techniques that seemed to disregard the uniqueness of the adult learner and, in my opinion, dishonored the adult learner as a person.

Over the years, I also have observed teachers using instructional techniques that most people, I believe, would consider juvenile. I have at times witnessed teachers respond to adults in ways that failed to respect the experience and wisdom their adult students brought to the classroom. I have attended professional conferences where presenters stated that the only adjustments that needed to be made in order to change an elementary school curriculum into an adult curriculum were to remove or change the pictures. I have also witnessed the use of children’s games, nursery rhymes, children’s songs, etc. in the adult classroom. Furthermore, I have seen teachers use elementary and secondary classroom management techniques to control the behavior of adult students (e.g., the blowing of whistles, the raising of hands, and the ringing of bells to get their students’ attention). What was even more disconcerting to me, however, was that, when these teachers were questioned about their methods and techniques, they failed to see their behavior as an issue of concern. I am not saying, nor can I prove, that the techniques and ways of communicating were detrimental to the learner; but I have questioned whether these practices are indeed the best approach that educators of adults have to
(In fact, while observing the aforementioned conditions, students were smiling and appeared to be enjoying themselves.)

Throughout my doctoral coursework and the study of adult development, education theory, adult learning theory, and cross-cultural teaching and learning, I began to question what it was that caused teachers to believe that these seemingly juvenile ways of instructing were beneficial. What was it that made them choose to espouse a pedagogy that, at times, seemed to disregard the fact that they were teaching adults? The more I reflected on this issue, the more I began to wonder about the effect this type of pedagogy would have on adult learners. It seems to me that treating an adult in ways that failed to honor and respect their uniqueness would most likely have adverse effects. The great teachers—Jesus, Confucius, Socrates, and many others—certainly did not seem to be in want of adult-like ways to instruct their adult students. Both here in the United States and in cross-cultural settings, my pursuit has become one of looking for ways of teaching that are not only educative, but also respectful of the adult ESL student’s age, experience, and uniqueness. This dissertation is primarily my attempt to understand students’ perceptions of respectful/disrespectful ESL instructions and instructors and to let their voices be heard.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

1. ESL/English as a Second—English as second language (ESL) is in fact a misnomer in many ways. English is often a second, third, or more language for students studying ESL. However, ESL is defined as the study of English by non-native English speakers in native English-speaking contexts.
2. ESOL/English for Speakers for Other Languages—ESL in this research project subsumes English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Although it is often considered a more appropriate term, ESL is used more ubiquitously.


4. ES/FL—both ESL and EFL

5. TESOL/Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages—the discipline or field that includes both ESL and EFL. TESOL (or TESOL, Inc) is also a professional organization for ES/FL instructors.

6. IEP/Intensive English Program—an English language program with a minimum of 18 contact hours of English language instruction per week organized around curricula designed to meet the learning needs of participating students. Many IEPs in the United States provide English language instruction for students preparing for admittance into American colleges and universities but lacking the language requirements necessary to be admitted. IEP students, however, may also choose to study at an IEP to gain cross-cultural experience and the pleasure of studying a language in a foreign country.

7. ELL—English language learner

8. Adult ESL learner—ESL students age 18 and older (as used by other researchers, e.g., Matlock, D. L., 2000, p. 22)
What Is to Come

Respect is both a socially constructed concept and a human experience. Therefore, to understand respect/disrespect within the ESL context, the lived experiences of respect require both discovery and discussion. This qualitative study seeks to illuminate how ESL/ESOL teachers and adult students conceptualized respect/disrespect in their contexts.

The remainder of this study will be organized as follows:

Chapter 2 will provide information regarding adult learning and adult ESL. Relevant aspects of culture will also be presented as well as studies related to my research.

Chapter 3 will present the research design and methods involved in this study.

Chapters 4-6 will present the findings of this study.

Chapters 7-11 will examine, analyze, and interpret the findings. Suggestions will also be made regarding areas for future study.
CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECTING ADULT LEARNERS IN A FIELD LIKE TESOL

Adult Learners

This study focused on conceptualizations of respect and disrespect, yet it also involved real people—in this case adult students and teachers—and how they understand and define respectful communication and behavior. Since this study involves the teaching of students who would generally be considered adults, it is important to briefly describe what adults and adult learners are and what makes them unique.

What is an adult? One can find myriad understandings of what being an adult means. Wlodkowski (2008) divides adults into three groups: younger adults (18-24 years old), working-age adults (25-64 years old), and older adults (65 years of age and older) (p. 32). Malcolm Knowles (1980), the father of adult learning in America,” provides a definition of an adult which suggests that adults are those who see themselves as adults, perform adult activities, and are responsible for their own lives. To others, being an adult involves an age, and some see the classification “adult” as a certain stage in the life cycle. Alan Rogers (2002) describes a broader Western conceptualization of adulthood; one comprised of maturity—“the full development and utilisation of all the individual’s talents,” perspective—“a more balanced
approach to life and to society;” and autonomy—“being responsible for oneself, one’s deeds and development” (pp. 41-42).

Another prominent view of what constitutes an adult is Paterson’s (1979) definition:

Those people (in most societies, the large majority) to whom we ascribe the status of adults may and do evince the widest possible variety of intellectual gifts, physical powers, character traits, beliefs, tastes, and habits. But we correctly deem them to be adults because, by virtue of their age, we are justified in requiring them to evince the basic qualities of maturity. Adults are not necessarily mature. But they are supposed to be mature, and it is on this necessary supposition that their adulthood justifiably rests. (p. 13)

What is an adult learner? Again, descriptions, definitions, and conceptualizations abound. As Fenwick and Tennant (2004) state:

There is no generic essentialised “adult learner” who can be described in ways that accurately and responsibly portray the myriad differences between people and the changes they experience. Indeed, ideas of adulthood vary so widely that announcing “adult” learning as a unique and distinct category has become a dubious enterprise. (p. 55)

Eduard C. Lindeman provided a foundational understanding of adult learning, and his ideas had a profound impact on Knowles’s theory of andragogy and understanding of adult learners. Lindeman’s assumptions of adult learners, as summarized by Knowles, are as follows:

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy.
2. Adults’ orientation to learning is life-centered.
3. Experience is the richest source for adults’ learning.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing.
5. Individual differences among people increase with age. (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005, p. 40)
Teaching the Adult Learner

Adults learn differently than their younger counterparts and have both a greater quantity of experience and a richer quality of those experiences. The adult brain also differs from the brain of a child. Wlodkowski (2008) states, “Neurologically, their brains are more developed and capable of judging, planning, and making decisions about their experiences in a manner that is more integrated, stable, reflective, and future oriented” (p. 99). Furthermore, Wlodkowski ascertains that adult learners are different from child learners because they are more likely:

1. To use relevance (what matters rather than what is playful or stimulating) as the ultimate criteria for sustaining interest
2. To be more critical and more self-assured about their judgment of the value of what they are learning
3. To be reluctant to learn what they cannot endorse by virtue of its value, usefulness, or contribution to their goals
4. To be sensitive to and require respect from their teachers as a condition for learning
5. To want to actively test what they are learning in real and life settings
6. To want to use their experience and prior knowledge as consciously and as directly as possible while learning
7. To want to integrate new learning with their life roles as parents, workers, and so forth (pp. 99-100)

Influences of experience and responsibility are the most notable differences between the way children and adults learn (p. 100). According to Wlodkowski, adults are most motivated when success, volition, value, and enjoyment are present and understood.

Since adult and young learners are not the same, adult learning theorists stress the importance that adults be taught and treated in ways that reflect their uniqueness. Knowles (1984) states that if adults “are treated as children, this conditioned expectation conflicts with their much deeper psychological need to be self-directing, and their energy is diverted away from learning to dealing with this internal conflict” (p. 9). Thus,
Knowles and others have postulated that the teaching of adults should be more andragogical and less pedagogical. To teach in such a way involves a paradigmatic shift from the traditional ways of instruction. In *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Learning*, Knowles describes the primary differences between the traditional, pedagogical model and an andragogical model of teaching (see Table 1).

### Table 1

**Differences between the Pedagogical and Andragogical Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Pedagogical Model</th>
<th>The Andragogical Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Conceptualization of the Learner</strong></td>
<td>Learner as dependent personality; submissively follows teacher’s plan and directions</td>
<td>Learner as self-directing; learners need to be encouraged to forsake dependency as learners and become more autonomous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult learners have a greater quantity and different quality of experience due to the length of their lives and diverse roles in society; their experience makes them rich resources; their experience is part of their identity and should not be ignored</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **The Learner’s Experience**   | Learners have little valuable experience to bring to educational events; value is placed on the teacher’s and the textbook writers’ experience along with the audio-visual tools that are used | }

continued on next page
The Pedagogical Model | The Andragogical Model
---|---
Orientation toward Learning | Learners enter learning activities to acquire predetermined subject matter taught according to a predetermined curricula | Adult learners are motivated by needs determined by their life situations, thus learning is more task-, problem-, and life-centered; every learning event makes explicit the importance of the learning event and its connection to the learner's life
Readiness to Learn | Students are ready to learn what they are told they are required to know for advancement to the next level or grade, often a function of age | Adults are ready to learn when they experience a need to know or do something in order to perform more effectively in some aspect of their lives; readiness is often connected with developmental tasks; instructors can encourage this readiness
Motivation to Learn | Students are primarily motivated by external pressures (e.g., parents, teachers, fear of failure, competition, etc.) | Adult learners, although motivated at times by external factors, are primarily motivated by internal factors (e.g., self-esteem, better quality of life, self-actualization, etc.)

*Note*: Differences between Andragogy and Pedagogy (based on Knowles, 1984, pp. 8-12).
The Adult Teacher-Learner Relationship

Adult educators often stress the need for an “appropriate relationship.” Terms such as mutual, open, equal, and participative prevail as descriptors of the adult teacher-student relationship. However, relationships are often complicated by the age, status, and position of the involved parties. Although the literature has stressed the importance of an appropriate teacher-learner relationship, establishing this type of relationship is a complex matter. In fact, the teacher-student relationship does not always develop in ways that personify the values most educators claim to espouse. The relationship can be characterized by inequality and by power unevenly distributed in favor of the teacher. Further complicating matters, adult students are peers and hold the potential to be teachers in other contexts.

The adult teacher-student relationship can be defined in both psychological and political terms. Carl Rogers (1969) has written extensively about the psychological nature of such relationships. In Freedom to Learn, Rogers outlines the basic attitudes educators need in order to have a relationship that facilitates learning. The first attitude is related to realness or genuineness. Rogers felt that a teacher was more likely to be effective if s/he entered into a relationship with the learner without a façade. The second attitude, “prizing the learner,” included “prizing his feelings, his opinions, his person” (p. 109). Although Rogers felt this attitude was most difficult to name, it is this aspect that seems particularly germane to his concept of respect. Rogers, elucidating his definition of “prizing,” states:

It is a caring for the learner, but a non-possessive caring. It is an acceptance of this other individual as a separate person, having worth in his own right. It is a basic trust—a belief that this other person is somehow fundamentally trustworthy. Whether we call it prizing, acceptance, trust, or by some other term, it shows up in a variety of observable ways. ... What we are describing is a prizing of the
learner as an imperfect human being with many feelings, many potentialities. (p. 109)

The final attitude Roger describes is “empathic understanding.” To Rogers, this concept goes beyond mere understanding of the learner. Rogers envisioning of empathic understanding implies non-judgmental acceptance. This attitude also evokes an empowered response in the learner. According to Rogers, when confronted with this type of understanding, the learner reacts by feeling, “At least someone understands how it feels and seems to be me without wanting to analyze me or judge me. Now I can blossom and grow and learn” (pp. 111-112).

Additionally, Rogers felt that respect was a vital component of all human relationships and specifically recognized its importance in the context of the teacher-student dyad. Maslow (1970) also recognized respect as an important human need and essential for human relationships. He writes, “man’s need for love or for respect is quite as ‘sacred’ as his need for truth” (p. 3). Respect, to Maslow, involved an affirmation of another’s individuality and an eagerness to see another grow. According to Maslow, all humans need to feel valued and accepted. Part of this need included the human need for recognition, respect, and attention.

In *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow explains how self-actualizing people should relate to one another. In this description, Maslow (1970) states:

The self-actualizing person will not casually use another or control him or disregard his wishes. He will allow the respected person a fundamental irreducible dignity, and will not unnecessarily humiliate him. This is true not only for interadult relationships but also in a self-actualizing person’s relationship to children. (p. 196)
The teacher-student relationship is also a political one. Freire’s (1970) famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, poses a way of teaching that liberates and empowers rather than dominates and domesticates. Freire describes a way of instructing students in which teaching “ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate students, but rather expresses the consciousness of the students themselves” (p. 51). In addition, the pedagogy Freire explicates and espouses leads teachers to a quest for mutual humanization (Salazar & Franquiz, 2008). Freire’s writings contrast two types of classroom political structures—the banking approach and a problem-posing approach—both of which shape and have direct bearing on the quality of the teacher-student relationship (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Freire’s Contrast of Approaches to the Teacher-Student Relationship*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Banking Approach:</th>
<th>The Problem-Posing Approach:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The teacher determines the goals.</td>
<td>1. The learners determine the goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teacher is knowledgeable and the students are ignorant.</td>
<td>2. The facilitator and learners all have useful knowledge and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The teacher imparts knowledge and skill and the students receive it [sic].</td>
<td>3. The learners soon apply the knowledge and skills in the pursuit of their goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The teacher talks and the students listen.</td>
<td>4. The facilitator and learners discuss issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The students store the knowledge for future use.</td>
<td>5. The facilitator and learners jointly decide the direction of class sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The teacher directs the class sessions and the students comply.</td>
<td>6. The education process helps create new realities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The education process perpetuates the status quo.</td>
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</table>

The Adult ESL Learner

In *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Jeremy Harmer (2001) provides a list of characteristics that highlight the adult learner’s strengths and uniqueness for future ES/FL instructors. These characteristics include the following:

1. They [adults] can engage with abstract thought.
2. They have a whole range of life experiences to draw on.
3. They have expectations about the learning process, and may already have their own set patterns of learning.
4. Adults tend, on the whole, to be more disciplined than some teenagers, and crucially, they are often prepared to struggle on despite boredom.
5. They come into classrooms with a rich range of experiences which allow teachers to use a wide range of activities with them.
6. Unlike young children and teenagers, they often have a clear understanding of why they are learning and what they want to get out of it. (p. 40)

Like other adult learners, the beginning of the educational process for the adult ELL often starts with a gate-keeping placement test. Students with little English proficiency, and whose concern is solely to learn English, generally take standardized tests prior to entry into an ESL program. In many cases, ESL students are denied access to academic programs because of poor test scores. Some students overestimate their English proficiency and find themselves forced to take ESL classes as prerequisites to credit-bearing college classes.

For some adults, quality ESL programs may be difficult to locate. Others, as in the case of refugees, are helped by sponsoring agencies. Some find programs through word of mouth. However, students with limited English proficiency or from lower socio-economic backgrounds may not have the means to use the Internet or find programs that meet their particular needs. Even if a good program is found and the student takes the proper tests, students may have to wait months before an opening in the program allows
them to participate. Once a space is secured to study, students are likely to be taught by part-time teachers with a wide range of educational and professional qualifications (Blumenthal, 2002).

Adult ELLs arrive in ESL classrooms for a number of reasons, and their motivation to learn is always in a state of flux (Schwarzer, 2009). Some come simply to learn the language. Others have the dual goal of studying English and learning about American culture. To some, the ESL classroom is a place to socialize or a means to escape difficult situations in their homes. Additionally, parents and grandparents take ESL classes to better communicate with children and grandchildren or to help them with their homework. Some may even come to “‘defend themselves’ against an English speaking system that does not always have their best interest in mind” (Wrigley, Chisman, Ewen, & Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, 1993, p. 2).

The length of time ELLs spend in the ESL classroom also varies greatly (Kilton-Sylvester, 2002). Many international students take ESL classes for a year or two before moving on to an academic major or returning to their own countries. Immigrants and refugees may study ESL for years or study just long enough to find more desirable employment.

It is important to note that one of the greatest differences between younger ELLs and adult ELLs is the amount of responsibility these learners often have beyond the classroom. Many are wives, husbands, parents, or even grandparents. Recent immigrants or refugees are often faced with the pressure to quickly locate employment and help their families (and themselves) adjust to their new culture and surroundings. Those who have
found jobs are frequently required to become more proficient in English to keep their positions or receive promotions (McKay & Tom, 1999).

It is also important to mention that affective factors, such as the emotional state of the learner, have a significant impact on language acquisition for adult ELLs (Song, 2006). Adjustment to unfamiliar academic and cultural surroundings, communication difficulties, financial limitations, and anxiety hold the potential to hinder the success of adult ESL students.

Adult ESL Teachers, Their Profession, and Its Challenges

ESL teachers, like other classroom teachers, have to balance and integrate two roles—a task-oriented, instructional role and an interpersonal, social role. In describing the role of the ESL teacher in *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Jeremy Harmer (2001) explains ESL teachers’ roles are contingent upon what they want their students to accomplish. He outlines eight roles ESL teachers generally employ: controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor, and observer (p. 58-62). The way these roles are enacted in the classroom, according to Harmer, varies according to the learning activity and the personality of the teacher. In *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*, Douglas Brown (2001) offers a number of similar roles. Brown’s roles fall on a directive to non-directive teaching continuum, and include: the teacher as controller, the teacher as director, the teacher as manager, the teacher as facilitator, and the teacher as resource (pp. 167-168).

While ESL teachers negotiate their instructional roles, they are also required to simultaneously have trusting relationships that facilitate learning. Effective ESL teachers
establish rapport and have friendly connections with students. The ESL teacher must also have an appropriate amount of sensitivity, and studies have shown a significant correlation between affective factors and language proficiency (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). As Hilles and Sutton (2001) state, “warmth, compassion, empathy, and kindness seem to be constant personal qualities in good ESL teachers” (p. 391).

The adult ESL instructor faces a number of challenges. First, adult ESL learners can be challenging to teach. Harmer (2001) lists three primary characteristics that can make teaching problematic:

1. They [adult learners] can be critical of teaching methods. Their previous learning experiences may have predisposed them to one particular methodological style which makes them uncomfortable with unfamiliar teaching patterns. Conversely, they may be hostile to certain teaching and learning activities which replicate the teaching they received earlier in their educational careers.
2. They may have experienced failure or criticism at school which makes them anxious and under-confident about learning language.
3. Many older adults worry that their intellectual powers maybe diminishing with age—they are concerned to keep their creative powers alive, to maintain a “sense of generativity.” (p. 40)

The ESL teacher is also called upon to include a great variety of learning stimuli and activities. In addition, teachers are required to observe and accommodate as many cultural and individual preferences as possible in all learning events (Hilles & Sutton, 2001), yet it is an impossible feat to respond to all of these preferences at the same time.

ESL teachers are also participants in a profession plagued with variety of problems. Across the United States, ESL teacher qualifications vary considerably. Some have ESL credentials while others in the field may not. Some instructors have very limited teaching experience prior to their work, yet are considered “professionals.” In a book regarding the state of the ESL profession, the authors state:
In the end, everyone is short changed: the individual teachers who feel a loss, the program that has to deal with uneven competence among its staff, and most importantly, the learners who know that whether they will have one of the better teachers will depend largely on the luck of the draw. (Wrigley et al., 1993, p. 26)

ESL teachers also receive different levels of preparation. Master’s programs in TESOL and applied linguistics vary in the number of methods classes students are required to take and in the number of hours students devote to teaching practicums. Those entering the ESL teaching profession for the first time, including those with advanced degrees, may have received little instruction on how to teach a second language or have little actual teaching experience. Academic programs rarely teach future instructors how to deal with problematic behavior in the classroom or students who lack an appropriate understanding of North American academic culture. Additionally, interpersonal climate management is rarely a component of the training many teachers receive (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p. 8), yet climate management is an important aspect of the teacher’s role in the ESL classroom.

In the United States, ESL teachers receive varying degrees of training regarding how to instruct adults, especially older adult students. At the same time, teachers are expected to deliver instruction aligned with adult learning theories. Introductory texts used to train TESOL professionals often devote only a small portion of the book to explaining what makes teaching adults a unique endeavor, and programs within the field do not have specific courses devoted to adult learning or andragogy.

ESL teachers often work on the fringe of the academic community (Blumenthal, 2002). Those familiar with the field contend that ESL teachers are generally poorly compensated and opportunities for professional development are not readily available.
Full-time positions are often rare, and staffing patterns vary considerably across the country (Cutshall, 2002). At my present position in one of the largest community colleges in the country, 81% of the ESOL instructors are part-time employees. Part-time positions generally offer little to no financial stability, and few colleges offer medical insurance, retirement benefits, or even sick days unless employees are full-time. In addition, part-time employees generally have minimal, shared, or no office space. They are often not compensated for time planning lessons or meeting with students outside of classroom contact hours. When professional development is formally offered, part-time instructors generally receive very little, if any, remuneration. In other words, those who prepare less, are less involved with their students, and attend fewer professional development workshops are paid more per hour than those who are more dedicated to their profession and involved with their students. Additionally, many part-time teachers are not observed during their tenure. Although my present institution regularly observes my teaching, my teaching was not observed at either research site mentioned in this study during the time I was employed as an instructor. At CCS (the community college used as a research site in this study), I was once told by one of the full-time instructors that part-time teachers were only observed when students reported dissatisfaction or classroom problems. In fact, many programs simply do not have the money or resources available to perform regular observations or help inexperienced teachers become professionals. As a result of all of these aforementioned factors, attracting and retaining qualified teachers to the profession is not an easy feat.
The Collision of Culture and Classroom: An Intercultural Perspective on the Role of the Teacher

As teacher/student interaction is such an archetypal human phenomenon, and so deeply rooted in the culture of a society, cross-cultural learning situations are fundamentally problematic for both parties. (Hofstede, 1986, p. 301)

Instruction occurs within a cultural context, and the teacher's role is a socio-cultural construct. In fulfilling their roles, teachers' make pedagogical choices—ones heavily influenced by their contexts. Two main cultural continua shape these roles: a continuum of individualism-collectivism and one of high-low power distance.

Individualism-Collectivism

Individualism-collectivism has been used as a primary way to understand the differences between cultures and the variability commonly found among them (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1988). In individualistic cultures, a high value is placed on self-actualization, individual initiative and achievement, and the “I” identity (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). In the United States—a country generally associated with individualism—freedom, autonomy, and individual rights tend to be highly esteemed. In contrast, countries considered to be collectivistic tend to emphasize harmony, loyalty, and family relationships over more individual pursuits. In collectivistic cultures, people generally emphasize the “we” identity and the importance of belonging to the “ingroup” (Hofstede, 1980). According to Triandis (1988, 1995), the major factor that distinguishes individualistic cultures from collectivistic cultures is the relative importance of ingroups. The ingroup, or group that is viewed as important to its members and one for which individuals are willing to make sacrifices, is treated differently in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. In cultures where individualism is predominant, people will have
many ingroups capable of influencing their behaviors in social settings (Gudykunst & Lee, 2002). This ingroup influence is generally less than that experienced in collectivistic cultures due to the plethora of ingroups found within individualistic cultures. People living in collectivistic cultures generally have fewer ingroups, but their influence tends to be more ubiquitous and pervasive. This ingroup influence also tends to make members of individualistic cultures act more universally in applying their value standards to others and causes collectivistic cultures to be more particularistic in their application of value standards (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

It is important to note that although individualism and collectivism appear in every culture, one will be predominant. The way individualism-collectivism affects culture is seen through the norms and rules that guide behavior. Individuals tend to be socialized in ways consistent with culture-level tendencies, but exceptions always exist (Gudykunst & Lee, 2002). Hofstede’s (2001, 1986) research further points out the quality of teacher-student interactions will be also influenced by where individual cultures fall on the individualistic-collectivistic continuum. Therefore, being aware of one’s own tendency as well as the dimensions (and variations) found within a specific culture is essential to both effective and respectful intercultural communication and the establishment of a positive, respectful learning environment.

**Power Distance**

Another dimension of Hofstede’s research involves the issue of power distance or what he called a power-distance index. Jandt, explicating Hofstede’s theory, defines power distance as “the extent to which the less powerful members expect and accept that
power, prestige, and wealth are distributed unequally” (Jandt, 2004, p. G-6). According to Dodd (1998), high power distance cultures accept the inequality found in their cultures as a norm, and tend to be hierarchical. Power, therefore, tends to be accepted as a part of society and members stress power that is coercive or referential (Gudykunst & Lee, 2002). In contrast, low power distance cultures stress interdependence and are less hierarchical in their structures. The United States and many western countries tend to be low in power distance.

The nature of the relationship between teachers and students will largely be shaped by how a culture values power distance. Social distance or closeness will be understood differently, thus holding the potential for misunderstanding. In large power distance societies, a teacher merits the respect of the student and students expect teachers to initiate conversation (Hofstede, 1986). In small power distance societies, education is generally more student-centered and students are expected to take initiative in their learning and communication with teachers. North American teachers, then, must consider how these differences will affect their roles, relationships, and responsibilities in a classroom comprised of students from cultures with varying degrees of power distance. Failure to do so may result in perceptions of disrespect.

**The Teaching Roles of Intercultural Educators**

Appropriating individualism-collectivism and high-low power distance as a matrix, Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter (2003) describe four prototype teacher roles. These roles include the teacher as authority, the teacher as patron, the teacher as outsider, and the teacher as facilitator.
The Teacher as Facilitator

In the generally student-centered context of the American classroom, teachers often find themselves in the role of the facilitator. In this role, the status differences between teacher and student are less important. Student-initiated communication and class discussions are highly valued. The teacher’s role is one of a mentor or friend (Lingenfelter & Lingenfelter, 2003). As a former middle school teacher in the United States, I found most students were comfortable initiating interactions with their teachers and their classmates. My students did not accept that their teachers had all of the answers, and at times they challenged their texts, the school, and their instructors. They often bombarded me with questions and appeared proud to share their individual ways of solving problems. In turn, I often encouraged them to work independently and often showed displeasure with the mere recitation of facts.

The Teacher as Authority

This role of teacher as authority is in direct contrast to the role of teacher as facilitator. As an authority, students expect teachers to have the answers and be willing to transmit their expert knowledge to their students. As the expert, they are afforded a great deal of status and respect. When teachers are the authority, students see themselves more as passive recipients than as active participants. Additionally, students generally do not enjoy spontaneously answering questions, especially those with an answer open to interpretation. As a teacher in China, my students made it clear that they valued lectures and information and were often less pleased with group work and class discussions. My
Chinese students were also uncomfortable calling me by my first name and were surprised (and at times uncomfortable) when I interacted with them as friends or equals. When the expectations of students who traditionally had more authoritarian teachers collide with teachers who were trained and enculturated to be facilitators, the results can be quite problematic. As Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter explain:

The expectations of students who see the teacher as an authority figure contrast sharply with the expectations of students who see the teacher as a facilitator. Students who see the teacher as an authority do not value independent thinking; they merely want the teacher to tell them what will be on the test so they can memorize it. When the teacher tries to encourage questions and interactions, the students often feel it is a waste of time. Every classroom has its distinctive social game, and conflicts arise when students and teachers bring different social game expectations to the classroom. (p. 77)

**The Teacher as Patron/Parent**

Perhaps one of the least understood roles in western contexts is the role of the teacher as patron/parent. Patron-client systems are more evident and more thoroughly studied in countries rife with socio-political instability. Although research in western contexts indicates this role is present in universities, companies, and other organizations, it seems that this role may be the most difficult for North American instructors to detect, comprehend, and accept.

The role of the teacher as patron/parent involves a relationship between teachers and students and is also contingent upon a degree of inequality in terms of status, power, or resources (Lingenfelter & Lingenfelter, 2003, p. 79). Pivotal to the relationship is the formation of and participation in an alliance that benefits both the superior member (the patron/teacher) and the inferior member (the client/student). Although this type of
relationship may appear purely pejorative by western standards, both parties often find the relationship mutually beneficial.

Describing the patron-client relationship within schools, Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter state:

When students see the teacher as a parent or patron, the teacher becomes the gateway to opportunity. If students do well, they may go farther. A student learns because of a relationship and the teaching methods—such as oral storytelling, lecture, call and response and humor—affirm the parent or patron bond with the student. Student expectations of the teacher are high, and the student does not want to disappoint the teacher. If the system works well, the teacher gives knowledge and the student gives respect. The focus is clearly on the importance of establishing relationships in order to learn. (p. 80)

To maintain this type of relationship, teachers and students must adhere to the particular rules of reciprocation within the social context. The balance of reciprocity is maintained through the give and take of gifts. These gifts can be either tangible or intangible (Chinchen, 1994). As Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter point out, many westerners understand the exchange of gifts in more materialistic terms and are therefore afraid of the demands and ethical considerations of such a relationship. Students who are accustomed to viewing the teacher as a patron/parent will often find expectations unmet, the relationship and instruction unfulfilling, and experience a sense of insecurity.

The Teacher as Outsider

When small power distance cultures are also highly committed to their social groups, an egalitarian game is created. When this transpires in the classroom and the teacher is outside the majority culture, the teacher’s role is that of an outsider.

As an ESL instructor, I have had the opportunity to teach a class in which there was a large group of students who were born in other countries but moved to the United
States during their middle or high school years. Generation 1.5 students, as they are commonly called, create a unique challenge to ESL programs across the United States (Blumenthal, 2002). In my own case, these students could not relate to ESL students who had recently arrived in the United States, nor did they believe they needed ESL classes. In addition, they felt a good deal of animosity for being placed in an ESL classroom and resented each day they spent in the college’s ESL program. Among this group of students, I was an outsider or perhaps an enemy. As an outsider, I often struggled to control the learning environment so that all of my students could learn. I became frustrated at times with the group’s resistance to the established rules. Under these circumstances, I was forced to focus on maintaining control of the class and became fatigued by both the constant need to enforce rules rather than teach. As an outsider, there is little chance for a close relationship to develop between students and teachers. The students may even attempt to form a group against the teacher. As a result, mutual distrust and hate may exist beneath a veneer of tolerance.

Social milieus are dynamic, as are teachers’ roles and their students’ perceptions of these roles. The role of the teacher is affected by such things as the type of institution, subject matter, cultural backgrounds, learning styles, the type of learning activity, etc. In the case of ESL instruction, teachers may act as an authority when giving a lecture and as facilitator when students work in groups. However, one role is generally predominant in any given classroom.
**Other Cultural Considerations**

**High-Low Context Communication**

High and low context communication is a function of individualism–collectivism (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996). According to Hall, in high-context communication “most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message” (Hall, 1976, p. 79). High-context communication also involves more indirectness, implicitness, and non-verbal expressions (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Low-context communication, in contrast, is more direct, explicit, and verbally expressive (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998) and occurs when “the mass of information is vested in the explicit code” (Hall, 1976, p. 70). As is also true of individualism–collectivism, one tendency, either low- or high-context communication tends to be dominant. Overall, high-context communication tends to be predominant in collectivistic cultures whereas low-context communication is predominant in individualistic cultures (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). In general terms, then, Americans operate from an individualistic tendency and utilize low-context communication whereas collectivistic cultures communicate in more high-context ways. This cultural difference also has the potential to cause a great deal of misunderstanding in the classroom, disturb the psychological climate, and lead to classroom communication that is perceived as disrespectful.

**Kluckhohns and Strodebeck’s Value Orientations**

Another way of looking at culture and communication is through lens of value orientations. Kluckhohn and Strodebeck’s value orientations help researchers analyze
different patterns across cultures, patterns which lead members of cultures to understand what is important and how life should be lived (Samovar & Porter, 2001). Like the dimensions of cultural variability, value orientations should be viewed as aspects on a continuum. The main orientations include the following:

1. Human nature orientation—viewing man as intrinsically evil, good and evil, or good.
2. Person-nature orientation—viewing humanity as subject to nature, cooperating with nature, or controlling nature.
3. Time orientation—stressing the importance of the past, present, or future.
4. Activity orientation—preferring a being orientation (valuing spontaneous activity in the present), being-in-becoming (valuing the inner, spiritual aspects of life over the material), or doing orientation (valuing action and accomplishments).
5. Relation (social) orientation—perceiving relationships with others as authoritarian, collective, or individual orientation. (pp. 71-79)

**Barriers to Effective Intercultural Communication within Learning Environments**

One can begin to more fully understand a culture by examining some of the features and underpinnings of culture that provide structure, shape values, form attitudes, and ultimately guide behavior in the learning environment. These aspects of culture also provide a framework for looking at barriers to effective cross-cultural communication within the learning environment context. In any intercultural encounter, communication can be effective or ineffective. Humans engage in particular strategies to navigate and negotiate each communicative situation. At times, strategies are appropriately employed leading to effective, functional communication; however, there are also times when encounters involve ineffective communication and outcomes. Dodd (1998), summarizing Gudykunst, Gumbs, and Ting-Toomey, poses that the effectiveness of communication is largely hampered by the following factors:

1. When arrogance is perceived or present on the part of one or both interactants.
2. When anxiety or uncertainty remains high following the stereotyping process.
3. When personality factors mediate the process (i.e., rigidity, low self-monitoring, low cognitive complexity).
4. When the interactants lack motivation to pursue the communication or to foster a relationship.
5. When stereotypes are premature and draw upon negative attributions.
6. When our identities are insecure, lacking robust social or personal identification.

(p. 63)

Violations of Expectations

One of the primary barriers to effective communication in the classroom is unmet expectations. ESL students and teachers come to a new classroom environment with preconceived ideas about what norms should guide behavior and communication in the classroom. When these expectations are left unmet or violated, uncertainty and anxiety are likely products.

One theory concerning violations of expectations in intercultural communication is the Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT). EVT has been applied to a number of different contexts, including the classroom environment. Conceptualized by Judee Burgoon (1995), EVT is a theory derived from the understanding that all cultures have specific norms and guidelines that inform behaviors. These norms and rules, coupled with individual-specific patterns of behavior, produce expectations concerning how others should behave and communicate (both verbally and nonverbally). Gudykunst and Lee state that EVT “frames interpersonal communication within the context of the expectations held by individuals and how individuals respond to violations of those expectations” (2002, p. 42). It is impossible to predict the exact effect of an expectancy violation; but one can assume that, if the message is deemed beyond the person’s range of
tolerance, the message will create a sense of disequilibrium, often leading to anxiety and frustration.

**Review of Related Studies**

**Respect Research in Schools**

Psychologists and educators have been interested in understanding and explaining the concept of respect. In both educators’ and psychologists’ definitions of respect, themes of regard, esteem, acceptance of individuality, deference, care, and honor are most predominant (Underwood-Baggett, 2002).

As evident in the Table 3, many initial studies involving respect in the field of education were conducted in the 1990s. Research involving respect in schools has continued up until the time of this study. The following is a review of three studies closely related to this research endeavor.

Table 3

*Respect Studies in Schools*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ladanye (1983)</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mormon high school students</td>
<td>Mutual respect is vital to the student-teacher relationship and necessary to a seminary teacher being deemed “successful.” Students reported the following factors demonstrated care and respect: involving the students often in the classroom; knowing their names; and talking to the one-on-one.</td>
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<th>Study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Diero (1996)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Secondary school teachers with good reputations</td>
<td>Factors essential to establishing healthy bonds and communicating respect include: addressing students in respectful ways; seeking to earn students respect; establishing rituals; treating and speaking to students like adults; empathizing with students; seeing students as people, individual thinkers, as nice people; talking to students individually when giving praise and criticism; establishing mutual respect; having clear boundaries, expectations, and consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffin (1997)</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Teachers and students at three high schools</td>
<td>Students and teachers perceived the nature of respect similarly in terms of attributes and somewhat dissimilarly in terms of how respect is enacted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ellis (1997)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>High school students</td>
<td>Respect from teachers was important to students; there is a positive correlation between students’ perceptions of respect and academic achievement; there is a negative correlation between respect in relation to discipline problems and absenteeism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott (1999)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Christian high school teachers and students</td>
<td>Little congruity exists between students’ and teachers’ operational definitions of respect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dekker (2002)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Christian high school teachers and students</td>
<td>Teachers and students share similar operational definitions of respect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
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<td>Jones (2002)</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Marginalized young adult students</td>
<td>Students mainly defined respect as being able to talk without being laughed at and having space to get your point across. Students believed respect was communicated when teachers acknowledged their questions and recognized their contributions. In contrast, teachers’ conceptualizations emphasized aspects of classroom conduct (e.g., accepting responsibility, helping students, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdy (2006)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>High school teachers and students</td>
<td>The conceptualization of respect centered around four themes: challenge (educationally empowering), attention (a nonjudgmental way treating people), empathy (acting with empathy and appropriateness), and expectation (a sense of optimism in relation to goals and challenges).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hajii (2006)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Staff and students in an alternative adult education program</td>
<td>To teach respect, teachers must model respect, nurture and build relationships with students, be caring individuals, provide focused attention, and understand their students’ cultural backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasko (2009)</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Ninth graders exhibiting disrespectful behaviors</td>
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*Note:* Based on Underwood-Baggett (2001, p. 28).
Studies in Higher Education

There appears to be a relative dearth of studies on respect in higher education. One noteworthy exception, however, is Buttner’s (2004) study of American undergraduate business students and their views of respectful and disrespectful instructor behaviors. In her study, Buttner built off research that showed that more positive teacher evaluations were achieved when respectful instructor behaviors increased, as well as research that indicated that students and faculty may have different expectations regarding classroom behavior. Adding to this work, Buttner presented students’ perspectives of respectful/disrespectful behaviors in college business classrooms and looked at gender differences in responses.

Buttner’s research revealed that “recognition of students’ opinions” was the predominant theme in regard to respectful instructor behaviors. According to Buttner, this theme was recognized by teachers “asking for students’ opinions, taking their responses into account in making decisions, listening to students’ concerns, getting to know students individually, and thanking students for input” (p. 324).

The second theme to emerge from Buttner’s study was “the nature of treatment of the students, including demonstrating kindness and concern for the student and showing sensitivity to the student’s situation” (p. 325). Other major themes were as follows: task-related help, responsiveness to students’ unusual situations, affirmation of students, responding non-defensively to students, and class integrity. The theme of class integrity “included concerns about honesty and truthfulness on the part of the instructor, demonstrating trust in students, fair and impartial treatment, concern for students’ rights, and providing justification for decisions” (pp. 325-326).
As one might expect, themes of disrespect were often the flipside of what constituted respect in the classroom. The primary theme concerning disrespect was “insensitive treatment.” Students cited examples of “rudeness, arrogance, condescension, ridiculing, sarcasm, cutting students off, and putting students down in front of classmates that were embarrassing and humiliating” as indicative of disrespect (p.327). Although other themes were far less predominant, other conceptualizations of disrespectful teacher behaviors included “lack of help in class-related activities, instructor’s defensiveness, lack of recognition of students’ concerns, classroom integrity issues, and instructor’s failure to respond to students’ class concerns” (pp. 327-328).

Another interesting finding of this study was that although male and female business students shared some similar conceptualizations of respect/disrespect, they also had as some important differences. Buttner found that male students felt respect was primarily expressed by an instructor’s recognition, responsiveness, and classroom integrity; and believed disrespect was expressed through lack of recognition, responsiveness, task-related help, classroom integrity, and an instructor’s defensiveness. Female students, on the other hand, understood their instructor’s respect predominantly through task-relevant help and affirmation, and “were more sensitive to treatment issues overall than men, and particularly in situations where they perceived the instructors’ behaviors to be disrespectful” (p. 330).

The general findings of this study appear to be that instructors and students saw respect, and particularly disrespect, differently. Buttner also suggested that these incongruities may lead to students feeling disrespected by instructors and encouraged further research that compares “faculty and student respect conceptions to identify
incongruities so that instructors can more clearly communicate their intentions and reasons for engaging in potentially misconstrued behaviors” (p. 330).

Sarah Shono’s (2004) dissertation entitled, *Good ESL Teachers from the Perspectives of Teachers and Adult Learners*, explored the characteristics teachers and ESL students use to determine what a “good teacher” is in a North American ESL context. Both IEP and community college students (primarily from Asia and Latin America) and teachers were part of Shono’s sample; however, no comparison is made regarding these two different academic contexts. Through qualitative interviews, Shono found several mismatches between ESL teachers and students in regard to what these two groups considered to be a good teacher and what they believed constituted good pedagogical practice. Although Shono’s dissertation is not a dissertation on respect, her study revealed that the most important factor to both students and teachers in determining whether a teacher was “good” was the aspect of respect. Furthermore, female participants in this study clearly described ineffective teachers as those who were disrespectful (p. 98).

According to Shono’s findings, the five most salient features of good ESL teachers are as follows: a respectful professional, a caring educator, a cultural mediator, a patient instructor, and a native speaker. Shono’s study also examined students’ and teachers’ understanding of good pedagogy. The result yielded 11 different pedagogical practices of good ESL teachers. These include: “(1) allowing personalized speaking time in class, (2) teaching authentic language and culture, (3) engaging students, (4) negotiating the curriculum, (5) conducting an organized class, (6) demonstrating subject area knowledge, (7) integrating content areas, (8) building learner autonomy, (9) building
learning confidence, (10) catering to learners' cognitive learning styles, and (11) tolerating ambiguity” (p. vi). Shono’s research also indicated that teachers focused more on pedagogical practices than students in describing good teachers and that students stressed more individual, affective factors (pp. 93-94). Three particular practices were emphasized by teachers but largely ignored by students: “building learning autonomy, catering to cognitive styles, and building learner confidence” (p. 167). Students emphasized a need to teach relevant content; however, none of the teachers mentioned this in the study. Matches in pedagogical practices included: teaching authentic language and culture, conducting organized classrooms, and demonstrating their knowledge of their subject area.

Sung’s Forms of Respect

From the field of sociology, Kyu-taik Sung’s research on elder respect has yielded some of the most extensive and detailed data regarding forms of respect (Sung & Dunkle, 2009; Sung, 2004; Sung, 2002). Sung’s primary research concern has been to understand elder respect from a cross-cultural perspective, with an emphasis on Asian conceptions of elder respect drawn from Confucianism. His studies, built upon previous studies (Silverman & Maxwell, 1978; Sung, 2001), have recognized 12 primary forms of elder respect. Sung’s research further concluded that each culture manifests different forms of respect and places different importance and emphases on these forms. Sung’s 12 forms of elder respect provide a helpful lens for examining respect. Although focused on respect shown to elders, these forms of respect nonetheless provide a frame of reference and point of comparison for those researching the concept of respect.
Why Do Adults ESL Learners Require Respect?

Adults expect their adult status to be recognized. Quite properly, they expect to be treated with respect and dignity on a course as elsewhere. They will not put up with harsh criticism, humiliation or being patronized. Ultimately they choose to vote with their feet if they do not find the equality of adulthood that is their right. ...Adults expect to be treated with respect and the equality of adulthood. (J. Daines, C. Daines, & Graham, 1993, pp. 8, 13)

Unless one believes teaching is the mere transmission of subject matter, teaching and learning involve both external and internal processes. The adult ESL student and all of her or his emotional, physiological, and intellectual parts must be considered. Conditions exist that are better for adult students to learn and develop, and learning is generally believed to be enhanced by supportive, non-threatening environments (Scovel, 1991). The role of teachers, then, is to create conditions that are conducive for learning and teach according to principles that promote the growth and development of adult students. Malcolm Knowles (1980) proposes a number of conditions vital to adult learning. These conditions include mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences. These conditions translate into appropriate principles of teaching, namely:

1. The teacher accepts the learners as persons of worth and respects their feeling and ideas.
2. The teacher seeks to build relationships of mutual trust and helpfulness among the learners by encouraging cooperative activities and refraining from inducting competitiveness and judgmentalness. (p. 57)

Respect, then, is pivotal to adult learning, and a respect and appreciation for the learners’ experience must be central to all learning activities. Knox (1990) in Helping Adults Learn, writes that adult learners “...want respect for themselves as adults. Regard for them as people with something to offer contributes to their sense of stability, worth,
and confidence” (p. 44). Hays (2001) found that when help is involved in human interactions, respect is as important or perhaps more important than rapport in many cultures. In the “Power of Positive Teaching,” McCormick (1994) summarizes the qualities of an effective teacher. The first of these attributes is as follows:

Effective teachers have strong, positive feelings for students and are not afraid to demonstrate these feelings; they show the students that they “love” them in a platonic manner. These teachers like students. They respect students. These teachers create an atmosphere of caring about the students (p. 8).

Stephen Brookfield (1987), a professor of adult and continuing education at Columbia University, laid out several principles for the effective teaching of adult students. His second principle states:

Effective practice is characterized by a respect among participants for each other’s self-worth. Foreign to facilitation [involving adults] are behaviors, practices, or statements that belittle others or that involve emotional or physical abuse. This does not mean that criticism should be absent from educational encounters. It does mean, though, that an attention to increasing adults’ sense of self-worth underlies all facilitation efforts (p. 10).

Elucidating even more cogently his view of the importance of respect in the teaching of adults, Brookfield writes:

A fundamental feature of effective facilitation is to make participants feel that they are valued as separate, unique individuals deserving of respect. To behave in a manner disrespectful to others, to denigrate their contributions, or to embarrass them publicly through extended attention to their apparent failings are, in educational terms, disastrous. Educators who behave in this manner will be faced with a number of consequences. They will find participants leaving, they will be unable to generate the goodwill required to conduct effective participatory learning exercises, and they will find learners so intimidated by the prospect of public pillory or private censure that they will be unable to learn. (pp. 12-13)

Adults often experience feelings of vulnerability, inadequacy, and shame when learning a language, thus further necessitating the need for respect. Their ability to talk is impaired by limited vocabularies and grammars. Fear of failure often grips those
struggling to understand, speak, read, and write in another language. Their identities are also challenged as they find themselves in a role that is traditionally reserved for the young. Research seems to indicate that shame increases the amount of cortisol in the body which impedes cognition (Schumann, 1997), and that adult ELLs may experience this as they are stripped of their ability to fluently communicate with their teachers, classmates, and the surrounding society. Hilles and Sutton (2001) purport that adult learners may be even more psychologically vulnerable than children. They state:

Adult learners are also psychologically vulnerable, perhaps in a way that children are not, precisely because they are adults and have already formed a strong sense of who they are. They have a great deal invested in their identities as proficient speakers of their first language. (Hilles & Sutton, 2001, p. 387)

Teaching ESL adult learners respectfully, then, can render learning more effective. Taking heed to ways of communicating that encourage growth and validate the identity of the student is essential to optimal learning. Ultimately, failure to attend to the affect or communicating disrespectfully can undermine the entire learning process.

Summary

In this review of literature, the uniqueness of the adult learner and the difference between teaching adults and children have been explained. I have also discussed the ESL teaching profession and some of its specific challenges. The adult learning milieu, including the cultural and psychological components, has been described. I also presented a number of studies relevant to respect research and studies germane to this particular study. Finally, an argument regarding why adult ELLs deserve respect has been presented.
Although lists of effective teaching principles, qualities of supportive classroom environments, and dimensions of cultures can be readily found in the fields of adult education, ESL, and the social sciences, little is written about how respect/disrespect is communicated in multicultural classroom environments. There remains, then, a lack of research in the area of how ESL teachers communicate respect/disrespect and the forms of respect that present themselves in the classroom. Based on what has been presented in this chapter, there is a need to not only add to the literature the voices of adult ESL students and their understanding of what respectful ESL instruction is and is not, but also to examine incongruities in the ways in which ESL teachers and students conceptualize respect/disrespect. The chapters that follow are proposed as an attempt to expand the dialogue regarding respect and its attendant features within the adult ESL context.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCHING RESPECT: PLACES, PROCESSES, AND PROCEDURES

The main purpose of this study was to better understand how adult ESL students understand respectful ESL teaching and classroom communication and to both honor and include their voices in the discussion of what defines respectful teaching in these contexts. Additionally, my research sought to elicit the ESL teacher’s perspective on respect within the classroom context. Historically, however, students’ voices are often the least represented in the research literature. As a result, teachers and administrators generally define educational concepts that shape practice. Through the responses, stories, and anecdotes provided by both the student and teacher participants in this study, I believe I was better able construct a more holistic picture of how respect and disrespect are understood and communicated in these particular contexts.

The Research Approach

This study was built upon a qualitative research foundation for several important reasons. First, my research questions and foci are aligned with the primary strength of qualitative research: the ability to study phenomena in their natural context and find meanings that better represent the essence of a particular phenomenon (Silverman, 2006, p. 44). These meanings could not have been deeply understood using positivistic or
objectivistic research methodologies. Secondly, I was not concerned with a pre-established definition of “respect,” but with how the meanings of respect, respectful teaching, etc., were constructed by the participants in these particular contexts. Thirdly, the vast majority of studies cited in the review of literature are solely based on quantitative research methodologies, thus justifying the need for a different research paradigm to examine the questions in focus. Moreover, studies focusing on understanding respect have generally centered on students’ secondary school experiences and were generally quantitative in nature. Finally, the concept of respect, although universal, is a multidimensional construct. In order to understand and better “peal back the layers” of the respect construct, a qualitative methodology had to be employed to probe more deeply into the core of how the participants conceptualized respect.

**Period of Time**

The interviewing process commenced on March 20, 2009, and concluded on June 12, 2009. The average interview was one hour in duration. Forty interviews were included in the data.

Observations began March 23, 2009, and ended April 28, 2009. I conducted a total of 22.5 hours of observations at both research settings.

**Selection of Setting**

“English Language Institute of the South” (ELIS) and “Community College of the South” (CCS) are pseudonyms for the two research sites utilized in this study. I chose these two sites in large part because I had worked at ELIS in the past and was teaching at CCS at the time of my data collection. Had I not had a relationship with the students,
teachers, and administrators at these schools, it would have been far more difficult to gain entry as a researcher and recruit participants. To be clear, none of the participants used in the study were my students at the time they were interviewed or observed. However, five of the students included in my sample were former students for a brief seven-week term, a term four months prior to the commencement of my research. With the exception of one teacher, all were former or current colleagues at the time of my study.

Another reason for the selection of these sites was convenience. At the time my study was conducted, I lived within a 45-minute drive from both of these locations, which made it easy to visit both sites. The two schools were also a convenient 10-mile drive from each other. Beyond convenience, I chose these two locations because they represent relatively typical programs for the type of English language teaching they provide. Many community colleges in the United States currently have ESL/ESOL departments, and IEPs are common in most major cities in the United States.

**Selection of Participants**

Participants’ names are also pseudonyms; many of which are the participant’s own creation. I used purposeful sampling to select all participants for this study. Both the academic director at ELIS and the ESL coordinator at CCS played a large role in the selection of my sample. My main criteria for selecting student participants were that participants needed to be enrolled ESL students, 18 years of age or older, and have sufficient English proficiency to be able to discuss the issue of respect and their English learning experiences in the United States. In my selection of ESL teachers, my only criterion was that participants were current ESL teachers in their corresponding
programs. However, concerning observations, I suggested to the coordinators that it would be best if I could observe teachers with varying levels of teaching experience.

At ELIS, the academic director gave me the names of students he felt would be able to help with my research. He also suggested that I limit my study to intermediate and advanced level students in the program. The administrative assistant then provided the names and contact information for these students. As per the director’s instructions, during break times between classes or during the students’ lunch hour, I located (or asked former students to help me locate) the students on the director’s list. I then inquired if students would like to participate in my study. Most students were eager and willing to participate, and several expressed that it would be a good chance to practice their speaking and listening skills. Some were concerned about the interview times interfering with their classes (many studied four or more hours per day at this site). I assured them that all interviews would be scheduled at a convenient time and would not interfere with their studies. Students who were unreachable during break times, I contacted via phone or email. Out of the students on the academic director’s list, two declined the invitation to be interviewed—one due to time constraints and the other felt her English was not good enough to participate. A few students did not return my calls or reply to my email messages.

Regarding the selection of teachers at this sight, the academic director announced my research project at a staff meeting and asked at the meeting if there were any teachers willing to participate. The director then provided the names of those who consented to be interviewed and/or observed, and I contacted the instructors to arrange the times of the interviews and establish a classroom observation schedule.
Since I was working at CCS at the time of my research, the academic coordinator recommended that I contact all of the full-time instructors and part-time instructors directly to see who would be willing to be interviewed. All of the full-time instructors expressed their willingness to participate in my study, and I was able to schedule an interview with all but one of them. Although I emailed both part-time and full-time instructors, only two of the part-time instructors expressed their willingness to participate in my study. Due to scheduling conflicts, I was only able to schedule one interview with a part-time instructor at this location.

When I met with the ESL coordinator concerning classroom observations, she recommended three different instructors to contact, each with varying years of teaching experience. Two of the recommended instructors agreed to be observed, while one declined because she had recently had another researcher in her classroom. Due to time constraints, I observed just two teachers at CCS and three teachers at ELIS.

To recruit students at CCS, I emailed teachers who taught intermediate and advanced level students to ask them to announce in their classes my research study and opportunity to participate. After not receiving any response, several teachers invited me to come to their classes to briefly describe my study and need for participants. I also announced my study to students in ESL classes that directly followed the classes I taught. Some of these students I had gotten to know since they often arrived as I dismissed my class. These methods of recruitment proved to be more successful. Once students agreed to participate, I arranged a mutually convenient time to meet.

Recruiting teachers and students at CCS was more challenging. I believe adjunct instructors were more difficult to recruit because of their schedules (some taught at
different schools or different CCS campuses). It was also more problematic to recruit students at this location because students generally spent less time on campus and had greater job responsibilities. Furthermore, unlike most students at ELIS who were prohibited to work outside of the school because of visa restrictions placed on international students, CCS student participants were able to work; and many students had full-time jobs outside of their busy academic lives.

**Description of the Research Sites**

The participants in this study involved both students and teachers from two different ESL contexts located in the southern region of the United States. The first context was an English language institute that provided intensive English training for international students, the majority of whom were seeking admission into American colleges and universities. The second group of participants was comprised of teachers and students from a community-college-based ESL program. Nine out of the ten participating teachers were native speakers of English, but all were American citizens. All student participants at the community college had immigrant, refugee, permanent resident, or resident status. In contrast, all of students from ELIS were international students. Although both locations had a small minority of students under the age of 17, all participants in this study were 18 years of age or older.

**ELIS.** ELIS opened its doors more than 30 years ago as a privately-owned educational enterprise. Over the years, the school has taught more than 6,500 students from 60 different countries (from ELIS’s website which cannot be cited due to privacy issues). The program is divided into six levels based on students’ proficiency levels. The
school offers classes in conversation, listening, reading, writing, and grammar. Although extremely diverse, the primary ethnic groups found at ELIS during the time of my study were Saudi Arabian, Korean, and Japanese students. Enrollment at ELIS is always in a state of flux; and during the time of my research, there were 74 students enrolled.

ELIS is housed in an office building. Most likely built in the 1960s or 1970s, the building is a brown, brick edifice with two tall pillars at the entrance. As one walks through the main door, a dental laboratory is on the left and its associated odors greet all who enter the building. The school offices are located on the ground floor, but the school facility is found in a suite housed at the end of the second floor. Pale wooden doors separate the school from the remaining office space. Upon entering the suite, a circle of couches and a piano can be found to the right, and hallways leading to classrooms extend in three different directions. During class times, the common area and hallways are generally empty and quiet. On any given day, the place can have smells of microwaved ethnic lunches, kimchi, warm bodies, or the remnant odor of cigarette smoke.

When classes were in session, the hallways and common areas remained relatively peaceful, although common classroom sounds could always be heard throughout the entire space. The moment classes were finished, however, a sea of human bodies flooded and jammed the hallways and common area, filling it with animated conversation. Some students quickly found their way to the sofa for a quick nap and slept despite the cacophony that surrounded them. Several students, some with little musical talent and some aspiring musicians (the latter were rare), regularly took turns playing the piano. On many occasions, I found a small group of students standing around a world map in one of the hallways near the common area. Here they showed their classmates and
teachers where they were from and learned about each other’s cities, countries, and travels.

If I listened carefully during break time, I could hear a number of different languages. Some students chose to speak to students from their homelands—these were often the loudest voices. Others chose to practice their English with peoples from other lands. Generally, all conversations were amiable.

Each of the full-time teachers had their own desk and office area, but the office space was part of a larger classroom. The rooms were rather small, narrow, and crowded. All were carpeted with outdated, functional brownish carpet.

ELIS’s ESL program was arranged in six levels, from beginner to advanced levels of English. Prior to each new term (or at the end of the term for those who returned), students took placement tests to determine their appropriate levels within the program. All students were required to take courses in grammar, reading, writing, listening, and conversation. Classes met five days a week, and each class was 50 minutes long. Terms at this location lasted for seven weeks, and generally there was a week-long break between each term. Many students took five classes per day, five days per week. Classes started at 9:00 a.m. although staff and students began arriving as early as 8:00 a.m. The last afternoon class finished by 5:00, but students often stayed later to chat, work on school assignments, or wait for rides home. The full-time teachers and some part-timer instructors remained past work hours to correct students’ work and plan lessons. The academic director and some teachers often socialized with students after class. On Wednesday nights, students often stayed for the Conversation Partners program. Conversation Partners involved volunteers from a local church who came to provide
conversation practice for ELIS students. On these nights, volunteers and students took turns preparing a potluck dinner. After the meal, the attendees sat around tables to discuss a wide array of topics. Sometimes topics of discussion were prearranged; but frequently, no topic of conversation was predetermined and students and volunteers engaged in spontaneous conversation.

**CCS.** CCS in many ways looked like a typical community college in the South. By “typical” I mean nondescript brick buildings, an adequate amount of landscaping, and a mix of 30-plus-year-old buildings with a smattering of new facilities; all of which seemed utilitarian in nature. During the time of my research, a two-story, 60,000 square-foot Student Services Building had opened behind a cluster of older and somewhat rundown single-story buildings. Along one side of the campus, there were a number of trailers used as classrooms and office space. With the exception of the newest building, the insides of these classrooms were rather drab. Carpets were brown or gray. The walls were also gray or cream-colored. I remember thinking that the buildings reminded me of what I imagined military training facilities to be like. Although I taught and conducted all my interviews on the main campus, CCS also had four other sites throughout the surrounding area. CCS offered 80 different programs of study and had a much larger student population than ELIS. During the time of my research, 7,926 students were enrolled in the community college.

Unlike ELIS, students at CCS generally sat and worked alone with books and laptop computers when they were not in class. I was always struck by a designated
smoking area located outside one of the main buildings where a steady flow of students gathered at any time of the day or night to light up.

ESL classes were taught in many of the buildings across campus, and I was fortunate enough to have one of my classes in the newest building. This classroom came equipped with the latest technology, comfortable chairs, and fresh paint.

Like ELIS, hallways and common areas at CCS were relatively quiet while classes were in session. When classes finished, the crowds spilled out into the hallways; but because the space was much larger, it seemed less constrictive and noisy.

ESL classes at CCS were divided into five levels. Levels ranged from “advanced beginner” to “advanced” and were mainly designed to provide English training to immigrant and refugee students. Some students at CCS went on to take non-ESL classes and pursue a college degree. However, many students took English classes to improve their English proficiency in order to find better employment opportunities. Most ESL classes at CCS were three credit hours and involved either two 90-minute class periods per week or classes that met once a week for three hours. Between classes, there was only a 10-minute break, which presented a challenge to teachers and students whose next class was far from their previous one.

CCS operated on a 15-week semester system. The earliest ESL classes began at 8:00 a.m. and all evening classes finished by 9:00 p.m. Most students attended only day or only evening classes, which allowed them to work when they were not in school.
Why Qualitative Interviews?

The purpose of this research project was to get a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of how the participants understood respect in their educational contexts. I also sought to comprehend the envisioning of respect and respectful teaching through the participants’ eyes. Furthermore, I endeavored to provide a respectful space where students and teachers could share their stories and idiosyncratic conceptualizations of respect/disrespect. As Seidman (1991) explains, choosing interviews as the primary means of data collection should stem from “an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3).

Rapley (2004) poses that qualitative interviews serve the primary purpose of “gaining very detailed and comprehensive talk” and allow interviewees the “space to talk” (p. 25). From my experience, the interviews seemed to serve this purpose well. Despite some initial nervousness, nearly all of the participants were able to articulate their ideas regarding respect and disrespect. Several students and teachers commented that interviews felt “therapeutic.” On a number of occasions, interviews culminated with a deep sigh and words such as “that was good.” At the end of my interview with Mary, a teacher participant, she said, “To be honest, I was really dreading this, but this was helpful.” Toward the end of my interview with Josie, another teacher participant, I decided to ask her again to tell me what respectful communication looked like between a teacher and a student. She said, “It looks like this [the interview].”
In the feminist tradition, Bridget Byrne poses:

Qualitative interviewing is particularly useful as a research method for accessing individuals’ attitudes and values—things that cannot necessarily be observed or accommodated in a formal questionnaire. Open-ended and flexible questions are likely to get a more considered response than closed questions and therefore provide better access to interviewees’ views, interpretation of events, understandings, experiences, and opinions.... [Qualitative interviewing] when done well is able to achieve a level of depth and complexity that is not available to other, particularly survey-based, approaches.... Qualitative interviewing is particularly attractive to researchers who want to explore voices and experiences which they believe have been ignored, misrepresented, or suppressed in the past. (2004, p.182)

My intent was to lead all participants to consider their experiences with respect and disrespect in their contexts. In my opinion, educators have little opportunity to hear and understand how students viewed communication and instruction in the ESL classroom. I was also genuinely concerned that at times ESL students were not treated—perhaps unknowingly on the teacher’s part—with the respect all students deserve. Thus, I felt this research endeavor provided the chance to hear from the students and teacher themselves in their own words.

The Interview Process

For this study, I employed the use of in-person, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B for sample interview questions). Before I began the official interview process, I piloted my interview technique with a volunteer who was my student at the time of the interview. His responses were not included in this study.

Immediately before every interview, I provided the informed consent form (see Appendix C), briefly summarized and explained the major points of the form, and asked students to sign it before the interview began. With the exception of one student who
initially did not want to sign the form (but after further explanation agreed), all participants immediately signed the form and the interview commenced.

All interviews were recorded using a digital tape recording device and stored on my password-protected computer. Although I attentively listened during interviews and purposefully tried to refrain from taking notes, I did make note of gestures and other non-verbal expressions that seemed to emphasize or express ideas that were significant to the participants.

A typical interview lasted approximately an hour and generally included the following:

1. Small talk exchanges
2. Summary and explanation of the informed consent form, followed by students signing the form
3. Completion of the interview header
4. General questions regarding respect/disrespect (e.g., How do you define respect? What does respect mean in your own words?)
5. Specific questions about respect and students’ ESL learning experiences (e.g., Do you feel that your ESL teachers have been respectful teachers? How do they show you respect or communicate that they respect you? Have you ever felt that your ESL teacher communicated disrespect toward his or her students? What did they do or say to show disrespect?)
6. Projective questioning (e.g., If you heard that Mr. X was a respectful teacher, what would you imagine Mr. X to be like?)
7. Projective questioning which involved a video clip of an ESL teacher instructing her students, followed by a discussion of whether she was a respectful teacher and how the participant came to this understanding

8. Invitation for the participant to clarify any points or add any final comments to what s/he shared during the interview

9. Summary of major points regarding respect/disrespect, followed by member checking

10. Invitation to contact me by phone or email to add any pertinent information

11. Examination of any themes that seemed to emerge in the interviews (e.g., As “care” appeared as reoccurring theme, if students did not mention this during the interview, I inquired about it directly.)

12. Expression of my gratitude for the participant’s willingness to participate in the study

Directly following each interview, I reflected on the interview and how it related to my primary research question. I also made notes of emerging themes, which later became part of my interview protocol. In reporting my research, I did not distinguish between comments the participants offered on their own and comments they offered in direct response to my questions. For example, many students told me their teachers showed them respect by caring about them. After hearing this repeatedly in the interviews, I began asking students if they felt that a teacher who showed them respect showed it by caring about them. I also regularly used member checking as a means to ensure that I understood exactly what the participants meant and ensure greater trustworthiness of my research.
Data Transcription

In order to fully immerse and familiarize myself with the data, I chose to selectively transcribe all of the interviews. Selectively transcribing the interviews involved the omission of digressions, false starts, and non-fluent utterances. If a participant digressed, I noted both the topic and the approximate length of digression in my transcription. When participants brought up ideas that appeared to be emerging themes, I made note of the time (minute/second) in order to conveniently replay that portion of the interview at a later time. Participants’ words were generally unaltered, unless a sentence or thought was rendered incomprehensible by grammatical errors or a general lack of English proficiency. In these cases, I provided bracketed words of clarification to aid the reader. Although uncommon, in cases where Chinese speakers code-switched, I translated and transcribed all Chinese verbalizations into English. I also capitalized words that were stressed by participants.

Data Analysis

In order for my data to have meaning, I employed a theme or category system as a means of interpreting and analyzing the data. I also utilized a primarily emic approach because the impetus behind this study was a desire to present the participants’ conceptualizations of respect/disrespect within their particular contexts.

The categories and themes I chose were not predetermined but emerged directly from the data. Data analysis was also an ongoing process; beginning after the initial interview and continuing up until the time this research project was completed. Themes were identified among all participants and coded accordingly. Through constant
comparison (Merriam, 1998), themes were then grouped by categories. These categories and themes were constantly adjusted as the interviews were transcribed and codified. Once the themes and categories were fully established, it became possible to develop concepts, compare and contrast students’ and teachers’ conceptualizations of respect/disrespect, and illuminate areas of congruity and incongruity among participants.

The Participants

Student Participants

Because of the need to have an adequate level of English proficiency to collect sufficient data and the recommendations of both ESL coordinators, I only included students from the intermediate to advanced classes, i.e., Levels 4-6 at ELIS and Levels 3-5 at CCS. None of the students in this study were my own students during the time of my research. Five students, however, had been my students several months prior to the beginning of this research project. Because I had a relationship with these five students, rapport had already been developed. These students, in particular, were more relaxed and seemed more prepared to share their ideas about respect. Table 4 and Table 5 provide more detailed descriptions of the individual students’ genders, nationalities, and ages; they also show how long the students have been in the United States and how long they have been ESL students. I had minimal contact with these students outside of the interview time, with the exception of my occasional participation in the Conversation Partners program at ELIS. Additionally, I saw and minimally conversed with some of the student participants at CCS, as they often arrived in my classroom as soon as my own class was dismissed.
Table 4

*Profile of ELIS Student Participants at the Time of the Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years (yrs.), Months (mos.) in U.S.</th>
<th>Years (yrs.), Months (mos.), or Semesters (sems.) of ESL Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abu</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatiana</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7 mos.</td>
<td>4 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abu Ahmed</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7 mos.</td>
<td>5 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaild</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deniz</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3 yrs.</td>
<td>1.5 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minako</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8 mos.</td>
<td>8 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sammy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3 mos.</td>
<td>3 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5 mos.</td>
<td>5 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1 mo.</td>
<td>1 mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiao Wen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>China/Taiwan</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
<td>5 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5 mos.</td>
<td>5 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10 mos.</td>
<td>9 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9 mos.</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>*32</td>
<td>7 yrs.</td>
<td>2 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woong</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6 mos.</td>
<td>4 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halim</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7 mos.</td>
<td>3 mos.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Age is approximate. Student did not or did not wish to reveal age.
A total of 32 student interviews were conducted; however, two were cut short by students’ late arrivals to the appointment and their need to attend class. These interviews yielded little data and were therefore excluded from the study. All of the student interviews took place on school property, with the exception of one student who preferred to meet closer to his home.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years (yrs.), Months (mos.) in U.S.</th>
<th>Years (yrs.), Months (mos.) or Semesters (sems.) of ESL Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Said</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5 yrs.</td>
<td>2 sems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7 yrs.</td>
<td>2 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinoty</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2 yrs.</td>
<td>3 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nini</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.5 yrs.</td>
<td>3 sems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>*37</td>
<td>4 yrs.</td>
<td>3 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.5 yrs.</td>
<td>1 sem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>8 yrs., 4 mos.</td>
<td>5 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.5 yrs.</td>
<td>8 mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2 yrs.</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamza</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>*35</td>
<td>13 yrs.</td>
<td>3 sems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shazmina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5 yrs.</td>
<td>2 yrs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Age is approximate. Student did not wish to reveal age.
Teacher Participants

With the exception of one teacher participant, all were former or current colleagues during the time of my research. I had varying amounts of familiarity with teacher participants but did not socialize with any of these colleagues outside of school-related activities. With the exception of one interview, all teacher participants were interviewed at their corresponding schools. In this one case, the participant asked to be interviewed at a local bookstore café. All teachers, except for Hoda, were Anglo-American. Hoda was an American citizen but was born in Iran. All had master’s degrees or more advanced degrees.

Table 6

Description of Teacher Participants at the Time of Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>International Experience (Yes/No)</th>
<th>Interviewed</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>ELIS</td>
<td>9+</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josie</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>ELIS</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>ELIS</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>ELIS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>ELIS</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>CCS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>CCS</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>CCS</td>
<td>4+</td>
<td>M.A.+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>I</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kristan</td>
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<td>Hoda</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
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<td>M.A.+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
In this study, all teacher participants had degrees in Applied Linguistics or TESOL, with the exception of Hoda, who had her doctorate and a TESOL certificate. Table 6 (above) provides additional information regarding these participants.

**Participant Observation**

**Why Participant Observation**

Although my primary source of data in this study was qualitative interviews, these interviews were informed by what I was observing in various ESL classrooms. In total, five different classrooms were observed for a total of 22.5 hours of observations. My primary focus throughout these observations was looking at how teachers communicated respect/disrespect within their classroom contexts. Although I had no way of knowing how students felt about the communication that appeared respectful/disrespectful to me at the time of the observation, I did use examples of things I had observed in these classes as a means to frame questions during interviews.

**The Observation Process**

Although observations took place at both locations, they varied in length and frequency. At CCS, observations in Maggie’s Conversation 3 class were three hours in length; and I observed this class on four different occasions. I also observed Hoda’s Grammar 2 class on five occasions and would have observed more had it not been for a tornado and other inclement weather that caused classes to be cancelled on two separate occasions. Each of these classes was 90 minutes in length.
Since ELIS’s school schedule was arranged in 50-minute periods and each class met five days a week, I observed Mary’s Grammar 3 class three times, Diane’s Conversation 2 class four times, and Josie’s Conversation 3 class four times over the course of three weeks. Originally, I had planned to observe a bit more at this location, but Josie and Diane cancelled particular observations. Diane said she was especially concerned about letting me observe something she thought would be of benefit or of interest to me. Although I had explained that my purpose was to observe naturally occurring communication and classroom behavior, she seemed to feel that she needed to provide me with some interesting fodder for my research. Josie also cancelled one observation because she felt an outside observer might inhibit her students’ performances in a particular learning assessment activity.

Prior to all of these observations, I had requested to be allowed to simply observe and take notes. However, when I was introduced to the class by teachers during the initial observation, all teachers introduced me as an ESL instructor or colleague. Although the majority of my time in these classes was spent observing and taking copious notes, students on several occasions asked me questions or sought clarification regarding their assignments. At times, even some teachers asked for advice, involved me in activities, or briefly chatted during breaks or when their students were occupied with tasks. I also felt somewhat obliged to assist since these instructors had graciously provided the opportunity for me to observe them and their classes.
Validation Strategies

Creswell (2007) provides eight possible validation strategies. I have employed several of these strategies, namely prolonged engagement and persistent observation, member checking, and rich, thick description (pp. 207-209). I have also clearly stated my own biases as a researcher at the beginning of this report. In addition, having two different research sites and 42 participants also allowed for greater validity of the findings.

Delimitations

This study is delimited to two educational settings in a southern region of the United States. The first context involved ESL teachers and students at a small IEP. The second context involved ESL teachers and students in a community college.

The study was primarily concerned with how participants understood respect and respectful communication within the context of learning ESL. Both male and female participants were involved in the study. I was particularly interested in determining which aspects of communication in the ESL classroom were deemed respectful and if students felt that specific ways of communicating, methods of instruction, or techniques for managing the classroom were disrespectful. Hence, this study is confined to an investigation of respect/disrespect within the aforementioned contexts.

Limitations

Although I conducted a total of 42 interviews and observed approximately 22 hours of ESL instruction, what I heard and observed cannot be generalized to what constitutes ESL instruction in the entire U.S. My research is limited to what I observed at
that particular time at those specific locations. Due to time restrictions and a desire to keep my research from becoming an exposé, I chose not to include the voices of those who had voluntarily left these institutions. However, I am fully aware that these voices may have shed greater light on perceived instances of disrespect. Again, because of time constraints and scheduling conflicts, my observations at these locations were only grammar and conversation ESL classes, and I was not able to observe any writing, reading, or listening classes. Had I had the time to observe all classes across the curriculum, I may have gained a greater understanding of how respect/disrespect manifests itself in a variety of contexts.

My observations were not free from complicating matters. Prior to my observations I informed all participating instructors that I was observing classroom communication. I intentionally did not explain that I was looking to observe how respect/disrespect was communicated for fear that participants might alter their normal behavior. I also purposely scheduled interviews with willing teacher participants after the observations were completed since the complete nature of my study was revealed in the interviews. However, I needed to begin student interviews while I was conducting these observations due to various time constraints. As a result, teachers may have learned the focus of my research from students and also ascertained the specific nature of my observations. Additionally, both academic coordinators were fully aware of the nature of my research and may have shared this with their teachers although I had requested that they not divulge the complete nature of my research to their teachers. If teachers were aware that I was specifically researching how respect/disrespect was communicated in these contexts, then the observations may not have been an honest representation of what
normally transpires within these classrooms. At this point, I cannot be certain whether teachers were privy to the complete nature of my research during the time they were observed.

Though I did not interview or observe students who were in my classes during the time this research was conducted, I did involve students who were my students in the past as well as students I had known through the professional relationships I had at both schools. I also did involve many teachers who were colleagues or former colleagues in my research. Consequently, these participants may have divulged more because of the rapport that was already established or they may have revealed less because of the lack of anonymity. My professional relationship with both academic coordinators may have also resulted in teachers being reluctant to fully share their experiences with me, or they may have chosen to present themselves in a better light. Although I assured all participants of their anonymity and promised to use pseudonyms instead of their real names in writing up this research, participants may have been reticent to fully share their true feelings and experiences.

Another limitation of this study was that there was no way of determining aspects of respect/disrespect participants took for granted and therefore omitted in their interview statements. When I compare students’ and teachers’ different conceptualizations of respect, I can only claim that the incongruity is based upon what was reported during the interviews, not the entirety of what the participants believed regarding respect/disrespect.

One final limitation of this study was the use of English as a medium of communication. None of the student participants were native speakers of English and thus all communicated in a language they were still trying to fully acquire. With the
exception of two Chinese participants who at times resorted to Chinese when they
became frustrated trying to express themselves in English, all were required to speak in
English due to my language limitations. As a result, students at times struggled to find the
right words to convey their ideas, experiences, and feelings about what constituted
respect/disrespect within their ESL classroom contexts.

Summary

The research design and procedures have been fully disclosed. The sampling and
method of recruitment, the site and participant descriptions, and the rationale behind
various decisions have all been presented. Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to the findings
these procedures yielded and the themes and concepts that emerged from the data. I have
chosen to first present the themes and concepts regarding respect that came from the
student interviews, and then intersperse these with content from the teacher interviews
and observations that shed light on these points. The chapters that follow illustrate the
concepts that emerged from the data and further complete the picture of
respect/disrespect in these contexts.
CHAPTER 4

THE FOUR CONCEPTS OF RESPECT

This chapter presents the themes and concepts that emerged from the interviews. The central understanding to emerge from the data could be called “mindful respect.” It explains the presence of key concepts of respect found in the study participants’ own words. It is impossible to state that each of the four concepts represents a category that was mutually exclusive. However, the themes that emerged were nuanced with words and expressions that caused the researcher to judge one theme more fit for one category rather than another. These concepts are an answer to the research question: How is respect communicated to students in an ESL context?

Concepts

The qualitative interviews yielded rich, descriptive data. As more themes emerged and were organized, four primary elements emerged in relation to respect. These concepts include the following: respect as intentional appreciation, respect as caring relationship, respect as supportive help, and respect as comfortable space. In presenting the findings of this study, the four sections that follow deal with each of the main concepts or representations of respect and the themes that underpin these concepts. Once all four
concepts concerning respect are described and explained, I present the findings related to concepts of disrespect as well as other major findings of this study.

**The Basis of Respect—Respect as Intentional Appreciation**

A respectful teacher acts like a human and treats students like humans.  
—Jane, China

The concept of *respect as intentional appreciation* is a composite of three themes: being seen, being known, and being acknowledged. This concept speaks of the need for teachers to be present with and attentive to their students. In the student reports of what constituted disrespect, participants often spoke of teachers who appeared aloof or distant. What follows is a description of what students described as fundamental aspects of behaviors or attitudes that communicated respect.

**Seen**

As students told their stories of how teachers communicated respect in the ESL classrooms, one of the most predominant themes was that they felt respected when their teachers saw, knew, and recognized them for whom they really were. On the most basic level, the sense of being “seen” was something many of the student participants mentioned as indicating respect. “Being seen” involved the non-verbal component of eye contact, or in the words of one participant, “eye touch.” Although eye contact was mentioned by more than a quarter of the student participants, students were also mindful of the difference between respectful and disrespectful eye contact. As Xiao Wen explained, there is more than one type of contact. The “correct type” of eye contact is friendly, “not the kind that makes you feel scared.”
Students also felt they were “seen” when teachers paid attention to them on a seemingly basic level. This type of rudimentary attention was often shown in the form of receiving regular greetings. As Shazmina, a young Somali student, described, when teachers ask questions such as, “Did you have a good weekend?” or “How are you doing?” this shows more respect than beginning class by saying, “Turn to page 53.”

**Known**

More than being seen or being paid attention to, students mentioned that teachers communicated respect when their teachers knew them as people. References such as “being known” or “my teacher knows me” were mentioned 29 times by student participants as indicators of respectful communication. These comments contained particular elements that students expected teachers to know, including having a general knowledge of students’ countries and cultures, being familiar with students’ religious practices, knowing students’ names, knowing the students’ goals, knowing what they needed to learn, knowing students’ strengths and weaknesses, and knowing their jobs. A young Slovak student stated, “Knowing the students’ goals is important...maybe the first step toward respect.”

Tim, a Thai student at ELIS, explained that knowing a student’s story is also an important component of knowing a student. In our interview, we had the following exchange:

Mark: How can an ESL teacher teach in a way that’s respectful?
Tim: Teach them like you are friends.
Mark: What do you mean?
Tim: Ask them about their family...that’s important. Say, “Tell me about your family, about yourself.” Memorize his [the student’s] name and his story. The more you know [his story] the more respectful you be.
It is important to note that students at both locations spoke of the importance of teachers knowing students’ stories and by getting to know the students both inside and outside the classroom. Students frequently recalled stories of teachers who had invited them places or arranged activities which allowed teachers to know their students and in turn helped their students get to know them. Joseph, an energetic Saudi student, said, “ELIS is like a warm family. The teachers, the administrators are like one family. When they want to have party, everyone is happy and all teachers respect each other and the students.”

Middle Eastern students in this study frequently spoke about feeling respect when teachers knew something about their religion and were aware of their religious practices and/or moral codes. They felt respected (or would feel respected) when teachers allowed them to be excused from class to briefly pray or visit a mosque. They also said respect is communicated when teachers avoid showing movies or videos that violate their religious beliefs and practices. Of the four students who mentioned sexual content (i.e., “kissing or other sexual things”) in movies or music videos, two of the students said that movies and videos that contained questionable elements would show disrespect to their wives (who were also students), but they themselves were okay viewing this type of material. These students also suggested that teachers who felt the need to show this particular type of movie or video could show more respect to Muslim students by giving them the option to leave and come back once the movie or video was finished. Out of respect for Muslims, several students also expressed the need for teachers to dress modestly. As Joseph, a young Saudi student, candidly said, “Teachers should dress modest and cover their boobs.”
Two teachers also addressed the need to dress modestly as a form of respect, and one teacher mentioned an attempt to be flexible concerning Muslim students’ religious needs. Patty, a middle-aged teacher at CCS, explained how she showed her students respect:

As a general thing, I suppose I try to respect students by respecting their little holidays and types of things. Somebody will say I can’t take the test on this day because I have to be at the mosque or something. And again, I’ll work with them if they need to take a test late or something because I do understand there are differences, unless they’re trying to get away with some outlandishly different treatment, and I’ll work with them in that regard. That kind of respects a person’s differences.

Acknowledged

Student participants clearly voiced the importance of being acknowledged as an essential component of respect. Being acknowledged involved the teacher recognizing and treating the students as adults, treating all students equally, appreciating the students’ abilities and talents, and giving them a sense of value and voice.

Part of the theme of acknowledgement involved being recognized as an adult student and being treated accordingly. Five students in the study spent the majority of their interviews talking about this aspect of respect and stressed the importance of teachers speaking to students like adults or “on the same level,” not like they were children. Other students mentioned that respect is communicated when instructors acknowledge the age of students. Furthermore, participants expressed that teachers who use adult topics and adult-appropriate activities communicated respect.

Respect was also expressed when teachers acknowledged and praised students for their special talents, abilities, and accomplishments. A Japanese student, who had been a
professional dancer in her country, enthusiastically related a story about a time when she was able to teach her ESL teachers and classmates how to dance the salsa. Her story provided the most vivid illustration of how recognition communicated respect in the eyes of the student participants.

Mark: Can you tell me a story about a time when an ESL teacher showed you respect?  
Amy: One day I had presentation in my class. I taught the students, including the teacher, how to dance salsa. They didn’t know how to do it. When I study English, I am like child, but when I teach dance, my teacher is like child. After I taught the dance to them, the teacher say, “Wow, that was so great! You are really good dancer. You should teach in the U.S.” She said this front of the students and to other teachers, too. In front of the other students she recognize me. It make me feel comfortable, good...I am a little special.

Having their voices acknowledged and valued was pivotal to students’ understanding of respectful teacher communication and was mentioned 29 times during interviews. Abu, a Saudi student at ELIS, said “having voice” meant students were “given the freedom to share opinions” and allowed to make suggestions. He went on to explain how teachers communicated respectfully when they allowed him to disagree and even accepted his suggestions. Like many participants in this study, Halim, a student from Libya, felt respect was communicated when people at his school requested his input or asked if he were satisfied with the instruction he had received. Similarly, Patrick expressed that respect is communicated when students are not always “told” to do things “but given choices or alternatives” in the learning process. He stated, “It’s good when teachers say, ‘Do you think we could change this sentence this way? Do you think it would be good to add...?’” In my interview with Gary, the academic director at ELIS, he explained this concept in the following way:
[Respect] is making sure the students know that they’re heard. We’re listening to the students when they are frustrated, and we make sure their voices are heard as much as possible. That they’re voices are understood as much as possible.

Students also mentioned that when teachers made them feel “cherished,” “admired,” or “valued,” they felt respected. Susan, a Japanese student at ELIS, felt particularly respected when teachers indicated they valued her and the process of her learning, not just the final product. According to what she had observed, Americans generally see value or emphasized the final result, but often failed to value the process. When a teacher valued Susan’s learning process, she felt respected.

One surprising finding was the mention of how being asked to assist one’s teacher created the sense of being respected. To many students, when a teacher asked for their assistance, they felt they were acknowledged as one having something to contribute, which led to the perception of respect. The significance of this aspect was demonstrated by the 16 times it was mentioned during student interviews. During one such interview, Joseph shared his ideas of how being asked to help his teacher communicated respect to him:

When someone asks me to help them, I feel respected. When my teacher asks me to help he to move chairs, or the administrator asks me to move something up and down the stairs, this feels respectful because when people are in my country they help each other. This is friendly.

Several students also mentioned that, when they were asked to translate for their teachers, this communicated respect. My discussion with Sammy illustrated how he understood this aspect of respect:

Mark: How do your ESL teachers show you that they respect you?
Sammy: For example, one of the teachers wanted me to translate for her and help to speak to another Arabic-speaking student. When she asked for my help—WOW! That’s really awesome. She trusts me to interpret for other student.
Mark: So trusting you communicates respect?
Sammy: That’s true.
Mark: Any other examples?
Sammy: Another teacher asked me to help him in his garden in his house during the spring break. I will feel good because I feel important when the teachers ask for help.

Finally, acknowledging the value of all students necessitates the need to treat students equally and fairly. In this study, 13 students saw a connection between respect and “students being treated the same.” The students’ value of equality is evident in comments like Abu’s. When asked how respect was communicated by his ESL teachers, his immediately replied, “I didn’t see any discrimination. They treat everyone the same…equally.” Sammy said, “A respectful teacher treats the students the same, in the same way, equally. A disrespectful teacher will pick on students, his culture, his country, his religion.” In a similar vein, Tomi spoke of the importance of spending equal time with students, “not just with those who speak well.”

The concept of respect as intentional appreciation involves being seen, being known, and being acknowledged. As I stated earlier, it is impossible to claim that the four concepts are mutually exclusive and do not overlap. However the themes that emerged indicated connections to particular concepts. For example, a salient component of the student interviews was the theme of praise as respect. Praise could have reasonably been a component of “being acknowledged,” yet nearly all mentions of praise were in the context of correction. Thus, I address this theme within its corresponding concept at a later point in these finding.
The Feeling of Respect—Respect as Caring Relationship

To be a good teacher, you must be respectful. To be a respectful teacher, you must be a caring teacher.—Nini, Iraq

It’s all about “careness.” —Nova, China

A big part of respect is care. A teacher who doesn’t care, isn’t respectful, and isn’t a good teacher. — Natasha, Slovakia

As I conducted the interviews, listened to the recordings, and read the transcriptions, I became acutely aware of how a caring relationship was so closely aligned with the student participants’ understanding of respect in this context. To students, respect was communicated through a caring relationship between a teacher and a student. Within the concept of respect as caring relationship were a number of themes. These themes primarily included the ideas of connection, availability, asking, listening, sensitivity, flexibility, and apologizing.

The concept I address in the following section—respect as supportive help—is also inextricably linked to care. It seemed nearly impossible to tease apart where care ended and the concepts of assistance and help began. Generally speaking, in the minds of these participants, offering help and assistance was evidence of care. Both care and help, however, have “a life of their own” and are therefore treated separately in this report.

The Beginning of Care Respect—Connection

We Latinos need connection!—Victoria, Colombia

In this study, there were over 40 student statements referencing the relationship between respect and connection. The “connection” discussed here is more than seeing, knowing, and acknowledging, but entails a relational cord that joins the hearts of teachers
and students. The accounts recorded in the interviews emphasized a ubiquitous view that connection was vital to the communication of respect. Victoria’s aforementioned comments were the concluding and summative remarks of her interview. She suggested that teachers “get to know their students and let students know them” through a caring relationship. Other accounts spoke of being “open” to students, asking about students’ lives and problems, and “breaking down the walls between teachers and students.” Shinoty likened this connection to “teachers sitting with students as friends.”

**Availability**

Related to connection, students frequently spoke of teachers’ availability as important to the communication of respect. Students, especially those at ELIS, stressed their teacher’s availability both inside and outside of classes. Minako, an effervescent Japanese student at ELIS, explained that when teachers made it known that they were available before, during, and after class, they communicated respect to students. She further stated that it is important to make time to answer questions because students are often reluctant to ask questions during the class because they feel they are the only ones with problems. Others commented that teachers communicated respect when they made it clear that students could ask questions at any time. Tatiana, a pregnant Colombian student at ELIS, explained that when teachers are available at times outside of class, they show both care and respect. Furthermore, students remarked that teachers who gave them their telephone numbers communicated their availability, care, and respect. It is also interesting to note that in this study only female participants mentioned availability as an important aspect of respect.
“Listening” and “asking” were two other salient themes regarding care and respect. Many students mentioned the importance of both listening attentively and asking caring questions as teacher behaviors that communicated respect. Although listening was brought up more frequently as a component of respect by CCS students, it was nevertheless an important theme at ELIS. When students mentioned “listening” as a component of respect, they generally included caveats such as “like you care,” or “with interest.”

The theme of “asking questions that show care and concern for the students’ well-being” was also prevalent at both research sites. Students stressed the importance of teachers being aware of their emotional state and asking questions to ascertain their well-being, especially when students appeared sad or upset. These types of questions were different from the “getting to know you” types mentioned in the first section, and involved a deeper care for the person. Lisa, an ELIS student from Switzerland, said “teachers that ask, ‘How are you?’ and convey they really want to know the answer, communicated respect.” Several other student participants mentioned the importance of teachers asking questions that showed concern for the students’ lives outside of school. Care as respect in the minds of student participants was a concern for the whole person and the situation that surrounded her or him. Natasha illustrated how she saw her teachers at ELIS communicate respect through care through her following statements:

Teachers at this school do care. They ask you a lot of questions. They ask you what your goals are. They listen. They are willing to help you get to the university. They help you solve your problems—both academically and in our
daily things. This helps this school feel more like a home. If a teacher doesn’t show care, doesn’t know how to handle students’ problems, this shows disrespect.

Tomi also recalled a specific story of how respect and care were communicated by a particular ESL instructor. When asked how her ESL teachers communicate respect, she provided the following example:

The teacher always worried about our life. When I have to make decision about going back to Japan with my husband or staying in U.S., she can tell I had a problem, and asked about it. I told her my situation...But after I decide to continue to live here, I told the teacher and the teacher said, “Great! It’s a nice way. I will support you with my pleasure.” It was not skill of teaching English, but I can feel she respect me and care about me.

**Sensitivity and Flexibility**

Although students frequently mentioned the behavioral component of care as expressing respect, even more prevalent were comments related to the attitude of care that demonstrates respect. According to students’ responses, a respectful teacher implied that she was caring. At times, care and respect seemed nearly synonymous. To others, in order to be considered “respectful,” the person was also required to be caring. Both empathy, i.e., an understanding of the student’s situation, and the behavioral response of “being flexible” were also frequently mentioned by the student participants as components of respect.

During my time as a teacher and as a researcher, I was privy to many respectful, caring, sensitive encounters. On nearly every occasion I observed Josie, I noted the way she ritualistically looked around the classroom before she began her instruction to seemingly monitor her students’ well-being. If she noticed a student who looked upset, she would check on the student. At the beginning of one observation, Josie noticed a
student massaging the neck of a wincing student. She quickly and sensitively ascertained whether the student was okay before proceeding with her lesson. She also periodically checked on the student’s condition throughout the class.

In my interview with Abu, he expressed how pleased he was with his teachers at ELIS and how respectful they were to him. When asked if he had a story about a particular time when he was shown respect, Abu recalled the following event that illustrated the connection between respectful communication and care, sensitivity and flexibility. Abu recounted:

When my wife had a baby and I couldn’t attend classes that day, I have Writing 6 research paper, and I have grammar homework and this whole things. And...because I’m not sleeping and teachers gave me one weeks to do my homework and make up my homework...even though we are at the end of the semester. [Gary] gave me deadlines and gave me a special situation, and bring your homework at the end of the situation. By showing that, they understood and cared, that showed respect.

Apologizing

Mentioned 16 times throughout the student interviews was the idea of apologizing as indicative of respect. Teachers who apologized for their mistakes were described as truly respecting and caring about their students. Specific incidents involving apologies included teachers apologizing for mistakes, such as errors in their instructions or grading, but more frequently involved times when teachers apologized for communication that was too harsh or insensitive. Several student participants stated that they had never had a teacher apologize to them prior to coming to the United States, and expressed surprise that American teachers were willing to apologize for their mistakes. During my interview with Lisa, she explained, “[apologizing] is very important. Admit that you make
mistakes. I saw this in class and found it like...WOW!” During my interview with Sammy, he remembered a time when his teacher apologized for being too harsh. His account illustrated the type of apology following a time when a teacher realized she had been insensitive. Sammy recalled:

I was showing my name in Japanese [his Saudi name written in Japanese characters] to another student. The teacher was very busy and when I tried to show her my Japanese name, she said she didn’t care [about his Japanese name]. Then, she immediately apologized. Wow, that was amazing!

The Nonverbal Component

It is important to note that students also frequently mentioned a smile as a nonverbal means of communicating care and other aspects of respect. When asked how teachers communicate respect, students nearly unanimously responded that it involved a smile. Sammy quantifies the importance of the nonverbal component by saying that “90% of respect is communicated through the face.” Many student participants said that smiles communicate respect by showing “care and warmth.” Although a component of respect as caring relationship, many students commented that a teacher’s smile was directly connected to the classroom environment, so this will continue to be addressed in a latter portion of the findings.

Respect as Caring Relationship-A Summary

Although I heard many stories of how teachers had shown students care and respect, Minako’s story seems to capture the essence of a caring teacher showing respect and illustrates the multifaceted nature of the respect construct.

One time, at the end of class I was very frustrated and got upset because of difficult writing assignment. It’s very, very hard and I very didn’t know what to
do. I ask teacher for help and cried in class. The teacher’s expression and sound communicated the respect. [Tears fill her eyes. She composes herself.] I began to cry, but he [the teacher] admire my tears. I apologized for crying and imagine the teacher’s feeling [would] be bad because I cried. I said, “I’m sorry, teacher.” He told me not to apologize. He said it was a good thing to cry because you will better. He had to go to appointment, but the teacher waited and was late. He let me stay...sit in the chair. He closed classroom door and talked with me. He wanted to know what was wrong. He maybe give a few words but he listened. He waited for me, and I was late for my next class. And he said that’s not important. He said, “What’s important, for the teacher is Minako.” He made me a priority and my feelings [were] important. He make me feel safe and did not let the other students see me cry.

The Fruit of Respect—Respect as Supportive Help

A good teacher, who loves his subject and loves to share his knowledge, helps others...helps students get closer their goals. — Natasha, Slovakia

Help shows respect...totally! —Lisa, Switzerland

Care and help as respect were the most predominant themes in this research project. They were also inextricably linked as an apparent bifurcation of the respect construct in the minds of the students. Most student participants explained that providing help was the result of care. This form of help was directly related to learning English and manifested itself in the form of helpful instruction, correction, explanations, and encouragement.

Academic Help

Although mentioned as evident in instances beyond classroom walls, respect as help was primarily discussed in the form of academic help. Students expressed that teachers who “tried all they [could]” or “gave all of themselves” to help students learn communicated respect. Students also felt that teachers who helped them understand by speaking slowly (but not too slowly) and clearly were also respectful. Other beliefs...
surrounding the concept of respect as supportive help included “helping students by
guiding them,” “helping students recognize their mistakes,” “helping students by
providing what students need,” and “helping to open students’ minds.” Three themes,
however, were most predominant in the interviews: help in the form of correction, help in
the form of explanation, and help in the form of encouragement. It is also important to
note that the aforementioned themes were seen as both a way of showing respect and a
means of communicating care.

**Correction**

Correction is like medicine. It doesn’t taste so good at first but it’s effective.
—Nova, China

Mark: How can teachers show their ESL students respect?
Hamza: Doing your job, like correcting papers shows them respect.
Correcting my oral mistakes and written mistakes shows respect.
That will be respectful. That’s good—really good. I like that. I will
be happy.

From my first interview I became acutely aware of how students connected
respect with correction. Correction was mentioned nearly 40 times during the student
interviews and all but three participants included correction in their understanding of how
respect was communicated in the ESL context. Although I had not expected to find this
as a central theme, this concept was pivotal in the minds of ESL students. It is important
to note that, even though students talked about correction across various skill areas, the
most common form that surfaced during the interviews involved the correction of written
assignments. In an interesting interaction with Natasha, she mentioned how she enjoyed
being corrected by her writing teacher, and then made these comments illustrating her
belief that respect and correction were linked:
When the teacher correct my writing and helps me to realize my mistakes and how to improve, I feel respect. I feel the most respect in writing class because all of the students’ writings are different, and the teacher doesn’t get mad, but correct them all. Conversation class would be even more respectful if students were corrected more.

Part of the theme of correcting as indicative of respect was an expectation that ESL teachers correct all written errors. Several students commented on how they welcomed red-ink correction of their work. Amy’s account of this type of correction exemplifies this idea:

Mark: How should an ESL teacher show respect?
Amy: Correct me...yeah, yeah, YEAH...Be a little strict if I am getting lazy. When I am finished speaking, correct me. Say, “You should say...” with a nice face and smile. It’s respectful when a teacher uses a lot of red pen and writes all over my paper. I want them do that or [I] will memorize it the wrong way and [be] very forgetful. Correct the student outside of class is better. Be available to the students outside of class. Give the students correct is more better. And correct it over and over again. Return work quickly. Yes, I want my work returned quickly or I will forget. Be prepared, organized...hardworking.

Although not as prevalent as other themes, several students, like Amy, stressed the importance of returning work quickly or receiving correction in a timely manner. The student participants in this study also stressed their need and desire for teachers to clearly show them their mistakes and to provide honest feedback about what needed to be improved. Other facets of this theme included correcting and then offering help, helping students to recognize mistakes, and spending time talking with students about their work and how they can “polish” their work to improve it.

In regard to correction of verbal errors, students often voiced their preference for individual correction or correction after class. Patrick offered this story of a respectful encounter with his conversation teacher:
Mark: Tell me a story about time when a teacher showed you respect.
Patrick: In conversation class the teacher met with me [alone]. She asked how I was doing that day. She made me feel comfortable. I answered the question she asked me. She said I was so good, and began with my strengths. She also showed me my mistakes, but said I could improve and correct my mistakes. She also told me that I wouldn’t stay at the same level. She told me my strengths first. Then, she told my weaknesses in a polite way. “This was bad BUT... it will be good in the future.” I didn’t take it like it’s bad... and I feel I CAN improve that.

It is important to note that the non-verbal component was particularly important to students in terms of showing respect via correction. Students frequently indicated that respectful correction was “with a smile,” in a “friendly” way, or “warm” manner.

Encouragement

Patrick’s account also brings up another common finding in this study—the mention of the encouragement-correction-encouragement sequence. Many students spoke of the need for encouragement with correction in order to prevent students from becoming discouraged. After several students shared their views on the importance of this sequence, I began to ask the student participants if this was the way they were corrected in their home countries. Most responded that this sequence was not as common in their home countries, but they thought this was a good way for teachers to help students and prevent discouragement.

As I indicated before, the concept of help as respect in the form of correction was frequently linked with encouragement. In most of these cases, students mentioned this in the context of first showing students their strengths prior to mentioning their mistakes or shortcomings. Although this concept was mentioned more frequently by students, several
teachers also expressed times when they communicated respect by praising and encouraging their students.

Woong’s story weaves together the two aspects of correction and encouragement; shows how the students’ concept of how respect, care, and help are linked; and provides a summative glimpse into the importance of encouragement and help to students’ understanding of respect:

Mark: Do you have an example of a time a teacher showed you respect?
Woong: Some [teachers] are very interested [in] me... or sometimes I don’t understand the grammar and structure and very disappointed [in] myself and feel depressed and don’t feel good. The teacher came to me to ask something. [S/he] tried to understand me, what’s the difficulty in learning grammar, [and] tried to find out what was wrong. And [s/he] find an easier way to explain it and encouraged me not to give up. [This was] very good... very helpful to encourage and this made me feel very relaxed and more comfortable in class. She cared for me... [Teachers should say], “You do a very good job, but you need to correct this. Can you correct this sentence?” A respectful teacher corrects with first compliment, then show what is wrong.

The concept of encouragement or praise, or as one student said it, “saying what’s right with my English before saying what’s wrong with it,” was most often mentioned as an aspect of the error correction process but not limited to this context. Students told stories of teachers who had helped to “cheer them up” and said things such as “you’re awesome” or “wonderful.” Students felt that teachers who encouraged them by giving compliments, lifting their spirits, and expressing interest and joy in what their students were learning, clearly communicated respect.

It is important to note that teachers were also aware of the importance of encouragement and praise and how it communicates respect. In my interview with Mary,
I asked her if she could recall a time when she or another teacher had communicated respect. In response she explained:

I think that happens all the time. When students make a big effort and do well, praise is elicited. At ELIS, students do the reading test. And after so many years of doing this, I can see who totally blew off the test and who made an effort. And one student was blowing off the test, and I talked to him before, and said, “If you blow it off I will have no understanding of your reading level.” And he made a great score. And the first thing I said was “great score,” and “I can tell you made an effort,” and I was very pleased. And he felt good. I felt more importantly that it changed his behavior, and encouragement is SO important. (I hate numbers and test scores.) Giving them encouragement.

**Explanation**

Showing respect through explanation was another predominant theme in this study, with students referencing explanation 25 times in their discussion of respect. Explanation was often directly connected to correction, i.e., explaining how to find and fix errors. However, when asked how teachers can communicate respect, ten students mentioned the need for teachers to explain their class rules. Students also frequently commented on the importance of teachers clearly explaining their assignments, ways of teaching, and plans for the course. Moreover, students felt that teachers needed to explain why certain lessons or methods of teaching were important or useful, and what a student needed to do to be successful in a class.

In the interviews, “explaining” was included in students’ descriptions of what constituted a respectful teacher and was viewed as both a helpful and caring behavior. More specifically, “explaining” was seen as helpful because it assisted students in their mastery of English, aided them in their understanding of classroom culture, and ensured
success in specific courses. There was also an emphasis on the need to explain things at the beginning of the course. As Nova stated:

If you tell them [students] your plan—how you will teach them—anything you say makes them feel like you know the situation and you make them feel like you can do a good job. [This] gives the students confident that they will do well, and help them feel respected and more likely a success.

Students also mentioned that teachers communicated respect when they explained things “in an easier way” or gave explanations that did not single out students who did not understand.

Having had the opportunity to read students’ evaluations of all the teachers at CCS, Nancy was also acutely aware of the students’ desire for clear and complete explanations. When I asked her how a teacher should communicate respect with ESL students, she replied:

Communication...being explicit, making sure that students really understand what you are trying to tell them, and trying to understand what they are trying to tell you. Those are the biggest things. Explaining why you’re doing something, the way you are doing something...If you make a conscious effort of trying to figure out the situations that cause misunderstanding, then you fare better.

**Patience**

Within the context of “respect as supportive help,” patience was viewed as an important virtue to both teacher and student participants in this study, but mentioned more than 20 times in my interviews with students. Students explained that respectful teachers did not interrupt but rather patiently waited for their students to finish speaking before offering assistance or answering their questions. Respectful teachers were also described as being patient with students who asked an excessive number of questions, made frequent mistakes, or had more difficulty learning English.
Help Beyond Classroom Walls

As with many previously mentioned themes, students described respect that occurred beyond their classroom walls. Examples included helping students get to know each other and assisting them with various crises that arose in their personal lives. It is important to note that students at ELIS mentioned non-academic help much more frequently than those at CCS. When asked to tell a story about a time when an ESL teacher showed her respect, Natasha recalled a time involving the academic director at ELIS. Her account illustrated her understanding of how respect is related to help:

Mark: Can you tell me a story about a time an ESL teacher showed you respect?
Natasha: I’m impressed every day. When I was injured, I was helped by our director and teacher. He drove me to the hospital and spent the whole day with me. I didn’t expect that. In Slovakia, the teacher wouldn’t go with me. I felt warm when the teacher did that, and I felt important.

Summary

*Respect as supportive help* primarily involved help inside the classroom, but at times extended to help outside of the classroom, especially to students at ELIS. Helping students to understand assignments, rules, expectations, new concepts, etc., was seen as a primary way teachers expressed respect. Although some students appeared to not have received much praise and encouragement in their academic lives in their home countries, they believed teachers who helped students see what they were doing well also communicated respect.

*Respect as supportive help* was the second most predominant concept that emerged from this research. Its connection to care was unmistakable as well as the
recognition that respect is communicated when assistance is provided both within and beyond the classroom. The final concept to emerge from the data, however, deals explicitly with the classroom environment and its role in the participants’ understanding of respect. This concept also contains the essence of all the previous ones, but with a distinct emphasis on the classroom atmosphere.

The Environment of Respect—Respect as Comfortable Space

The fourth and final concept to emerge from this data was the concept that respect is communicated through the creation of a comfortable learning environment. It is impossible to define how participants described this space without placing a teacher within the context, for it is the teacher who generally controls the type of space a classroom will be. As one student told me, “The key to a respectful learning environment is a good teacher.” In the minds of students, comfortable learning environments were created by teachers who knew their students, cared about and for students, and helped students reach their goals. Students also explained that comfortable learning environments were hindered when teachers did not provide the appropriate amounts of help and care, or failed to treat students as adults. Creators of respectful learning environments in this study were most frequently described as friendly, nice, and responsible. Although not as prevalent, students also used adjectives such as warm, genuine, honest, stable, trustworthy, open, funny, creative, happy, and strict to describe teachers who created respectful learning environments.
What Is Comfortable Space?

Balanced

Student participants described a respectful ESL learning environment as one that avoided extremes. Three frequently mentioned aspects which required moderation or balance were humor, strictness, and relational closeness. Many students related that a respectful teacher made the class or the learning of English fun. Others mentioned that they felt respected when teachers corrected them in a more casual, humorous way. However, participants also alluded to the tension of both wanting a relaxed classroom atmosphere but also desiring a certain degree of strictness, organization, and structure. Halim’s suggestions seem to summarize this idea. He recommended that teachers, “Be a little funny; make joke. Don’t be very hard or serious. Use a more relaxed way. You need [to be both] serious and helpful. Be a little careful [at] first, not too relaxed.”

Additionally, students expressed their desire for a friendly relationship with their teachers, but on the other hand, spoke of the need for certain boundaries. Many of the teacher participants also alluded to the need to maintain “proper boundaries” with students and to have an appropriate balance in the teacher-student relationship. Their responses, however, expressed more of a concern with becoming too “buddy-buddy” with students and losing control of the class.

Safe

Students frequently commented on the need for a respectful teacher to create a place where students felt safe and protected. Physical safety was generally not an issue at either of these locations, but students spoke of times when they experienced ridicule or
emotional harm (see Chapter 5). Students also expressed that a respectful learning environment meant a safe place where they, their opinions, and their English would not be laughed at or made fun of by others.

**Relaxed**

The concept *respectful as comfortable space* is the result of many students mentioning the need for a classroom environment that is relaxed and comfortable. Two particular students had learned the word “comfy” in the week prior to their interviews. As they explained their conceptualizations of respect, they recurrently used this word in their interview. To these two particular students, “comfy” described the relaxed atmosphere that facilitates language learning as well as the way a respectful teacher made them feel. Students also frequently alluded to the stress of speaking English in front of their classmates and felt that respectful teachers had a way of defusing this stress.

As I stated earlier, when students were asked to describe a respectful teacher the majority of the student participants’ caricatures involved references to “smiles” or “smiling.” Students explained that their teachers’ smiles also helped them to relax and sense that, in the words of one participant, “everything will be okay.” As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, students felt that a smile expressed respect by conveying interest in students, acceptance, warmth, and care; however, students also pointed out that a teacher’s smile communicates a sense of safety that led to a more comfortable, relaxed learning space.

Finally, participants also expressed that allowing students to work in groups or with partners, as well as providing opportunities for students to get to know each other,
made the classroom a more relaxed and respectful place. According to participants, working with others alleviated some of the nervousness and embarrassment associated with having to speak or respond by oneself.

*Respect as comfortable space* is the final concept that emerged from the findings of these studies. The majority of the student interviews contained stories of how teachers communicated respect by creating learning environments that were relaxed, comfortable, and safe. However, a significant number of stories were also recounted that told of times when the learning environment was disrupted by ESL teachers who did not communicate respectfully. The following chapter is devoted to these stories and serves as a reminder of ubiquitous need for “a little respect.”
Mark: What is disrespect?
Shinoty: Disrespect is when people look like they can’t see you.
Kelly: Disrespect is when you treat students as less than a person.

Disrespect Beyond ELIS’s and CCS’s Walls

In many ways, it was easier for students to recall disrespectful encounters from experiences beyond the ESL classroom. Students primarily mentioned feeling disrespected in four primary places: schools in their countries of origin, ESL schools outside of ELIS and CCS, retail stores, and churches in the United States. In this section, I will relate some of their stories because I believe these accounts add a layer of understanding to their conceptions of respect/disrespect within the ESL context.

Toward the beginning of every interview with student participants, I asked them to tell me about a time they felt disrespected. My intention was to prepare each participant to talk about respect and disrespect within the context under study and to ascertain whether the student clearly understood the meanings of the words “respect” and “disrespect.” When asked about times they had experienced disrespect or felt disrespected, the majority of students described incidences involving primary or secondary teachers back in their home countries. Several students recalled times when
they were hit, cursed, or ridiculed by teachers. Additionally, two students recalled occasions when teachers threw objects at them. During my interview with Tatiana, she told a story about a teacher who threw an eraser at a student for talking. She described how the chalk dust flew everywhere and covered her clothing and hair. According to Tatiana, the teacher did not apologize, but instead yelled, “Silence!” and “Shut up!” She went home crying to her mother, and Tatiana said she would never forget this event.

In another case, a student told how her teacher taught the students in her class to cheat on important standardized tests by hiding notes in their mouths and pens. This student said that she felt disrespected because the teacher showed them how to cheat in order to garner favor with her employer and receive a monetary reward.

Allison, a former teacher in Korea, described how she agonized over the way her colleagues treated students at her school. When asked to talk about a time she experienced disrespect, she said:

I was teacher in Korea…teachers didn’t care about students’ opinions. Only good teachers ask our opinions. I hated when teachers didn’t listen or talk with students. It was so hard. Some teachers with a lot of experience told me not to talk too much to students.

The second most frequently mentioned site of disrespect was in retail stores in the United States. From bookstores to clothing stores, students recalled times they were shown disrespect. Abu told how disrespect is often evident to him by the way people look at his wife’s hijab, “especially in the mall.” He said that although he could not read others’ minds, he could tell they were being disrespectful by “looking strangely and their whispers.”
Hamza told of two different events in retail stores within the vicinity of CCS. Because she has dark skin, dresses in traditional Muslim clothing, and wears a hijab, she was easily identified as a Muslim. While in a bookstore one day, a man approached her and repeatedly said, “Why do you want to kill us?” When Hamza slowly and carefully explained that she had no desire to kill anyone, the man softened his tone, apologized, and explained to her that he had never met a Muslim before. As she finished her story, Hamza told me she truly felt sorry for that man.

Hamza’s second story involved an older man who kept taunting her by saying, “Why don’t you go back on the boat where you came from?” To this, Hamza replied, “I didn’t come on a boat. I flew here.” When she tried to explain to this person how and why she had come to America, he refused to listen.

As I mentioned before, students had stories of other educational settings where they had studied ESL. One school, a large English language training provider, was frequently cited as a place where students had experienced disrespect. When questioned why they felt disrespected at this particular school, one student told me, “To get respect, you have to give more money.” Others mentioned how they felt that some teachers and the administration “just worked for the money and not for the students.”

Both CCS and ELIS are located in the Bible Belt of the United States. As such, many students visited local churches with their host families, friends, and teachers. Although I had not expected to hear stories of students being shown disrespect at places of worship, several participants mentioned feeling disrespected by church members who did not try to understand them when they were speaking or those who simply repeated,
“Anyway, anyway…” In these accounts, it was a lack of patience or an unwillingness to listen that students found to be disrespectful.

Disrespect Within the Walls of ELIS and CCS

In order to paint a clear picture of how students viewed disrespectful ways of communicating within the context of the ESL classroom, I asked students if they had ever experienced disrespect as an ESL student. If they had experienced disrespect, I asked them to describe the incident. If they reported that they had not been treated disrespectfully, I asked them to imagine a hypothetical disrespectful ESL teacher and to describe the teacher’s attitude and how that teacher would act. I also asked the participants to view a video clip of an ESL instructor teaching adult ESL students and comment on whether this instructor was respectful/disrespectful and explain their opinions. Finally, without revealing my own perceptions of these events, I introduced behaviors I had seen in the ESL classes I had observed, and asked students to comment on certain behaviors that I felt could have been viewed as disrespectful.

In the data collection process, it became evident early on that students’ concepts of disrespect were often the direct opposite of the four concepts and other themes regarding respect. What follows is a description of the primary themes that emerged in the interviews, events I observed in the classrooms, and examples teachers provided that seem to verify these students’ accounts.

Unacknowledged

Although most students felt their ESL teachers were respectful, students also described times when they felt disrespected when teachers failed to acknowledge them in
some way. Speaking at times hypothetically, many students described how they would feel disrespected if teachers ignored them, failed to know some important information about them, or spoke to them as if they were children. Shinoty’s definition of disrespect as a condition when people “can’t see you” exemplifies this. In fact, nearly 30% of the students in this study mentioned that they felt, or would feel, disrespected if they or their questions were ignored.

In my observations of the schools in this study, I found most of the teachers to be engaged with their students. There were times, however, when teachers did not pay attention to students who asked many questions or students who made comments irrelevant to the topic being discussed. During my observations at both of these locations, I occasionally witnessed times when students were ignored because they repeatedly interrupted teachers who were talking with other students. I also observed a few incidents when teachers appeared busy or preoccupied with other matters. In Maggie’s class at CCS, one student regularly interrupted to ask questions that were particularly irrelevant to the lesson. During these types of questions, Maggie seemed to pick and choose which questions to answer and which to ignore. It is also important to note that, out of the classes I observed, only two of the teachers regularly began class by greeting students. However, the instructors I observed could have encountered students in classes taught prior to the ones I observed.

Teachers who did not take the time to get to know their students also were viewed as disrespectful by student participants in this study. Therefore, the need for the teacher to know her or his students’ backgrounds and act in a sensitive manner seemed vital to students’ conceptions of respect/disrespect. In particular, Muslim students said that
teachers who did not respect their religious or moral beliefs were disrespectful because they failed to know something very important about the student. According to Halim, he would “hate a teacher who chooses dangerous [inappropriate] words, bad words, sexual things.” During our interview, he told a story about another school where he had studied ESL:

At [another IEP], the teacher sometimes shows students movies, but have sexual...short part. At first, just kissing, but the students [in the class] are men and women. In our culture, we cannot accept this. The first time [this happened] my wife asked the teacher to let her know if there’s kissing in the movie ahead of time...so allow the students to go out during that time.

Although the vast majority of students mentioned feeling respected by being recognized or praised, several students felt their teachers communicated disrespect when they or what they said was not properly acknowledged. Nova, an older Chinese student at ELIS, described a time when he had offered some suggestions to his teacher as to how to help him and other students learn. In the interview, he stated that he felt disrespected by his teacher because nothing changed as a result of his suggestions. Another participant described a time when an ESL teacher at a different school had not been teaching responsibly. According to this participant, the teacher often did not prepare her lessons properly and was very unhelpful to all the students in the class. After talking to both the teacher and the school administrator about the problem, the student felt that both parties neither acknowledged her concerns nor the complaints of other students. She described in detail the smug look of the teacher after the complaint was voiced. As a result, she left this school and transferred to ELIS.

The most extreme story of a teacher not properly acknowledging a student was found in Hamza’s account. During our interview, she became noticeably upset as she
recalled the story of an ESL teacher who often compared the way she and her classmates spoke and wrote in English to her “mentally handicapped brother.”

She recalled:

I was taking a class, a writing class... she was so horrible. I just quit coming. I was taking the class because I wanted to take it. It wasn’t required. It was so awful the way she [the teacher] talked. She had a mentally challenged brother and she gave us this example...as if we were mentally challenged. She always compared us to this mentally challenged brother. I cannot accept this. Maybe I’m sensitive...but I cannot accept.

As I mentioned earlier, some of the questioning I pursued in the interviews with students and teachers stemmed directly from what I was observing during my visits to ESL classrooms. Some of the teacher behaviors I observed in these classes, as well as behaviors I had seen in ESL classrooms prior to this study, caused me to question whether students felt disrespected by particular activities that seemed appropriate in elementary and perhaps secondary classrooms, but less appropriate for adult students. One such persistent observation involved the use of games and songs that seemed more indicative of primary school instruction. My underlying question was whether students found these types of activities disrespectful because, to me, they failed to acknowledge the ESL student as an adult. At ELIS in particular, the majority of students commented that they enjoyed ESL games, and although they felt like these activities were for children, the games made the learning experience more exciting and broke up the monotony of learning a new language. Some students said that games were even a preferred method of instruction because they could speak more freely and spontaneously while playing English learning games. When asked if using games as a means of
instruction was disrespectful, Natasha expressed that anyone who found these types of activities to be disrespectful needed “to be more open-minded.”

However, there were some students at ELIS, and many more at CCS, who expressed a dislike for learning games and spoke of them as being disrespectful to adults. Jane, a Korean student at CCS, commenting on the usage of games in ESL classes, candidly stated:

I hate games, especially BINGO, because they are not related to learning English. If a teacher has to use a game, they must explain why these [games] are used or students won’t be able to see the purpose of that.

A student from ELIS and one from CCS both felt games were fine as a teaching tool, but said others might see certain games as disrespectful. Other students stated that games should not be “silly” and that teachers should avoid using “silly songs.” Still other students explained that using games seemed “ridiculous,” “funny,” or “naïve.” After reflecting on the comments regarding games and songs and the ages of the participants who responded to these questions, it became clear that students who seemed to be bothered by games and songs were primarily students over the age of 30 or those who had been in the United States for a longer periods of time. Hamza, a student in her mid-thirties, was particularly direct concerning her view of games. During our interview, she exclaimed, “No games—just teach me English.” Victoria, a Colombian woman in her fifties stated, “For me, games are a little embarrassing.” Sofia, a 36-year-old woman and former lawyer in Colombia, provided her understanding of how students felt about games:

Games…it’s very individual when it comes to games. The game is good for me. Playing the games helps when I am shy. [They] helps me learning in the correct way. Some students stay home if there are games or movies. Learning is a muscle.
And you need to keep working [the muscle]. Games is a secure way for me to learn.

During my time at ELIS, I also observed another technique that did not always seem to acknowledge the maturity of the student. At times I witnessed the use of behavior management techniques that, prior to my doctoral pursuits, I had only seen in primary and secondary classrooms. Particularly prevalent was the use of devices such as lights (i.e., turning them on and off), bells, whistles, musical instruments, and clapping to signal the end of a task or simply to get the students’ attention. When asked about these techniques in the interviews, students at CCS generally indicated that using these means was disrespectful, whereas the majority of students at ELIS did not feel these classroom management techniques were an issue of concern. However, when I asked students at both of these locations to rank these techniques (e.g., lights, bells, whistles, musical instruments, and a verbal request for quiet) from most respectful to least respectful, students unanimously stated that teachers’ verbal requests were most respectful. On several occasions, students expressed similar ideas to those of Jane’s: “Bells and whistles are for dogs and cattle, not for people, but I can accept that. Some students can’t.” One Chinese student at CCS was particularly bothered by some of these techniques. She exclaimed in our interview, “I hate bells and whistles, but maybe using the light is okay, if the teacher explains why…. Of course, using words is more respectful.”

Hamza, in a similar vein to other participants, expressed her feeling about these techniques and then offered her own interpretation regarding why they were used:

For me, these things are what teachers do in grade school. Children don’t stop talking because they are children. When they [teachers] treat college students like children, they become like children. Teachers don’t do this [use these techniques] in math class or in other classes—only in [ESL] grammar. It’s because their
[English] level is like a nine-year-old...they teach this way because their level is
the same [as a nine-year-old]. We’re not perfect, but we shouldn’t be taught like
pre-K students.

When Sammy was asked about using these means of getting students to be quiet.
He looked visibly disturbed and remained quiet for a while. Then, he said,
“Disrespectful...disrespectful. Students are people, not cattle. Just say, ‘Okay guys, let’s
get to another [begin our] lecture.’ That is really not respectful.”

Teachers were all aware of the use of these behavior management techniques.
Similar to my own observations of graduate TESOL programs, Maggie recalled seeing
the use of the bell as part of her MA TESOL program. She explained, “Had a MA
TESOL prof who used a bell, too. The bell and whistle are disrespectful. Something
about the bell is just wrong...bringing in something for that type of purpose.”

It is also important to include a description of the way one particular teacher I
observed elicited responses from students that seemed to fail to acknowledge the maturity
of her adult students. This observation occurred in the classroom of an ELIS teacher,
Diane, during a time of when the teacher wanted to review material she had taught
before. The following is an excerpt from my field notes concerning this event:

Diane: Who knows the answer?
[Students appear reluctant to answer Diane’s questions. Perhaps students
do not know the answers or felt too uncertain to risk guessing.]
Diane: Do I have to get my candy?
[Diane picks up a large basket filled with hard candy.]
Diane: I have my candy.
[Students begin to try to answer her questions.]
[Diane picks up a basket filled with candy.]
[Diane asks a question and then asks students if they want candy.]
Diane: Don’t you want candy? [encouraging the student to continue trying to ask
the question]
Although I felt it was inappropriate to discuss this event with student and teacher participants at ELIS because they would have immediately known it was Diane, I described this event to CCS students to get their responses. Students unanimously stated that this was disrespectful. As one student explained, “We’re not two or three-year-olds.”

During the day I observed this interaction, I also witnessed times when both male and female students were gently pulled or pushed by Diane to get them seated in the correct groups or properly positioned in a photograph she wanted to take. Upon observing this, I recalled other times when I had seen these types of behaviors as both a former teacher and researcher. Diane was not the only one who physically pulled or pushed students to get them to move. On one occasion, I observed the owner of the school pushing and pulling students into various positions for school photographs (rather than simply asking students to move).

During the first few days as an instructor at ELIS, I also observed an occasion when a student was handled a bit more aggressively than what seems “normal” for interactions with adult students. In this case, a Saudi student entered what ELIS called the “school store.” It was not an actual store per se, but a large closet filled with snacks and school supplies that students could purchase. On this particular occasion, the student entered the store at a time when it was “closed.” In response, the school administrative assistant went into the store, pulled the student out of the store by the arm and shouted, “Get out of here!”

The physicality of all these events was neither violent nor pain inducing, but rather resembled ways parents sometimes interact with their children. It is also important to note that these types of events were often simultaneously accompanied by verbal
instructions such as “move,” “come/get over here,” or “don’t sit down.” These rather
terse commands seem unique to the adult ESL environment and relatively nonexistent in
other adult learning environments I have encountered.

In addition to the abbreviated way some teachers spoke with students, I also
occasionally observed a manner of communication that appeared to lack an adult-like
quality. An observation in Hoda’s class at CCS illustrated this point:

Hoda: Maybe we’re going to have a test tomorrow.
Egyptian Student: Why?
Hoda: Because I’m a teacher, and I can do whatever I want. Okay, let’s go to the next one [section of the book]. This is kind of boring.

Related to acknowledging students as adults, I also at times heard teachers at
these schools refer to ESL students as “kids” or “my kids.” These comments were more
frequent at ELIS and at other schools where I had observed in the past than at CCS, and
were rarely overheard by students.

Interviews with students gave me the opportunity to explore their perceptions of
these occurrences. Of the students I asked directly about this issue, six students expressed
that it was “very disrespectful” for teachers to refer to adult students as “kids” or “their
kids.” Said, a jovial taxi driver taking classes at CCS, said, “Don’t call me like ‘a child,’
call us your students...that’s much better.” Others, however, did not seem to mind
teachers referring to them as “kids.” Nini, a young Iraqi student, explained, “I don’t mind
because the teacher is like a mother to me. They are calling you something, and that can
make you feel connected.” Still, other participants believed if teachers referred to their
adult students as “kids,” this must be a type of joke and attributed it to American culture.
Somewhat related to this observation was the awareness of a certain tone of voice some teachers used that I had never heard used with adults, but heard quite frequently when adults spoke with children. This tone at times included a type of ESL teacher talk, but primarily involved the tone of voice rather than vocabulary or rate of speech. I specifically noticed this during my interview with Kristan. During our interview, we were frequently interrupted by phone calls and students coming into her office. The tone of voice and facial expressions she used when talking with teachers and the way she spoke with students who called or entered her office were remarkably different. Phone calls with colleagues were much more relaxed and nuanced with polite expressions. Conversations with students were noticeably more abrupt and her facial expressions were far more serious. Although unintentional, my recording device also allowed me the opportunity to listen repeatedly to the changes in tone and discourse.

Again, my questions regarding this matter (e.g., Did you ever hear an ESL teacher speak in way that sounded like the way an adult speaks to children? Did/would you feel disrespected by this type of speech?) brought a wide range of responses. Woong, a tall, amiable Korean student at ELIS stated, “My teacher always talking to us as if we were babies—TOO slowly.” Jenny said, “sometimes I notice ESL teachers treating students like children. Sometimes their voices are SO strange...so slow.” In contrast, Tim said, “It’s okay because we look like children in class because children don’t understand the words.” Still others offered a different understanding of this tone. “It’s different [in the U.S.]. If the teacher looks happy when she says [talks like] this, then it’s okay.” As I mentioned earlier, older students or students who had spent more time in the United States seemed to be more sensitive to this type of tone. The following are two examples:
Talking to students like they are children...that is disrespectful. I’ve never faced this myself, but I’ve heard teachers talking like this. It’s good to talk slowly, but not in a silly way. No, you can’t treat them [adult students] like children. Let them feel adult responsibility and help them realize they have made mistakes in a wise way. (Shinoty)

Yes, I have noticed this, and I don’t like it. I would like teachers to speak to me the same way they speak to an adult, just speak slowly. Even the hospital, we talk to people who cannot move like they are babies. It’s not good. The nurse takes care of everything, but [the patients] are not babies. (Tomi)

As part of this study, I also asked teachers if they had noticed the aforementioned behaviors. A few of the teacher participants said that they had never noticed this way of communicating with students; however, the majority were quite aware of this phenomenon and had their own examples of such events. Mary, an older teacher at ELIS, told me that she had seen teachers “treat students like babies” and talk to them in childlike ways. Josie described the childish affirmations that ESL teachers sometimes use with their students as “puppy talk” or “verbally petting your dog.” At CCS, Patty had much to say on this topic. Below is an excerpt from our interview.

Mark: Did you ever notice teachers speaking in ways...or types of activities that seemed unusual for those teaching adults?
Patty: Hmm.
Mark: Or maybe in a way that seemed more like a way they would speak to a younger student?
Patty: Yes, I guess have noticed that a bit. Now that you mentioned it, that is true to a certain extent. As ESL people, we tend to forget sometimes that...not always. And I haven’t really noticed that here that much at CCS. But in [another university], we got the cream of the crop [of ESL students], and we sometimes fail to realize that because they don’t have the linguistic skills that they need us to mother them, that we’re their savior to shed the light of English upon them...and that if we teach them English their lives are going to be so much better because of this, and that because they don’t know English, they must be wallowing around in their own ways in their own language, and that we need to shed the light of English on them. I do see that a little bit.

Mark: Have you ever noticed teachers talking in a tone that’s similar to the way adults talk to children or referring to their students as “kids”?
Patty: I’ve definitely noticed that more. When this field started, it was basically started by regular English teachers who happened to have some foreign students. It’s that mentality. And a lot of them were also elementary teachers and a lot of people went from that field to ESL…and it’s hard for people like that to shake that off. I can’t imagine that I would see that too much with younger people [teachers]. I remember we had some Arabic speakers whose writing was just awful and we were trying to get them to write on the line. So we went out and got some books from stores that were basically teaching kids how to write. They had big cartoony pictures. The students themselves didn’t seem to mind, but it definitely seemed child-like to have them in the class. And there are obviously big differences between adults and children, but a lot of people still see it as the same. But I do think that people with any master’s degree or knowledge in the field, would understand the way you learn a first language and the way you learn a second language are two different things.

During my interview with CCS’s academic coordinator, I asked her if she had ever noticed disrespectful communication. Although Nancy said she felt TESOL was generally a respectful field, she was aware that some teachers found it difficult to treat ESL students as adults. She explained:

There’s a temptation or tendency to treat ESL students like children rather than adults. That’s the thing I see the most. And there’s times when teachers were using things like children’s books to teach, and I thought you wouldn’t want to do that without explaining the methodological reasons why this was important. You would have to have the right group to be able to use that or explain why you are using an activity designed for little children. That’s the thing that I see the most. And if you use silly games or activities, you would really have to set it up properly so students would understand the purpose for the activity.

We’ve had some issues with teachers [at CCS] yelling at students or not communicating with them in a productive way—tone of voice, not being interested in listening to the students and finding out what the problem was and what actually went wrong. Not being open to the fact that the student may have a legitimate complaint about the class. Closing the lines of communication. These are all issues that we have. We have had issues and have observed teachers or people who don’t really seem to communicate effectively, and they don’t seem to value students’ opinions and issues. They just let students follow their opinions and do their assignments.
Gary, the academic director at ELIS, also appeared familiar with some attitudes or ways of communicating that failed to acknowledge the age of the students and communicated a form of disrespect. When I asked about using lights, bells, and other devices to get students’ attention, he offered his observations and explanation why teachers rely on such devices:

I’ve used the light switch thing as a means of getting students to go to classes. My gut is the bell bothers me…ringing the bell to get attention. I have not seen that the light bothers students, or have read that in their faces. I wouldn’t have thought so, but I have done it… I think this is because most teachers’ experience tends to be from their K-12 experiences, and it’s an easy way to rely on what they believe a classroom looks like.

Gary also recalled a conversation he had had with an applicant he had interviewed for a teaching position at ELIS. He described the uneasiness he felt with the way the interviewee described her relationship with students. He explained:

I recently interviewed a teacher who told me that she was a university ESL instructor and she tells them [the students] that she is a mother hen. I would be lying if I didn’t say that this immediately put me off, and that I don’t see this as a respectful approach to adults. Maybe some people can pull that off…. I didn’t end up hiring her.

Unequal Treatment

Generally speaking, both groups of students felt they were treated equally and fairly by their ESL teachers, and this was regularly mentioned as being part of their understanding of respect. However, both contexts had some noteworthy exceptions. In my interview with Victoria, she explained that, although she had been treated fairly, she had heard of Mexican students who said their teachers had treated them less favorably than other students. Some Saudi students at ELIS also felt that there were occasions when female students received better treatment than male students. One Korean student
mentioned that some teachers “stereotype Asian students as not good” and treat Asian
students differently because of their reticence in class. Another Asian student stated that
because “black students are not very respectful” and Middle Easterners are “very strong,”
some teachers like Asian students more than other groups.

**Just Doing Their Job**

Although interviews were primarily filled with stories regarding respectful, caring
teachers, there were several stories of teachers that seemed to lack an appropriate amount
of respect as care. The most salient comments in this regard involved accounts of
teachers who appeared to be too busy, preoccupied, or aloof, as well as those who were
“just doing their jobs for money.” Seven students mentioned the lack of care and respect
expressed by these types of behaviors.

In the video clip portion of the student interviews, the students viewed a three-
minute clip of an ESL teacher at a large university in the Pacific Northwest. After
viewing this video clip, a number of students expressed that the ESL teacher in the video
was not very respectful. When I asked why they felt this way, the students repeatedly told
me that she was “just doing her job” and lacked care (although this clip was used as an
advertisement for the university at the time of this research). After viewing the video clip,
Natasha had this to say:

Teacher is just doing the job...[she was] not asking questions. She stops students
from speaking. That’s not respectful. They should be told before [to raise their
hands before they answer] not during. This interrupts students. She doesn’t
discuss things. When they’re speaking, stopping the student [interrupting] is not
respectful. She looks like she doesn’t care—just tell it and end it as soon as
possible. [The teacher] should ask more questions, show more interest, and
explain [the rules] at the beginning of the semester... A childish way to interrupt
the students when they are speaking.
**Insensitivity and Inflexibility**

Another theme that emerged from the interviews regarding the lack of care involved an insensitivity to students’ needs or culture. Students recalled times when teachers were unwilling to bend rules when it came to religious holidays and observances, important or emergency phone calls (that came during class times), or continued to show “inappropriate” movies or videos after students complained. Others mentioned teachers who gave excessive amounts of homework despite knowing how busy students were.

Although Patty commented that she tried to show students respect by “respecting their little holidays,” she also described a “when in Rome, do as the Romans do” attitude that she had toward students. However, in this study, it is this type of attitude, or an unwillingness to accommodate students, that students perceived as disrespectful. From Patty’s point of view, she felt that students primarily needed to be more flexible. She stated:

I’m a firm believer in a “when in Rome,” type of thing. We had a little program [another ESL program at a different university] for TAs to get them used to working in an American classroom. We taught them that this might be a great way to teach in China, but in America it doesn’t work. I remember this one conversation I had with a girl...they didn’t have to pay for the course...we gave them three meals—FOR FREE. And one Chinese lady came up to me and complained about the food. She said she wished they’d be serving rice. I was taken aback and angry. I wanted to say, “Look, you are not living in China. You’re living in America, and we don’t eat rice at every meal. We have sandwiches.”...When I lived in these countries, I didn’t wear shorts, or I worked on Christmas day. I didn’t expect people to accommodate me because I was living in their country. To a certain degree, I expect that in return.

When I asked Nancy whether or not she had witnessed anything as the ESL coordinator at CCS that she felt was disrespectful, she, like some students, described
certain teachers who seemed to be inflexible or uncommunicative with students. She characterized this type of teacher in the following way:

Not taking any kind of responsibility for any of the issues or not being willing to talk with the students about why it [a test or assignment] was too hard, and not asking them [students] specifically why it was too hard or were unwilling to explain their pedagogical decisions. It often comes out of a teacher’s own insecurities and maybe she can’t explain why a test is too hard and can’t explain why she did what she did and so her response is just to shut down and not listen to what they’re [students are] saying. For example, a student didn’t understand an assignment, and the teacher said, “Well, you just need to read it again or read your book and figure it out.”

**Unwillingness to Help**

In the minds of the students involved in this study, ESL teachers who offered supportive help communicated respect. Conversely, teachers who appeared unhelpful were considered disrespectful. According to student participants in this study, teachers who failed to adequately correct homework or class work, explain concepts (especially in relation to grammar) or expectations for assignments, or clarify classroom rules were particularly disrespectful. Students also described disrespectful teachers as “intentionally unhelpful.” For example, Amy recalled a teacher explaining to her class that he could not correct their papers because he needed to “watch TV or eat...his own things [personal matters].” Amy went on to say, “This is not respectful. [It] makes you feel that you are not important.”

Natasha’s comments also illustrate the perception that correction is an important aspect concerning the communication of respect/disrespect. In her interview, she explained: “Guiding a student is important, to help them improve...giving them tips. Not
respectful to not correct. Some students want to hear what they do wrong. Some teachers think not correcting gives the students chance to improve, but this is not true.”

It is important to note that not all types of written correction were seen as respectful. Lisa related a story of a teacher who wrote all over her notebook with “ugly handwriting” and crossed out and erased words that she or he had written. Although Lisa appreciated the corrections, she felt disrespected by the way her notebook was treated.

The most egregious “offense,” however, regarding help (or lack thereof) was not over the absence of correction, but a lack of explanations. Five students mentioned that their ESL teachers at times “did not easily [readily] answer their questions.” Several others also noted being treated disrespectfully when teachers refused to give explanations and simply replied, “This is English.” Students also recalled being treated disrespectfully when teachers looked at their first drafts and made few corrections, but received second drafts full of corrections. Joseph expressed this type of disrespect and his frustration when he said, “Explain what you want first, not after the paper is done.”

At times, students seemed unsure as to whether teachers did not know the answers to questions or were purposely withholding information from their students. Several students also mentioned that teachers would not answer them and would state, “you should know this” or ask, “Why don’t you know this?” One student mentioned that her teacher said, “this isn’t my job” when the student asked for help. A number of students also recalled times when their teachers rushed to proceed with the class without thoroughly answering students’ questions or ascertaining whether or not there was adequate understanding.
During my interview with Sofia, she recalled a story about an ESL teacher who seemed to exemplify the unhelpful encounters some students alluded to in their interviews. Her story indicated both her feelings concerning disrespect and the outcome of such teacher behaviors.

Mark: Can you remember a time when an ESL teacher treated you disrespectfully?
Sofia: I know a teacher who I don’t know why she is teaching. She was a very bad teacher—a type of disrespect. She never explains nothing about your question. She never answers your questions or the answer was very evasive. If I didn’t understand her and asked for help, she was aggressive or she said “this is English.” She doesn’t have an answer. She became angry. This is the answer [she gave me], “This is true and no more. This is English.” This is very disrespectful. I don’t spend any more time with this teacher. I spend my money [for this course] but no more my time with this type of person.

Although this aspect of disrespect was seldom mentioned during my interviews with teachers, Nancy recalled a time from her own teaching when she felt she was disrespectful to her ESL students. Her account illustrated her awareness of how inadequate explanations can lead to perceptions of disrespect:

When I was a young teacher, I kind of would fall into the trap of not explaining things...because I didn’t have an answer and had not thought things through enough to explain to them [to students] my rationale. They [students] always realize when you’re doing it. They know when you’re just confused or avoiding them because you don’t know the answer. I know this now by reading the [teacher] evaluation forms. Sometimes if your manner is abrupt and uncommunicative, they will assume you don’t really know what you’re talking about.

Impatience

Students also mentioned times when they felt their instructors communicated disrespect by their impatience. Teachers also acknowledged their impatience and cited some of these incidences when describing times when they perhaps had communicated
disrespectfully. Patty’s account of her own disrespectful communication provided a good illustration of how instructors can communicate disrespect through impatience:

I sometimes lose my patience when I’m teaching. When I started out teaching, I had infinite amounts of patience. And I have to say, since I’m teaching at a community college, we don’t always get the brightest bulbs in the box here. We get those who aren’t cut out for higher education and we eventually weed them out, but I sometimes forget. So the other day I was teaching a single-slot substitution drill. They just had to look at the example and fill in the slot with something else. It was very mechanical and you really didn’t have to think about it. Of course, there was one slacker student. He was always absent, and he was having trouble with it. Finally, I said to him, “LOOK, this isn’t rocket science.”

**Extremes**

As one might assume, all the factors that contributed to students feeling comfortable in their learning environments, when lacking or absent, led to the communication of disrespect. This final concept was the only one where the themes involving disrespect outnumbered those related to respect. The most egregious attitudes or behaviors reported by student participants in this study involved teachers who were seen as too overbearing or punitive. One student likened this type of communication to “a nagging mother,” and in many ways, this metaphorically represents what students frequently found to be disrespectful. Hamza’s story also illustrates another issue students found disrespectful: disciplining students publicly in front of their peers. Although Hamza’s description may involve a more extreme case, it speaks of the need for greater flexibility and empathy:

The disrespect was this way...like everything. Like if you come late, she doesn’t say, “You’re late. Go out.” She will say...like everything, “I am not your mother waiting for you. I’m not your mother. I have to start the class!” She even talked about it so much even until the classroom [class] is over. Her face was hatefulness. She talked to us as if we were so dumb and didn’t deserve her. She’s
hateful. Disrespect looks like hate. She lifts herself up and put others down. She always does that.

A lot of ESL students say the ESL teachers makes them hate school. When a student does something they [teachers] don’t like, they talk about it so much. One student said, “If school is like this (talking about CCS), then I don’t need.” Yes, they want to teach you, but in this age, everyone works. I have to support a family.

I have an art appreciation teacher. He is very strict, but he knows we have to work and have responsibilities. He says I know you might have to drop your kids off at school sometimes, but on this date, we have a test so don’t be late. Because you have a test…life is not black and white, so see it that way [the way the art teacher did]. Teachers should understand that [life is not so black and white].

Similar to Hamza’s account, Said also recalled a time when he felt his ESL teacher communicated disrespectfully by being too overbearing regarding cell phones and homework, and offered his suggestion for how it could have been dealt with more respectfully. In our interview, he explained:

The teacher makes rules from the beginning and give rules you should follow. They say if you come late, cell phone rings, and explain it [the rules] to you. She already told you what is wrong. But some teachers to talk to students like you’re kids. “Hey, why didn’t you turn off your phone before you came?” This is disrespect. They say, “Why didn’t you do something yesterday [before]?” Instead of just letting you [face the] consequences, they make a big deal out of it in the class and talk to students like kids. The way you say things is so important. When I teach the kids (I teach them to write Arabic), so I know how to talk to a student. So when teachers points out a mistake by addressing the group, and having the group correct the problem, this is more respectful…not individually.

In addition to being overbearing and punitive, some instructors were described as disrespectful for being too authoritarian. Students often expressed that they felt disrespected when teachers told them (rather than asked them) what to do. Although few participants actually used the term “authoritarian,” they described times when teachers used their power to push and prod students into submission. One student said that his teacher just says, “no” to students’ requests without offering an explanation. Other
students mentioned that some teachers did not give them choices but told them what to do. During my own observations, I heard teachers speak to students in ways that at times seemed more like demands than requests. Several teacher participants also mentioned times when they or colleagues “barked” commands or “barked out” an answer, rather than politely asking or explaining things. In my interview with Kristan, we had the following exchange:

Mark: What do you think ESL students would say are disrespectful ESL teacher behaviors?
Kristan: The barking [Kristan laughs]. When students are late...when students come into class, I tell them to come in quietly and sit down. I don’t want to hear your big long explanation about why you’re late, blah blah blah. But sometimes (and I will cut them off), and I say, “Save it for later.” “Sit down.” or I’ll even say, “I don’t want to know.”

Jokes and Humor

Although students mentioned that jokes and humor as an aspect that communicated respect, jokes and humor were also cited as places where disrespect could occur and undermine a safe, comfortable classroom climate. Students sometimes characterized teachers who joked sarcastically as being disrespectful. Others described situations where they were disrespected by teachers who used humor that they could not understand. At CCS, Maria recalled a time when a teacher laughed very loudly after she told a story about being electrocuted by her hair dryer. At the time of her interview, Maria expressed that she still could not understand why this teacher laughed so loudly at her misfortune. Like others, Tomi expressed her problem with her American teacher’s humor. In my interview with her, she shared these feelings and words of advice:
Sometimes Americans’ jokes are trouble for us. I don’t want to interrupt his speech [the teacher when he is speaking], but I cannot follow him. [Make] sure the students understand and don’t use too many jokes...feeling is not so good. Sometimes I think the ESL teachers in American laugh too much...not all teachers. Too much is not better than less.

It is interesting to note that three teachers in this study described times when they made sarcastic comments in their classes. Two strongly believed that their students were unable to understand their sarcastic humor. Mary stated, “ESL students don’t pick up on sarcasm [Mary laughs]—stuff usually goes over their heads.” Patty also expressed her belief that ESL students did not comprehend her sarcasm. In defending her use of sarcastic comments, she explained, “And if ‘Joe Slacker’ walks in five minutes late, I’m going to makes some snide comment like ‘Oh, thanks for coming’.”

Not all teachers were unaware of students’ difficulties with jokes and humor.

During my interview with Maggie, she admitted:

I have to be very careful with joking. In one class students never asked questions. One day a Japanese man asked a good question. I then told the class to please give the man a hand because he asked a question. The student stood up and said, “Why are you making them laugh at me?” In retrospect, I would never do that again. They don’t get humor so you have to be careful.

**Unprotected Space**

Students also described occasions when they felt disrespected by teachers who failed to provide a protective, safe environment. Several students recalled times when they felt hurt or disrespected when other students verbally attacked them for not sharing a similar view of morality. In this study, students particularly cited discussions that dealt with topics such as abortion, homosexuality, and capital punishment as being particularly volatile. In my interview with Kelly, a lesbian student at CCS, she described a time she
had written an essay on same-sex marriage. After collecting Kelly’s and her classmates’
papers, her ESL teacher randomly distributed the papers to the students for peer review.
To Kelly’s chagrin, her paper was given to a Muslim student who did not share her
beliefs about homosexuality and gay marriage. When this student received Kelly’s essay,
he laughed at what she had written and later allowed other students to read her essay. As
a result, Kelly felt that many of her classmates did not talk to her again or looked at her in
a condescending way. Not only did she find her classmates to be disrespectful, but she
also felt the teacher (who had already read her essay and knew she was lesbian) should
have been more respectful by not asking her to share her paper with a student who did not
respect her views. In addition to Kelly’s story, three other students recalled similar times
of being disrespected by students who laughed at them for not sharing the same views
and by teachers who had allowed it to happen. During my interview with Lisa, she
recalled her experience:

I once explained my opinions about homosexuality [in my conversation class]. I
was the only one with my opinion, and they [the other students] were much more
strong about their opinion and they were laughing...and they felt my opinions
were strange. They found it funny because they couldn’t imagine to be
homosexual and were uncomfortable and laughing about it. I felt a bit
disrespected. Putting the other person down by laughing at someone else’s
opinion, and the teacher didn’t do anything. She seemed to agree with the ones
who were laughing.

Some students also felt unsafe or embarrassed when teachers corrected them in
front of their classmates. Students alluded to times when they were disciplined for
misbehavior or verbally corrected for mistakes in their spoken or written grammar. As I
mentioned earlier, students also described feeling especially disrespected if teachers
asked them why they did not know certain material or why they had not mastered a
particular concept. In all of these cases, students shared that they felt disrespected by teachers who made them feel embarrassed in front of their peers. In one particular account, Xiao Wen recalled feeling disrespected by a teacher who not only corrected her publicly but also got angry:

Another time, we were in a class. Sometimes I read a sentence too softly. When I’m not so sure of the word, so I read a sentence very softly...and she couldn’t hear it. She said, “Excuse me?” She said this twice. She pushed me “LOUDLY...LOUDLY!” That is one disrespect.

Teachers were also aware of colleagues who at times belittled students. During my interviews with teacher participants at CCS, several alluded to a full-time instructor who was not afraid to express her impatience and displeasure. As Maggie recalled:

I’ve heard some students complain because of a certain full-time teacher who doesn’t listen to people who give answers that are wrong. If she asked a question and the student gives an answer, if they’re wrong, she’s says, “No, you’re wrong. We’ve been over this 20 times.” And some students like that. Some students say, “No you don’t treat people like that.” She does not cut them a break.

Out of Control Emotions

Finally, expressing extreme or inappropriate emotions was another issue students mentioned as leading to disrespect and a sense that the classroom environment was unsafe. At the time of the interviews, students and teachers alike shared stories of ESL instructors who became extremely angry or upset during a class. Several students alluded to teachers who became angry and impatient when their students were unable to understand them or answer their questions. Several teachers confessed that they at times became extremely upset, angry, or lost their tempers. Kristan described a time when she became “hot and upset” when her ESL students plagiarized. She also recalled another occasion when she experienced a “brain hemorrhage” after finding a student looking
through her grade book. Maggie also confessed that she sometimes “rants and raves” when students do things that frustrate or upset her. The day of our interview, she described how she had lost her temper a few hours prior to our interview:

Just today I was giving a final and I started yelling, “Do not take communication skills next semester! You are not ready. You are not ready. I don’t care if you pass this class. You are not ready!” I’ve given this test three times [this week]. And these people...you would think [they would have realized] this other class took it [the same test] on Monday, and you would think they would ask someone from that class. Cheat a little bit for God’s sake. So when they said I didn’t tell them something that was on the test, I said, “You’re wasting your time. You have two hours to finish.”

Assuming she had apologized to her students for yelling, I asked Maggie if she did anything after she “lost it” with her students. To my surprise, she said, “No, I feel my worst outbursts are probably like a lot less than other teachers, and I don’t worry about it too much. I’m nice 99% of the time. I’m too nice 99% of the time.”

During my interview with Patty, she also mentioned that there were certain types of students that were difficult for her to respect. Consequently, she told me about a time she had lost control of her temper in class because of a student’s behavior. Our discussion went as follows:

Mark: Is there anything that you can describe that causes you to lose respect for a student?
Patty: Yeah, I know...this is one of my pet peeves—yawning out loud in class. I hate that. I just assume it’s not something in their culture. I usually try to ignore it, but then I call them out, and they usually get defensive. Then, if it happens again, then I say something. I tell them in American culture, when you yawn like that, it’s extremely rude and disrespectful. I had one Egyptian kid. He would always come in late. I ended up having to kick him out a few times. I let it go a couple of times. He got bent out of shape. And then I thought I had a little agreement with him. Then, a few days later, he did it [yawned] again! And the whole class noticed because they heard the five minute tirade I had previously. I “suggested” if he was that tired in class, he should just stay home. He had said he was sorry. I don’t know...the kid just laughed and thought it was funny because one of the
other kids thought it funny. I think that’s one of the highest forms of disrespect.

Mark: In the tirade, what did you say?
Patty: I went on and on about how would you feel if you were up there talking. And I just kind of lost it. He was such an egregious offender in so many ways in all aspects of his life and was the bane of my existence. He constantly questioned everything… At what point do they take responsibility? At some point I have to draw the line, and as a teacher, I need to say I don’t need to couch these comments in nice terms. I wonder if they put any blame on themselves for stuff like that. I tend to speak in direct terms. And it’s getting worse and worse, and snowballing, and maybe I need to step back a little to where I was 10 years ago.

Final Thoughts

It is important to note that some teachers did not appear to realize the potential impact their ways of communicating had on their students and the learning environment. Others, however, seemed to become aware while they telling me stories about their teaching experiences. As Carrie, another CCS instructor, recalled how she dealt with disrespectful students, she appeared to become aware of how she had at times shamed students by “calling them out.” She explained:

Sometimes I say, “Am I going to have to separate you?” Calling them out in the classroom probably does make them feel disrespected. Yeah…calling them out probably does shame them. I call them out for cheating or being late. I try to talk with them during break time…but I know teachers who would grab the test and tell them to leave [if students were found cheating].

Although less pronounced than the hundreds of comments related to how ESL teachers communicated respect, it is surprising that all of the teacher participants and nearly all of the student participants were able to recall a time when they had witnessed ESL teachers communicating in ways they felt were disrespectful. The interviews also revealed certain types of students that ESL teachers had a difficult time respecting. These and other unanticipated findings will be discussed in the chapters that follow.
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Similarities and Differences Between Teachers’ and Students’ Understanding of Respect/Disrespect

Conceptual Similarities and Differences

Interviews with both teachers and students indicated both marked similarities and differences concerning participants’ understanding of respect. Both groups of participants mentioned themes related to the concept of respect as caring relationship more than all other concepts, and both groups had the fewest comments regarding the concept respect as comfortable space. The most significant incongruity was the difference between students’ and teachers’ emphases on the concepts of respect as supportive help and respect as intentional appreciation. Student participants had a far greater proportion of comments related to the concept of respect as supportive help than the group of teacher participants. Subsequently, teachers placed greater importance on the theme respect as intentional appreciation.

Incongruity was also apparent in the way teachers and students emphasized/deemphasized the four emergent concepts with regard to the communication of disrespect in these contexts. Teachers spoke about disrespect less in terms of how it
violated *respect as caring relationship* or *care as supportive help* and more in terms of how disrespect violated *respect as comfortable space*. Students, on the other hand, emphasized ways teachers communicated disrespect with regard to how it violates *respect as caring relationships* and *respect as supportive help*.

**Thematic Incongruities—The Widest Gaps**

Although there appeared to be some similarity concerning the emphasis both groups of participants placed on these broad, over-arching concepts, there was greater contrast regarding how these groups viewed the themes that comprised these concepts. In this section, I will first deal with the more “significant incongruities” (those frequently mentioned by student participants but mentioned by none or only one of the teacher participants) followed by incongruities that were less significant.

Concerning the concept of *respect as intentional appreciation*, there was significant incongruity between teachers’ and students’ themes. Although emphasized by students, teachers rarely or never mentioned the themes of valuing students as individuals, acknowledging students as adults, accepting students, asking students for help, or greeting students as a means of communicating respect. A second concept with many thematic incongruities was the concept of *respect as comfortable space*. Although four teachers mentioned “establishing rules” as a means of communicating respect, these ideas were not expressed in the student interviews. Students, however, stressed the importance of helping students understand the rules. It is also important to mention that only student participants discussed the importance of creating a comfortable or relaxed learning environment as a means by which teachers could communicate respect. Students
also emphasized the importance of smiling, protecting students, and using humor; however, no teachers in this study mentioned these aspects in their interviews. In this study, students also cited many more examples of non-verbal aspects of communicating respect/disrespect than did the teacher participants.

Thematic mismatches were also evident in the remaining two concepts. Concerning the concept *respect as caring relationship*, only one teacher mentioned “apologizing;” however, this was mentioned 17 times by student participants. In regard to the concept *respect as supportive help*, student participants mentioned “the teacher corrects me” 39 times and “the teacher answers my questions” 12 times, but none of the teacher participants mentioned these concepts in their interviews. In this study, only one teacher appeared aware that students might feel disrespected by teachers who did not correct their written mistakes. Although she may have recognized ESL students’ desire for correction, her position was quite different from that of the students in this study. In our interview, she explained:

In a writing class, some students feel that you are being disrespectful when you don’t correct all their errors. They might think, “Why didn’t you correct that the first time?” This might be a miscommunication type of thing, [rather] than a disrespect thing, and some students might find this to be disrespectful. We have to teach them it’s not in their best interest for us to correct all of your writing. And you wouldn’t learn anything. And I would be up to 3:00 a.m. fixing your paper and that wouldn’t be good for anybody.

**The Smaller Gaps**

Although not as significant as the aforementioned incongruities, the data showed a number of other differences between both groups’ understanding of how respect/disrespect was communicated within these contexts. In regard to the ideas (codes)
“showing care” and “encouraging students,” only two teachers mentioned these as ways ESL teachers communicate respect. In contrast, the majority of students discussed these ideas during their interviews. In fact, the word “care” was mentioned over 64 times during the student interviews. Both groups also mentioned the idea of “mutuality,” or the belief that respect involved a “give and take.” However, this idea was more pronounced in teacher interviews. Teachers also more frequently cited the Golden Rule when describing their conceptions of how respect is communicated and facilitated in the ESL classroom. Although both groups mentioned the need for “connection” and “opportunities to spend time together” (both in and outside of the classroom), students placed a greater emphasis on these themes.

**Similarities and Differences Among Students at ELIS and CCS**

Students at both CCS and ELIS emphasized the four concepts (*respect as intentional appreciation, respect as caring relationship, respect as supportive help, and respect as comfortable space*) in a similar manner. The concept that received the greatest amount of attention in the student interviews was *respect as caring relationship*, followed by *respect as supportive help, respect as comfortable space,* and *respect as intentional appreciation*. Themes, on the other hand, had greater variation, especially the terms related to the concept *respect as caring relationship*. A proportionately higher number of students at CCS mentioned flexibility, attentive listening, and apologizing as important components of this concept than did their counterparts at ELIS. A much greater proportion of students at CCS also mentioned the themes “acknowledging students as an adult” and “explaining things clearly” while relating their conceptions of respect. One
theme never mentioned at CCS, but significant at ELIS, was the need for humor to create an environment that communicated respect. ELIS student participants also placed a proportionately greater emphasis on the idea of “having voice” than students at CCS.

**Similarities and Differences Between This Study and Other Studies**

In this section, I will relate prior research significant to this study and discuss how each yielded similar and different themes related to respect. One study particularly significant to my work was Buttner’s (2004) research involving undergraduate business students and their views of respectful and disrespectful instructor behaviors. Buttner’s research is significant in that it involved a qualitative study of college students (the mean age being close to participants in my study) and their understanding of respectful and disrespectful teacher behaviors. Her study yielded seven categories related to respectful instructor behaviors and six categories of disrespectful teacher behaviors. Her findings share five similar themes with participants in this study; namely, both groups of participants found recognition of students’ opinions, treatment of students, task-related help, responsiveness to unusual situations, and affirmation of students as primary behaviors which indicated respect. Buttner’s category of “nondefensiveness” was not mentioned by participants in this study. The final category of Buttner’s study was “class integrity” which included “being fair and honest with students” and “fair and impartial treatment.” Although students did not mention the teacher’s honesty as indicative of respect in my study, the majority did mention being treated equally and fairly as a behavior that communicated respect. Students in this study placed a greater emphasis on task-related help in the form of correction and explanation than the business student
participants in Buttner’s study. “Recognition of student perspectives,” the most predominant category in Buttner’s study, was also a teacher behavior that communicated respect in this study, albeit not as predominant as many other themes.

Concerning disrespectful behaviors, both studies also have some noteworthy similarities and differences. Both studies’ participants named insensitive treatment, lack of help, defensiveness (reacting angrily to student questions), and classroom integrity (being treated unfairly, lack of truthfulness, lack of justification for instructional decisions) as behaviors that communicated disrespect. Failure to respond to students (not responding to class concerns, including making exceptions and altering assignments), although significant in Buttner’s study, was not found to be as significant to the students in this study. Students in this study did not mention a lack of truthfulness as indicative of disrespect on the teacher’s part but did mention all other aspects of “classroom integrity” that Buttner’s study revealed. It is important to note that many incidences of disrespect in both of these studies were seen as the result of insensitive treatment. It is also noteworthy that students in Buttner’s study did not refer to being treated like children in the list of behaviors they witnessed or found to be disrespectful although this was a significant finding in my own study. Also missing from Buttner’s findings was any mention of nonverbal behaviors that communicated respect/disrespect, yet this was one of the most salient findings of this study. Additionally, not correcting students and not giving thorough explanations was seen as indicative of teacher disrespect in my study, yet these were not a part of Buttner’s findings.

One other interesting point of comparison between Buttner’s study and this study is the way in which students reported how they would deal with disrespectful teacher
behaviors. Although the majority of students in this study reported that they would try to discuss the situation with their instructors, this was not a reported response in Buttner’s research. Both groups of participants, however, did mention that they would not come to class and would not participate. Although participants in Buttner’s study expressed that they would retaliate by responding disrespectfully to teachers that treated them in a disrespectful manner, this was not a response mentioned by participants in this study.

Another closely related study was Elaine Coffin’s study of respect. Coffin (1997) investigated how secondary school students and teachers understood the meaning of respect. This study also tested Coffin’s construct of respect—one comprised of caring, power, and climate. Her primary finding was that students and teachers “perceived the nature of the respect construct similarly in terms of its attributes and somewhat dissimilarly in terms of how respect was enacted on an ongoing basis in the classroom” (p. ii). Similarly, my study also shows that both teachers and students conceptualized respect in terms of all four concepts of respect (respect as intentional appreciation, respect as caring relationship, respect as supportive help, and respect as comfortable space). However, the themes used to describe these concepts and the emphases placed on the themes and concepts (i.e., as indicated by number of participants mentioning each theme) were quite different between teacher and student participants. Coffin also found that both students and teachers connected the aspect of care in the respect construct with trust, empathy, and sensitivity (p.132). Similar to Coffin’s findings, participants in this study saw empathy and sensitivity as aspects of respect and part of a caring relationship between teachers and students. Trust, on the other hand, was mentioned by only one student and one teacher participant in this study. In both of these cases, the participant
mentioned trust as an aspect of disrespect (e.g., “not trusting me” and “breaking down of trust”). Impartiality was another significant component of respect in the minds of students and teachers in Coffin’s study. In this study, impartiality (i.e., treating every student the same or equally) was also mentioned by nearly half of the student participants.

Regarding the component of power, students in Coffin’s study found a misuse of power (e.g., “prematurely judging and labeling students”) as disrespectful and stressed the need for flexibility and open-mindedness. Furthermore, both students and teachers emphasized the need for mutuality in power relationships. In this study, however, students frequently mentioned the misuse of power (being overly strict or authoritarian) as being disrespectful, and several students mentioned respect was communicated when they were given a voice or a say in their learning. In contrast, nearly all the teachers at CCS referenced the need to preserve power. Their comments regarding their need to not let students “cross the line” or “get away with too much,” as well as the need to be “more formal” with students to avoid discipline problems, express this sentiment.

Finally, students’ discussion of climate in Coffin’s study focused on “specific behaviors which validated them as persons, “especially not becoming impatient when students did not understand” (p.133). Teachers in Coffin’s study saw climate in terms of respectful dialogue and seizing the “teachable moment.” Similarly, patience/impatience was also seen as an essential component of respect and mentioned 17 times by student participants in this study. Impatience was also described as a primary hindrance to a respectful classroom environment. In addition, students in this study conceptualized climate in terms of the teacher providing a comfortable, relaxed, protected space. In contrast to Coffin’s study, both students and teachers participants in this study
emphasized the need for respectful dialogue, one which involved attentive listening coupled with caring, supportive responses.

Summary

When compared with other studies dealing with respect, this study shows both marked similarities and striking differences. The data in this study also clearly indicated some important differences between the ways ESL teacher and their students understand respectful communication. These differences will continue to be discussed and analyzed in the chapters that follow.
CHAPTER 7

WHAT IS RESPECT?

In the beginning of this research endeavor, I detailed how I became intrigued by the topic of respect and how ESL students understand respectful communication. Since a respectful teacher is strongly equated with a “good teacher” (Shono, 2004), I was interested in exploring the qualities of ESL instructors and their teaching that caused students to deem certain instructors “respectful” and others “disrespectful.” Simply stated, this study has shown that respect was communicated to students within these contexts via the following four concepts: respect as intentional appreciation, respect as caring relationship, respect as supportive help, and respect as comfortable space. In many cases, disrespect involved the absence of any of these four aspects.

Forms of Respect

As was mentioned in the review of literature, Sung’s research, dealing with 12 different forms of respect, provides a lens for discussing the answer to my primary research question. Sung’s identification of various forms of respect, caused me to look for distinct forms or means of communicating respect evident within the context of my own study. In 2009, Sung and Dunkle conducted a study examining how social workers
convey respect to their elderly clients. The following twelve forms were identified by Sung (2009, 2002):

1. care/service respect (providing care and service for elders)
2. acquiescent respect (assenting, listening to elders)
3. consulting respect (seeking elders for advice)
4. precedent respect (providing services to elders first)
5. salutary respect (greeting and saluting elders)
6. linguistic respect (using proper language in addressing elders)
7. victual respect (serving drinks and foods of elders’ choice)
8. gift respect (presenting gifts to elders)
9. presentational respect (holding proper manners before elders)
10. celebrative respect (celebrating elders’ birthdays)
11. spatial respect (furnishing elders with comfortable seats),
12. public (serving neighborhood elders and elders at large) (p. 253)

Description of Forms

The student participants in this study cited a wide variety of different expressions of respect they had received while students in the United States. Teacher participants also explained the means by which they demonstrated and expressed respect to their ESL students. By adapting Sung’s forms of elder respect, I was able to identify 11 different forms essential to student respect (see Table 7) or forms students believed teachers used to communicate respect. Conversely, the absence of any of these forms also had the potential to communicate disrespect. Students’ and teachers’ answers to interview
questions provided invaluable insight into how they conceptualized respect/disrespect and led to the identification of 11 primary forms of respect. The following is a list and brief description of each form.

Table 7

*Forms of Respect as Reported by Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Respect</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentational Respect</td>
<td>-dressing modestly&lt;br&gt;-dressing appropriately for the context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-making eye contact&lt;br&gt;-warmly greeting students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salutatory Respect</td>
<td>-asking about students’ days/weekends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiescent Respect</td>
<td>-honoring students’ concerns and suggestions&lt;br&gt;-giving students voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-using instructional methods and techniques appropriate for adult students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-recognizing students’ experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-recognizing and attending to adult students’ strengths and weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-responding empathically and patiently to the circumstances that surround adult students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andragogical Respect</td>
<td>-creating a classroom environment that is comfortable, safe, and conducive to adult learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial Respect</td>
<td>-providing a space free from unnecessary conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultative Respect</td>
<td>-seeking input from students regarding class goals, objectives, and content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued on next page
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of respect</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Care Respect – Care and Service | -pursuing an appropriate caring relationship with students  
-showing concern for students’ needs and objectives  
-showing empathy and flexibility when necessary  
-making oneself available during class and at appropriate times before and after class  
-helping students realize their learning goals  
-correcting and explaining errors  
-explaining rules and structure of American learning environments  
-adequately responding to students’ questions in an appropriate amount of time |
| Celebratory Respect | -celebrating and praising student accomplishments, abilities, and talents  
-speaking politely  
-speaking in a manner appropriate to students’ level, age, and experience |
| Linguistic Respect | -communicating nonverbally in ways appropriate for adults  
-immediacy behaviors (non-verbal expressions of care, warmth, concern, kindness, etc.) |
| Kinesic-Paralinguistic Respect | -assuming a polite posture  
-making eye contact |
| Professional Respect | -knowing the subject material and being able to explain it effectively  
-knowing the skills in need of development and the ability to help students do what is required  
-conducting oneself and the class in a professional manner (e.g., coming to class on time) |

**Care respect.** Student participants at both CCS and ELIS named behaviors and attitudes related to this form of respect more than any other. When asked how teachers
communicated respect, nearly all student participants at some point during the interview used some form of the word “care.” Subsequently, care was frequently linked to the service aspect of this concept, that of helping meet the needs of the students. In the minds of student participants, the teacher’s availability and willingness to help them by answering questions, correcting their errors, and giving them support in the learning process led to their sense of being respected. It is important to note that this also implies, (and was confirmed by students’ responses), that teachers must first know students (i.e., levels of proficiency, cultures, learning styles, etc.) in order to demonstrate this type of respect.

**Presentational respect.** This form of respect was expressed primarily by students’ and teachers’ mention of the teacher’s modesty as a means of communicating respect, and by students who expected teachers to dress professionally. It is important to note that although students and teachers mentioned the importance of modest dress at both locations, professional attire was mentioned more frequently among the community college student and teacher participants.

**Salutatory respect.** Students also frequently expressed that teachers who acknowledged their presence with eye contact and simple greetings expressed respect. As described in Chapter 4, participants also felt that teachers who greeted them (e.g., “How was your weekend?” or “How are you doing?”) at the beginning of class were more respectful than those who immediately started teaching their lessons. In their discussions of disrespect, students also mentioned teachers who looked busy, ignored them, or failed to make eye contact as communicating disrespect.
Acquiescent respect. Like Sung’s conceptualization of this form of respect, acquiescent respect involved the attitude of humbly listening and valuing others’ opinions. In expressing this form of respect, students spoke of teachers who listened and responded to their suggestions and acknowledged their “voice.” Teachers who spoke to students “on the same level,” provided choices (as opposed to demanding compliance), were viewed as respectful. On the other hand, teachers who spoke in extremely strict, serious, or authoritarian ways were often regarded as disrespectful.

Consultative respect. Although related to acquiescent respect, this form involved a teacher actively seeking student input and suggestions. Teachers who asked students questions such as, “Do you feel you need more practice with this or are you ready to study something different?” were viewed by some participants as being more respectful. Like acquiescent respect, this form involved the teacher moving from a more teacher-centered approach to a more student-centered approach to instruction. It is also important to note that both acquiescent respect and consultative respect resemble many aspects of Freire’s (1970) problem-posing approach to the classroom political structure of the classroom. In this approach, and in the minds of many student participants in this study, the teacher should appreciate that learners have useful knowledge and abilities, and discuss educational issues with students. Additionally, a few students felt they should have a say in the direction of the class.

Andragogical respect. Although this form of respect was not part of Sung’s study, it presented itself in students’ and teachers’ accounts of what constituted respect in
an ESL context. This form of respect involves four of the five aspects of “The
Andragogical Model” found in chapter 2 of this dissertation; namely a respect for the
adult learner’s experience, orientation toward learning, readiness to learn, and motivation
to learn. This form of respect involved the recognition of the student’s age and exploiting
the advantages of being an adult learner. It also entailed dealing empathically and
patiently with adult students’ particular challenges. This form of respect involves
understanding and responding to the needs and particular life circumstances that surround
the adult student. Student participants expressed that they felt respected when teachers
were flexible with issues such as pregnancy, childcare, and children’s schooling. This
form also included comments related to descriptions of behaviors that communicated
disrespect. For example, turning the lights off and on or ringing a bell to get students’
attention was seen as a technique more commonly associated with children (or animals)
and viewed as less respectful. Students also expressed feeling respected when their
teachers treated them like “regular, American college students.”

**Spatial respect.** Sung’s form of spatial respect involved the provision of
comfortable seating to the elderly. Students in this study, however, focused more on the
psychological, affective comfort felt in the classroom than the physical components.
Students frequently described the importance of a comfortable, relaxed place to learn. As
the researcher, it seemed to me that students felt this type of space was created when the
affective filter was lowered and when there was little threat to face. Instructors who
helped create this type of space were viewed as respectful and caring.
Although conflict cannot be entirely avoided in the ESL classroom, unnecessary
conflict brought on by highly controversial discussion topics, led to some students feeling
disrespected. Several students also mentioned times when teachers failed to protect them
or support them during arguments, especially during times when they were outnumbered
by a vocal majority. Furthermore, they described feeling ridiculed and disrespected by
other students and by teachers who failed to intercede or offer adequate protection.
Spatial respect, therefore, also involved the teacher being attentive to issues of “face,”
including how she or he corrected students’ behavioral problems or language errors. It
also included empathy and sensitivity in teacher-student interactions.

**Linguistic respect.** This form of respect involved verbal expressions within the
ESL context. Students described teachers who used polite, caring, and kind expressions
as communicating respect, and those who were verbally “impolite,” “mean,” or “harsh”
as communicating disrespect. This form of respect was predominant in teachers’
understanding and conceptualization of respect.

**Kinesic-Paralinguistic respect.** I termed this form of respect “kinesic-
paralinguistic respect in order to include all manner of non-verbal communication as well
as vocal qualities involving volume, intonation, and pitch. This was a predominant theme
in students’ understanding of how teachers communicated both respect and disrespect,
yet one rarely mentioned by teachers. Non-verbal communication that conveyed care,
warmth, friendliness, etc., was seen as respectful, whereas non-verbal expressions of
apathy, annoyance, impatience, etc., were indicative of disrespect, and reported in facial
expressions (e.g., blank stares, rolled eyes), tone of voice (e.g., “sounds angry,” “sounds
mean”), and volume (e.g., “She kept speaking louder and louder.”). What was clear in this study, and understandable due to the large number of students from high-context cultural backgrounds, was that students found the teachers’ faces and body language to play a pivotal role in the communication of respect/disrespect. To students, the teacher’s face was a more reliable source of whether the teacher was communicating respectfully/disrespectfully than the verbal message. Teachers, the majority of whom were from a low-context society, focused their understanding of how they communicated respect via their verbal messages.

**Celebratory respect.** Although Sung’s original study considered “celebrative respect” to be the celebration of significant dates (i.e., birthdays, anniversaries), this context involved the celebration of progress, academic achievement, and special talents and abilities. This form of respect fulfills the needs of what Lim and Bowers (1991) termed “the competence face,” i.e., the need to have one’s skills and abilities appreciated and respected. Students frequently mentioned that when teachers praised their progress or noted their unique talents, they felt respected. Amy’s story of how her teacher praised her ability to dance exemplifies this form of respect as well as the myriad mentions of how praise communicated respect.

**Professional respect.** This final form of respect is the second form not included as a part of Sung’s research. However, professional respect played a significant role in the communication of respect in this context, especially among teacher participants. Professional respect involved having the necessary knowledge and ability to teach the content of the course, as well as the appropriate professional conduct in and outside of the
class. To students, professional respect focused on the teacher’s ability to instruct in ways that helped them develop a particular skill or ability. Students also tended to find teachers who taught in more abstract ways as less respectful than those who taught them “how to do.” Hofstede (2001) also identifies this as a key difference between schooling in individualist and collectivist societies.

In this study, teachers focused more on being prepared and organized as indicative of respect, whereas students emphasized behaviors related to professional conduct. This form was also evident in students’ understanding of disrespect. Several students cited times when their ESL teachers were late or did not show up for class, noted occasions when teachers did not explain the reason behind their tardiness or absence, and recalled instances of teachers who failed to apologize for breaches of professionalism.

These forms of respect, although interrelated and at times overlapping in their meaning and implementation, offer a distinct way of understanding the many expressions of respect explored in this study. The behavioral forms outlined here provide a beginning of what could be developed as a detailed typology of forms of respect in classroom contexts. They also allow one to see the way different groups of participants tended to prefer one form over other forms, as well as some incongruities between student and teacher participants conceptions of respectful/disrespectful teaching.
CHAPTER 8

CULTURE’S ROLE IN THE CONCEPTION OF RESPECT/DISRESPECT

This study did not research the dimensions of cultural variability. However, aspects of culture were involved in participants’ perceptions of what constituted respect/disrespect. Since this study involved participants from 17 different countries, it is impossible to make broad claims to culture’s role in the many conceptions of respect/disrespect. However, it seems reasonable to describe ways that cultural differences may have played a role in participants’ understanding of respect/disrespect.

**Individualism-Collectivism and Respect/Disrespect**

Individualism and collectivism are a primary means of understanding culture and communication. As was discussed in Chapter 2, students from more collectivistic cultures tend to be more reticent in classroom situations and are generally concerned about a loss of face (their own and their teacher’s) than those from individualistic cultures where face-consciousness tends to be weaker. Students from collectivist societies also tend to place a greater value on harmony in classroom interactions.

Nearly all participants in this study involved North American teachers from an individualistic cultural background and students from more collectivistic societies. Ways of communicating that caused a loss of face (e.g., being “called out” by a teacher in front
of the class, negative comments about a student’s culture, being ridiculed by classmates for being lesbian, etc.) or caused disharmony in the classroom also appeared to have been seen as form of disrespectful communication on the teacher’s part. Students also mentioned that addressing a student’s mistakes as a group problem rather than an individual error, made them feel respected. Furthermore, students repeatedly mentioned that being corrected individually was more respectful than in front of a group. All of these factors seem to point to the idea that if teachers were more familiar with collectivistic ways of communicating, respectful communication may have been enhanced.

Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance and Respect/Disrespect

Students in this study repeatedly expressed how respect was communicated when teachers explained rules, lessons, and assignments, and made their expectations explicitly known. Additionally, students mentioned feeling disrespected by teachers who did not provide the scaffolding and/or the explanations they desired. This might have been the result of feeling anxious or unsure about how to complete the assignments and an inability to fully understand their teachers’ expectations. Students also expressed that disrespect was communicated when their instructors did not provide an adequate amount of correction and when they failed to fulfill “their obligation” to transmit expert knowledge. This aspect seemed to be further operationalized when no explanation was given other than “This is English.” Furthermore, debates or discussions on controversial issues and activities that seemed unstructured to students (due to lack of explanation
and/or lack of structure) may have also produced a greater amount of anxiety in students from stronger uncertainty avoidance societies and led to feelings of disrespect.

**High-Low Context Communication and Respect/Disrespect**

Another important component of culture, which may have played a role in participants' conceptualizations of respect/disrespect, is the aspect of low/high-context communication. It is generally believed that high-context communication tends to be predominant in collectivistic cultures, whereas low-context communication is predominant in individualistic cultures (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Low-context cultures tend to be more explicit in their verbal communication and most of the message of the communication is found in the precise words being used. High-context cultures tend to rely on more non-verbal means of communication and less on the explicit verbal message. The importance of non-verbal expressions of respect/disrespect was predominant in student accounts, and seldom mentioned by teacher participants in this study. Some of the problems with disrespectful communication also seemed to stem from teachers who were unaware of or unconcerned about their non-verbal communication. Students mentioned feeling disrespected by teachers' facial expressions that, to them, communicated disapproval, annoyance, or impatience.

**Violations of Expectations**

Disrespectful communication in this study was largely a violation of expectations. Students expected to be acknowledged but felt disrespected when their experience, age, or life circumstances seemed to go unnoticed. Students also expected to be treated fairly. They hoped their teachers would be flexible, caring, sensitive, patient, and helpful. They
wanted their instructors to give explicit instructions and teach them how to develop the
group's language skills necessary to communicate effectively in English. When any of these
hopes were not realized, they felt their teachers communicated disrespect.

Teachers also had expectations. They wanted their students to regularly attend;
willingly participate; arrive, leave, talk, and complete assignments at the “proper time;”
develop critical thinking skills; discuss and debate issues; express interest in learning, and
think creatively. Instructors also hoped that students would be respectful of their time.
When these expectations were not met, they became frustrated and had a difficult time
respecting their students.

The aforementioned expectations held by students and teachers express their
cultural values and norms and directly relate to dimensions of cultural variability.
Although it is impossible to state the exact effect of an expectancy violation, one can
predict that, if the communicated message is beyond a person’s range of tolerance, the
message will create a sense of disequilibrium, with the potential to lead toward feelings
of anxiety, frustration, and disrespect.

Time

Concepts of time are heavily influenced by cultural experiences. Cultures differ
widely in their understanding of time and how it is used and wasted. Edward T. Hall (*In
Dodd, Samovar, & Porter, 2001*) proposed that cultures are either monochronic or
polychronic. Monochronic cultures tend to see time as lineal, segmented, and manageable
(p. 190) and polychronic cultures tend to view time more holistically and “can interact
with more than one thing at a time” (p. 190). Reactions to tardiness or how one
conceptualizes time-wasting behavior are largely influenced by values regarding time. These reactions and conceptualizations also convey an individual’s deeply held beliefs regarding time and are largely shaped by how a culture perceives and uses the concepts of the past, present, and future.

The issue of time was ever-present in both students’ and teachers’ accounts of what constituted respect/disrespect. Many of the “heavy withdrawers” from the Good Will Bank (see Chapter 9) involved students who communicated disrespect by violating their teacher’s expectations regarding time. For example, The Negotiators and The Chit-chatters were deemed such because teachers felt these students wasted their time. The Slackers also violated teachers’ expectations of what constituted an acceptable time to arrive or leave class. Students expressed feeling disrespected by teachers who criticized them for being tardy or spent too much time talking about being on time for class. Clashes among teachers and students from different cultural backgrounds, often involved different understandings of time and often led to feelings of disrespect. Especially evident were clashes involving students from cultures that tended to value people, spontaneity, and impulsivity over schedules, as well as teachers who had very low tolerance for tardiness, extensions, postponements, or wasting time.
CHAPTER 9

COMMUNICATING RESPECT IN ADULT ESL CONTEXTS

The Importance of Respect

Mark: Do you think a good teacher is a respectful teacher?
Sammy: If a good teacher and a respectful teacher are combined, if they have both of these qualities, this combination is going to be amazing—perfect and AMAZING! He’s not going to be THAT good without being respectful.

Communication + Respect = The Secret to Success—Kelly, Puerto Rico

To be a good teacher, you must be respectful. To be a respectful teacher, you must be a caring teacher.—Nini, Iraq

The aforementioned quotes exemplify how students viewed the concept of respect within the context of the ESL classroom. All participants in this study expressed that respect was indeed essential, especially concerning the student-teacher relationship, classroom communication, and learning environment. As stated earlier, student participants generally found their learning experiences in ESL classrooms in the United States to be respectful and expressed appreciation for being treated with respect. Teachers also expressed their desire to be respectful and emphasized having respect reciprocated.

How Is Respect Communicated to Students in an ESL Context?

The social context of the ESL classroom is one complicated by a mix of distinct cultures. Each participant in the social “game” found within the four walls of the
classroom comes with preconceived ideas about what constitutes a respectful classroom environment. As such, there is a need to negotiate a new set of “game rules.” Although students’ descriptions of respectful teachers and instruction included aspects of the teacher as authority and the teacher as facilitator, the preeminence of the teacher as an analogous patron/parent was also apparent. This study indicates that this analogous patron-client role is often the most closely aligned to the respectful teacher role in the minds of the student participants. The prominence of this role was especially true for those in the beginning stages of acculturation. Furthermore, the concepts of mindful respect indicate that in order for an ESL teacher to be deemed respectful, s/he must be seen as one who enters and maintains a caring, supportive, and familial relationship with students; but the amount of support and care students require diminishes with students’ adjustment and acculturation.

The Prominence of the Patron/Parent Role

Teachers and students arrive in the ESL classroom with unequal status. In most cases, teachers, by nature of their positions, have greater power and status than their students. In the case of the ESL teacher, educators also hold the keys to students leaving ESL programs and moving on to various academic pursuits. This inequality and power differential is a key component in the establishment of the patron-client teacher role.

As was mentioned earlier, the patron-client system is often found in societies rife with political instability. Although ESL students may or may not come from such societies, their roles as newly arrived immigrants or sojourners in the United States leads to a disequilibrium and instability often experienced as culture shock. Many of the
students in this study also spoke of their need for teachers who acted as advocates or allies to assist them not only academically, but also in and through the ups and downs of life. The perceived need for alliances in the midst of instability is another factor contributing to the patron-client relationships identified in this study.

The patron-client teacher role also implies reciprocity. Although set in an African context rather than a multi-cultural ESL setting, Chinchen’s (1994) study revealed that his students sought reciprocity through an exchange of tangible and intangible relationship gifts. Table 8 shows the gifts teachers and students exchanged. The participants in my study exchanged far fewer material gifts; however, the gifts Chinchen describes are similar to the way teachers and students exchanged the social commodity of respect in this study.

Although corrupted forms of this type of relationship most certainly exist, patron-client relationships can also work in mutually beneficial ways. An exchange or transaction is also an expression of the relationship and should not be viewed in a purely pejorative manner. The give-and-take nature indicates a connection, not in the mechanistic, impersonal way Westerners often imagine it to be. The relationship between patron and client should also not be viewed solely as a means to obtain instrumental benefits and mutual advantage, but also appreciated for the strong bond of devotion it creates. The continuing pattern of reciprocity also gives birth to trust and allows for the freedom to request.
Table 8

*Types of Patron-Client Relationship Gifts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tangible</th>
<th>Intangible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gifts from Patrons:</td>
<td>Gifts from Patrons:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. money</td>
<td>1. advice, counsel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. loans, credit</td>
<td>2. future aid guarantee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. job</td>
<td>3. influence and prestige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. eat together</td>
<td>4. extra time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. telephone call</td>
<td>5. sponsorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. correspond by letter</td>
<td>6. display sincerity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. hospitality</td>
<td>7. show interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. clothes, shoes, etc.</td>
<td>8. concern in welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. visit</td>
<td>9. neutralize competition, conflict, or danger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. attend ceremonies</td>
<td>10. protect, defend support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. settle disputes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. arrange apprenticeships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. make contacts with creditors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts from Clients:</td>
<td>Gifts from Clients:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. labor, services</td>
<td>1. give patron mandate to lead, accepts followership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. chicken, goat, checken egg</td>
<td>2. respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. garden vegetables, fruit</td>
<td>3. risk life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. token money</td>
<td>4. continuous display of affection, deference, and obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. letter of thanks</td>
<td>5. loyalty, support, acclaim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. cooked food</td>
<td>6. friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. visit</td>
<td>7. protect, defend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. help patron manage transactions with other clients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like Chinchen, who had to make choices as to whether to accept or reject this unfamiliar role, ESL teachers are also faced with this same choice as they confront the social realities in their classrooms. The issues of reciprocity and exchange are not easy to negotiate. As ESL teachers often discover, the size and nature of their students’ requests present unique challenges to both teachers and students alike. Based on interviews at CCS and ELIS, Table 9 shows how teacher and student participants constructed the “respect exchange.” The respect exchange presents the expectations regarding the attitudes and behaviors that communicate respect in these contexts. A distinction is also drawn between how participants expected to give and receive respect.

The Exchange of Respect—The Teacher’s Perspective and the Good Will Bank

This study focused on the issue of respect, and how respect is communicated or fails to be communicated in these contexts. In looking at respect as a social commodity to be exchanged, one can see that teacher and student participants viewed this exchange somewhat differently and that this difference resulted in miscommunication and perceived disrespect.

Teachers and students in this study expected an exchange of respect. Although there were exceptions, the vast majority saw respect as a reciprocal exchange. Teachers in this study, especially those at CCS, expressed that they found it difficult to show respect without the student also being respectful in return; and teachers frequently alluded to the Golden Rule in their descriptions of respect. Several teachers, when asked to describe respect in ESL contexts, referred to the story of the “Good Will Bank.” The Good Will Bank was the creation of a full-time instructor at CCS, and represents how
teachers viewed the exchange of respect in these contexts. This metaphor describes how the exchange works from the point of view of the teacher and points to the existence of the patron-client relationship. In my interview with Nancy, she eagerly explained the meaning of the Good Will Bank and the “teacher-patron’s” expectation regarding the exchange:

D. [a full-time ESL instructor at CCS], has something...this is great...she has this thing called the Good Will Bank. She tells students the first day of class, that every student has an account in the Good Will Bank. They can make deposits in the Good Will Bank by coming to class on time, and doing their work, and participating in activities, and having their book, and all that kind of thing. And they can make withdrawals, by being late, skipping an assignment, or talking when she’s talking, or whatever. And the key is to have more deposits than withdrawals. So if you are a student who is always on time, and always does their work, and always has their book, and always behaves in a respectful way, then you can make a withdrawal from Good Will Bank later on in the semester if you need it. But if you haven’t made any deposits, and you try to make a withdrawal, then you will be overdrawn and be out of luck. And I’ve used this in my classes. So students really get that and understand, and it’s such a great analogy because they have all had bank accounts. And the reality is, although we try to be objective as teachers, those people who have made deposits, are more likely to get half a point, or a point, or so added to their grade and are more apt to get it. That’s just the way that life works, although it’s not really fair, but that’s just the way [it is].

The Biggest Withdrawers from the Good Will Bank—Disrespectful Students

Although students at times seemed reticent to share stories of teachers who had shown them disrespect, teachers were willing, and sometimes appeared preoccupied with, accounts of how students had been disrespectful to them. Two teachers, in particular, had difficulty staying on track with my interview questions and periodically regressed to stories concerning the disrespect they were shown. It is also important to note that all of the teacher participants in this study were able to recall times when students were disrespectful.
Teachers were also quite candid about certain types of students they found difficult to respect because they found their behaviors and attitudes to be disrespectful. These types of students all withdrew from The Good Will Bank and failed to reciprocate according to the expectations of The Respect Exchange. As such, they were unable to properly participate in the respect exchange, and were therefore not afforded the normal amounts of respect in return. The following is a list of types of students teacher participants identified (in their own words) as difficult to respect, a brief description of how they were defined within these contexts, and an explanation in light of The Goodwill Bank and Respect Exchange.

**The complainers.** Although teachers may not have realized they were part of a patron-client system, certain types of students made withdrawals from the Good Will Bank that disrupted the respect transaction. Complainers were no exception. They involved a set of students who were discontented with homework, lessons, schools, teachers, or classroom policy. Complainers withdrew heavily from their Good Will Bank accounts by challenging the power and/or authority of the teacher and by failing to offer the attitudinal “gift” of deference.

**The negotiators.** The Negotiators continually tried to bargain with teachers over grades, extra credit, or sought to negotiate school or classroom policy. Negotiators also challenged the decision-making authority of their teachers. Additionally, they wanted a greater say in the transaction, and would not take “no” as an answer. Negotiators transgressed the respect exchange in much the same way as The Complainers and therefore faced similar consequences.
The chit-chatters. Chit-chatters were students who talked excessively to classmates. In some cases, Chit-chatters committed an additional crime by speaking to others in their native languages. A Chit-chatter could also make a withdrawal by taking up a disproportional amount of class time asking or answering questions, even if the student were speaking with the instructor. Chit-chatters made hefty withdrawals by consuming too much of their monochronic teacher’s valuable commodity of time.

The slackers. Slackers were defined as students who did not complete assignments, failed to complete them on time, or completed assignments in an unsatisfactory manner. Additionally, students could be considered “Slackers” if they frequently arrived late, left early, asked for or demanded extra credit to eliminate their bad academic records, yawned loudly, or put their heads down during class. Slackers, in particular, failed to properly participate in the respect exchange, and were viewed as especially bothersome.

The bumps on logs. These students were those who were reticent to speak or participate in class and were typically Asian. Although these students were less offensive than The Slackers, they were nonetheless labeled as disrespectful because of their failure to appropriately reciprocate with proper “engagement” and “participation.” As such, they were viewed as difficult to respect.

The Generation 1.5s. Generation 1.5s were students born outside of the United States but had attended American middle schools and/or high schools. They were also generally seen as those who had acquired “the American high school attitude.” These
students frequently did not see the need for ESL classes and were often referred to as “the hardest to deal with.” Although not a problem at ELIS since nearly all the students were international students, Generation 1.5s presented some of the most difficult challenges to ESL teachers at CCS. According to teacher participants, this group is especially troublesome for ESL teachers because they are so different from “typical ESL students” who are generally motivated to learn and respectful toward their teachers. Appropriating Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter’s teaching roles, I believe Generation 1.5s often view the teacher as “the enemy.” They frequently believe their goals are different from the classes to which they have been assigned and see less need for an ESL teacher’s help. In addition, they do not identify with other ESL students because they have been in the United States for years and have attended American schools. Having already had prior experience as students in the U.S., they are accustomed to different teacher roles, and often reject their new role (student-client) and may refuse to regard their teachers as patrons. Consequently, they often fail to appropriately participate in the respect exchange and are therefore not afforded the same “respect gifts” that other ESL students receive.

In addition to these six groups, others were also labeled. Throughout my time as a teacher and researcher in these contexts, I became aware of the ways students were sometimes stereotyped by their countries of origin. When I spoke with Gary about hearing this, he explained that students often “get lumped together” in teachers’ minds if a group becomes a majority in the school. During the time of my observations at ELIS, the largest population of students came from Saudi Arabia and teachers’ references to “the Saudis” were not uncommon. The Saudi stereotype at times conjured up an image of a boisterous slacker. CCS was also not immune to stereotyping. Teachers frequently
referred to “The Generation 1.5s” or “The Egyptians.” As I mentioned earlier, Generation 1.5s were known for their attitude. Egyptians were generally considered negotiators. As an observer privy to conversations about such groups, I believe these groups were labeled or stereotyped because they challenged the authority of their patron-teachers and often failed to offer the gifts their patrons most expected and desired.

The Respect Exchange—The Students’ Perspective

Students also desired and expected respect from their teachers, and like their instructors, students came to the classroom with a degree of goodwill and respect already “credited” to their teachers’ accounts by nature of the teacher’s position in their own societies. The four concepts of mindful respect present a picture of the “gifts” of respect students appreciated receiving and/or expected to receive. However, what these concepts do not clearly explain are the benefits of good transactions, the consequences of bad transactions, and the importance of allowing students to reciprocate.

The Benefits of Good Transactions

Although students did not have such a developed or descriptive analogy of the respect exchange as the teachers in this study, the student interviews revealed their awareness of receiving the gift of respect. A good portion of my interviews with students was filled with accounts of teachers who had shown them respect. When students were respected, they generally responded with great appreciation and love for the teacher and enthusiasm for learning. During a member checking discussion with Minako, she expressed how she feels about and responds to teachers who communicate respect:
I will have positive attitudes. For example, I can enjoy and relax in his or her classes. I do not feel much pressure even if she requires lots of homework because I know she loves to help me when I do my best. I try to follow her teaching even though she speaks fast or soft because I believe that I can improve my English if I follow her. I do homework. Actually, I do homework for my grade even if I disagree with a teacher's teaching way. If I respect her, I take time to do homework to perform well. For example, when I need to make a word list, I try to make one creative sentence with using a new word. Next, I make sure whether the word fits the sentence or not with using the Internet. And also, I try to use the word in summary. I actively participate the classes. For example, if she or he asks something to students, I answer it. I visit her during her office time to ask questions.

The Consequences of Bad Transactions

Transactions or exchanges can also negatively affect the parties involved. Unfortunately, some student participants in this study had experienced some bad respect exchanges with teachers, ones characterized as disrespectful. During the student interviews, I had the opportunity to listen to students’ stories of disrespect, as well as how they responded or would respond to hypothetical disrespectful exchanges. When asked to describe how they had or would respond to a teacher who communicated disrespectfully, student answers varied greatly. Generally speaking, students expressed that they would feel embarrassed, sad, or angry; and several mentioned that they would hate a teacher who showed them disrespect. The most commonly reported behavioral response to disrespect, however, was to discuss it with the teacher to determine why the teacher communicated in a disrespectful manner. The need to confront the teacher was also connected to the need to find where to place the blame (i.e., on themselves or the teacher). Some mentioned immediate, direct confrontation, while others said they would talk to their teacher after class. Tatiana felt that if she were disrespected, she had to talk with the teacher because “without respect, a relationship wouldn’t develop... students
wouldn’t ask questions, even if they don’t understand. Students wouldn’t find it fun to go
to school.” Similarly, Nini explained, “I’ll just want to go home, but I will go [to the
teacher] and find out why. Is it my religion or me? If I can fix it, I will do my best. If I
can’t, then I will drop this class.”

Dropping the class or leaving the school was the second most common behavioral
response to disrespect. In an interview with Shinoty, he described the progression he felt
students go through when responding to disrespect: “They will feel frustrated and feel
afraid. You’ll get bad grades, not because you can’t study, but because you start to hate
the class, the subject, and the teacher...at last change the school [transfer to a different
school].”

Finally, students reported that they would avoid interacting with a teacher who
had communicated disrespectfully or become less involved in the class. Tim, a reserved
Thai student, blurted out, “I will never want to talk with him [a disrespectful teacher]. I
will hate him. Next time, I won’t ask the teacher for help...ever again. It’s finished.”
Minako articulated that when she is not treated respectfully, she responds by not caring
about the class or her assignments. She said, “I almost copy a sentence from a dictionary
but change one word because I think her [the teacher’s] way is not effective for me. I
don't want to take time to do her homework. As a result, I don't develop my vocabulary.”

It is important to note that most of the comments I received regarding disrespect
were hypothetical. However, the students’ responses to disrespect seem to indicate the
great importance of respectful communication to these students, as well as some common
ways students respond to disrespectful communication.
Respect Is Communicated When Students Are Able to Reciprocate

As seen in the concepts of respect, students understood respect was communicated when they felt the existence of a relationship was also communicated. In the context of the patron-client relationship, the give-and-take nature indicates the fact that there is a relationship. Therefore, being allowed to assist one’s teacher makes it clear that both parties have accepted the relational bond and like students expressed, it also expresses trust, acceptance, and ultimately respect. Additionally, allowing students to reciprocate also helps them to maintain their sense of dignity and self-worth. Chinchen (1994) states:

There will be no sense of self-worth if one is not allowed to reciprocate. The purpose of reciprocity in the patron-client system is for that very purpose: to avoid humiliation by allowing each party to maintain their dignity and self-respect by staying out of debt. “Bouncing a check” is shameful and degrading. (p. 165)

As mentioned in Chapter 4, one of the biggest surprises of this research endeavor involved the frequency of hearing students express that being allowed to help one’s teacher communicated respect. My exchange with Nini, like many others, made this clear:

Mark: How can a teacher show respect [to ESL students]?
Nini: If a teacher asks students to help with translation, I feel respected when teachers asks me to help them. If a teacher asks students to help move desks, this will show respect to me. The teacher makes you feel like a friend, and that you’re important.

Once one understands the link between communicating the existence of a relationship to students’ understanding of respect, one can also see that communication which results in students feeling ignored or not a priority becomes most egregious. In other words, nonverbal and verbal ways of communicating that failed to express a bond
between the student and the teacher were always interpreted as disrespectful, because if there were a bond, there would always be reciprocity and obligation.

**The Un-Authoritarian Authority**

Although ESL students and teacher participants in the study appeared to accept the teacher’s role as an authority, or as one having higher status, many expressed their displeasure when teachers were too authoritarian or directive. Gary was critical of a new teacher at ELIS whom he characterized as “very directive” and described her behavior as disrespectful. Later in the interview, I also asked Gary why he thought some teachers were disrespectful by being directive, and why this “directiveness” was not prevalent in other university classrooms. After pondering this for a few seconds, Gary came to the conclusion that it was perhaps due to a type of “cultural superiority” that enabled the teacher to speak in one way to people from other cultures, yet like peers to members of one’s own culture.

Both teachers and students alike described teachers who were too directive or authoritarian as disrespectful. During my observations, I also recorded comments such as, “I’m going to count to 10, and then you should be done.” “Hold on a second.” “Guys, listen!” On several occasions, I heard teachers raise their voices when students did not answer the right question. During one particular observation, I encountered this exchange:

Teacher: Maybe we will have a test [next time].
Student: Why?
Teacher: Because I’m the teacher and I can do what I want to.
(Later in the evening)
Teacher: If one person doesn’t give me the homework, I’m not going to give back your tests.
Teachers and students at CCS also told stories about a particular full-time teacher at CCS who was very authoritarian. The students did not speak kindly of her, but there were some teachers who admired her “for not putting up with anything.” Other instructors, however, commented on her “barking” and expressed that students were afraid of her. In the video clip I used as part of the interview process, many students described the teacher in the video as disrespectful because she simply told students what to do rather than asking them to raise their hands.

It is important to note that politeness in the English language is often encoded to complex modals. As a result, teachers often simplify their speech to help students understand their verbal instructions. However, the “barking” and terseness I observed and heard at both research sites did not appear to serve the purpose of comprehensibility. Rather, it often appeared to stem from the teacher’s impatience or frustration.

Although student participants generally described teachers who were too authoritarian as being disrespectful, students generally felt respectful teachers knew their subjects, organized their lessons, and explained things so students could understand. In direct contrast to aspects of Malcolm Knowles’s andragogical model, most adult students in this study expected respectful teachers to fully orchestrate a plan for developing their students’ English language proficiency. They also wanted their teachers to have the answers, and felt disrespected by responses such as “this is English” because it failed to provide the knowledge they felt teachers were obligated to provide. From all indications, student participants accepted the authority of the their ESL teachers but felt respectful teachers refrained from exploiting students by being too authoritarian.
Helpful and Hurtful Humor

Although an oft-mentioned aspect of respect in student interviews, teachers rarely spoke of the importance of humor’s connection with respect. In the student interviews it also became clear that there was a clear distinction between helpful and harmful humor. Helpful humor was seen as humor that enabled students to relax and enjoy the learning experience. Many students, especially those from Middle Eastern backgrounds, expressed the importance of the teacher not being too serious in the classroom. This type of humor also helped students sense a connection between themselves and their teachers, and they seemed to appreciate a more light-hearted pedagogical approach. In terms of the patron-client relationship, humor, like reciprocity, expresses a familiar relationship and allows for relational ties to develop.

Hurtful humor was generally described in two ways: (1) jokes, laughter, or teasing that students could not understand or (2) sarcasm that students clearly understood and caused them to feel disrespected. Several students mentioned times when their ESL teacher said something funny, but the students could not understand the joke. As the teacher, and at times several students, laughed together, those who were unable to understand the humor either felt left out or stupid for not understanding.

As mentioned earlier, several teachers recalled times they had used sarcasm but felt their students did not understand it or it “went over their [students’] heads.” My research indicates, however, that students were aware of times their teachers were sarcastic and felt this communicated disrespect.
The role of teacher as patron also explains how students would feel alienated from teachers when these harmful types of humor or sarcasm are present in the classroom. When students cannot share a mutual understanding of the humor or experience the sarcasm of their teacher-patron, students are left with feelings of betrayal and the perceptions that they were disrespected.

**The Importance of Correction**

The student participants in this study repeatedly mentioned the importance of correction as a way of communicating respect. Although I may have anticipated some connection between respect and correction, I did not anticipate how pervasive this was to students' conceptualizations of respect. Their comments during the interviews expressed a deep appreciation and desire for as much correction as they could get. Most did not seem to mind papers covered with red ink as long as the comments both clearly explained the errors as well as provided suggestions for correcting the mistakes. Students also welcomed correction of their spoken errors as long as these comments took into account students' face concerns.

In terms of the patron-client relationship, effective correction also communicates a relationship. According to student participants, correction expresses care, help, and concern. Like the clients in Chinchen's study, students also wanted the teacher's advice and counsel and saw it as a type of gift teachers provided in the respect exchange. Furthermore, students in this study had some understanding of the time involved in offering good corrections. In both Chinchen's study as well as this one, the time teacher-patrons offered to their students was understood as an important gift. Students at ELIS
and CCS repeatedly told stories of how the gift of time was one of the ways they felt assured that their teachers respected them.

Conversely, teachers who did not provide the correction students desired were seen as disrespected. In one particularly poignant moment in a student interview, the participant recalled how an ESL teacher had communicated disrespect by not giving adequate corrections and not returning the work in a timely fashion. The teacher told his students that he also needed time to eat and watch TV and as a result, he was not able to finish grading their papers. Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter's description of the patron-parent teacher role explains that teachers are expected to give knowledge. In failing to provide the correction students desired, teachers were perceived as withholding knowledge and therefore described as disrespectful.

The Importance of the Nonverbal

As I explained in Chapter 8, many student participants came from high-context cultural backgrounds. Individuals from high-context cultures tend to rely more on facets of communicated messages that are beyond the words of the message. In this study, one of the most frequently alluded to concepts in the communication of respect involved the importance of the nonverbal aspects, most notably a smile.

The importance of smiles and other forms of nonverbal communication that convey warmth, compassion, patience, love, etc., communicated the existence of a familial-type relationship and seemed to assure students of the presence of a relational bond as well as the respect gifts associated with this relationship. In Chinchen's study, patron-teachers gave the gifts of protection and sincerity to their students as relational
gifts. The students in this study also felt that respect was communicated through protection (in this case the provision of safe, protected atmosphere for learning) and described how the teacher’s face often conveyed this aspect of respect. Students also drew a connection between the teacher’s sincerity and respect, as understood via their nonverbal communication.

Understanding the Respect Exchange

The respect exchange (see Table 9) is a compilation of both teacher and student participants’ ideas regarding how they both gave and received respect in the context of adult ESL. The primary focus of my research involved understanding how adult ESL students conceptualized teacher respect and whether or not they found ESL instructors to be respectful. The student participants in this study also greatly outnumbered the teacher participants, so the interviews yielded far more data about students’ perceptions of respect than how teachers conceptualized respect in these contexts. However, teachers were eager to share both stories of how students communicated disrespectfully as well as the ways they as teachers communicated respect to their students. Their willingness to share enabled me to collect a substantive amount of data regarding how they understood both the giving and receiving of respect. In the student interviews, the majority of the time was spent listening to students’ description of times they felt their teachers had communicated respect. Students also shared stories of disrespect, and they described responses to respect/disrespect. Since the focus of my research dealt more with how they perceived the ways their ESL teachers communicated respect, I spent far less time inquiring about how they communicated respect to their teachers. As a result, the
interviews yielded less information about how they gave and reciprocated respect and much more regarding how they conceptualized the receiving of respect. In future research projects, I will make student perceptions of how they show respect to their teachers a greater priority in order to present a more complete picture of the respect exchange.

The Tangible and Intangible Aspects of a Respectful Relationship

Reciprocity within the context of a respectful relationship may involve both tangible and intangible means. This difference in the conceptualization of reciprocity within the respect exchange increases the chances for miscommunication between ESL teachers and their students. North American teachers may have had little to no experience giving gifts to their teachers beyond primary school and may be unprepared to deal with the gifts some ESL students offer them as instructors. ESL students may come from cultures where gift giving may be commonplace between students and college professors, and students may be unaware that their gifts may be misunderstood as bribes.

Chinchen's (1994) research indicates that the meaning of the gift may be interpreted symbolically. The African participants in his study preferred “to symbolize rather than verbalize important messages” (p. 157). Students did not verbally tell their teachers, “I respect you.” Instead, as Chinchen explains, “‘I respect you’...[was] communicated through the gift of cooked food” (p. 157). As a teacher in China, students frequently invited me to their homes for meals and at times brought various souvenirs and food items as gifts to me in class. Latino, Asian, and African students at my current place of employment regularly bring food and drinks as gifts before class and place them on my podium or desk. On most occasions, I have sought to share these items with the class
but have repeatedly been told by the gift giver that these were only for me to enjoy. Students have expressed that these gifts symbolize their appreciation and respect for my efforts to help them learn. As an instructor, I have observed that beginning level ESL students and ones less acculturated are generally more apt to give these types of gifts. Additionally, tangible gifts are associated with a deepening relational bond. Students who respected their teachers’ professionalism and hard work, may not be compelled to offer teachers tangible gifts. However, as the relationship between students and teachers develop and a sense of indebtedness grows, students appear more apt to give more tangible gifts.

As an ESL teacher, I have received a variety of tangible gifts from students (e.g., gift cards, cologne, souvenirs, food that students or their family members prepared, purchased food, etc.). The size and the frequency of these gifts have at times put me, as an ESL instructor, in an awkward position. Do I accept these gifts as a sign of appreciation and respect? Do I decide to return the gift to the student and risk the possibility of causing the student to feel rejected or hurt by this decision?

One of my female colleagues recently received expensive necklace as a gift from one of her Middle Eastern students. Without a formal policy in place, she found herself in an uncomfortable position. If she returned the necklace, she risked hurting the feelings of the student and undermining the relationship she and the student had built throughout the term. One of our colleagues advised her to keep the necklace because he felt the student would feel disgraced if she did not accept the gift. She wrestled with what to do and talked to several of her colleagues to get their advice. For this particular teacher, there was also a high probability that she would have this student in a future class, hence the
need to also maintain a proper teacher-student relationship. In the end, she decided to 
return the necklace “to avoid any miscommunication,” and at this point in time, the 
student has not reenrolled in any of her classes.

An understanding of the respect exchange within these contexts can be an aid to 
both ESL teachers and students. In order to communicate respectfully with students, 
issues surrounding respect and respectful communication need to be addressed through 
dialogue with students, colleagues, and school administrators. Policies should be 
established and explained in order to avoid awkward and uncomfortable gift-giving 
situations like the aforementioned examples. Teachers need to become more familiar with 
the various ways their students give and receive respect. ESL students need their teachers 
to help them understand how North American teachers understand and demonstrate 
respect and appreciation within academic contexts.

**Unmet Expectations and the Consequences of Nonparticipation**

Both parties in the exchange of respect listed a number of behavioral and 
attitudinal expectations regarding respect. As I mentioned earlier, unmet expectations 
were often considered the root cause behind the conceptualizations of disrespect. An 
awareness of expectations is a positive, initial first step toward better communication.

Although awareness and understanding are a good first step, they also need to 
lead to participation in the exchange in order for the relationship to develop; failure to 
participate may lead to serious breakdowns in relationships. Students in this study who 
failed to offer the gifts teachers desired (e.g., punctuality, attentiveness, etc.) were often 
not given the goodwill they afforded those who offered the attitudes and behaviors
teachers desired. Teachers who failed to provide the attitudes and behaviors students desired were at times confronted with less engagement and effort on the student’s part.

Additionally, teachers who are too “stingy” or authoritarian can eventually lose their “clientele” and become isolated. Student participants in this study recalled times they left schools or refused to participate in class when teachers failed to offer the respect they felt they deserved. Chinchen (1994) describes it this way:

Miserly patrons are vulnerable to becoming bereft of clientele if they insist on hoarding their wealth. Clients who believe a patron is becoming unfair, harsh or autocratic, disenfranchise the patron in protest and attach themselves to another patron. When clients desert a patron, the patron is left to function alone. (p. 163)

Communicating Respectfully

The respect exchange may appear to be a formidable challenge to ESL teachers. Student participants were quite forthright in what they believed constituted the behaviors and attitudes of respect. An attempt to fulfill all of what students understood as a respectful exchange would be an impossible feat and create an overwhelming sense of indebtedness on the part of the student. The pervasive message of the students’ stories of respectful encounters indicates the attitude of care coupled with availability and assistance in time of need were often all that was needed to communicate respect. These simple displays of care and kindness also cultivated respect and engendered affection in the hearts of students. Here again, Chinchen’s findings among his African participants reveal a marked similarity and demonstrate the nature of what is required to have a respectful relationship with students:

Little acts of kindness, showing you care and are thinking about the person translates the relationship into the emotional realm. Tapping into the socio-
emotional domain (through a token gift, a [sic] help in time of need, sharing, or a verbal expression of affinity) fuses the relational link, preparing the way for unbelievable acts of loyalty, respect and support. … Those who have become culturally competent in the skill of tapping into the emotions with the reciprocity tool find themselves caught up in warm and lasting relationships, built on the firm foundation of trust. (pp. 167-168)

In other words, ESL instructors who genuinely care about their students and find ways to demonstrate this care through respectful behaviors will be more apt to move the relationship from a more formal relationship to one characterized by affection, trust, and ultimately respect.

Table 9

The Respect Exchange

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers’ Perceptions of the Respect Exchange</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Giving Respect to Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Well-organized lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Assistance in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fulfill responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Appropriate availability (as defined by the teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Prepare students for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Professional, modest dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Flexible (but with professional limits as defined by teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Receiving Respect from Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Obeying rules/class policies (e.g., attendance, punctuality, cell phone usage, plagiarism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Working hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Making school a priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Treating others (including the teacher) the way they want to be treated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

continued on next page
Receiving Respect from Students (continued)

Behaviors (continued):
5. Listening/paying attention (not distracted
6. Not speaking in one’s native language du

Attitudes:
1. Engagement with teacher, classmates, les
2. Enjoyment of the learning process
3. Deference

Students’ Perceptions of Respect Exchange

Giving Respect to Teachers

Behaviors:
1. Listening
2. Asking questions, especially after class
3. Expressing thanks (verbally, via email, etc.)
4. Behaving appropriately in class
5. Sitting in the front of the classroom
6. Showing dependence
7. Praising teachers and their teaching
8. Ongoing compliments
9. Giving souvenirs
10. Bringing cooked or purchased ethnic food
11. Offering to help
12. Giving teachers good evaluations

Attitudes:
1. Hardworking
2. Attentiveness

Receiving Respect from Teachers

Behaviors:
1. Making oneself available
2. Asking questions about students’ lives
3. Listening to students
4. Giving clear explanations
5. Patiently helping students with learning difficulties
6. Making expectations known
7. Connecting with students
8. Assisting inside and outside of class

continued on next page
Receiving Respect from Teachers (continued)

Behaviors (continued):
9. Providing handouts
10. Apologizing for mistakes
11. Refraining from saying negative things about others
12. Being there in time of need
13. Smiling
14. Nonverbal communication of care, warmth, and kindness
15. Offering advice
16. Providing emotional support during difficulties
17. Using appropriate humor
18. Acknowledging and speaking in a way that recognizes the student’s age, experience, abilities, etc.
19. Praising students
20. Greeting students
21. Protecting and creating a safe learning environment
22. Allowing students to assist the teacher and reciprocate
23. Taking care of sick/injured students
24. Giving advice regarding jobs, schooling, advancement, etc.
25. Inviting students to teacher’s home
26. Eating with students
27. Providing transportation to students
28. Writing letters of recommendation
29. Dressing modestly
30. Making cultural accommodations
31. Giving students a voice in the classroom
32. Giving students choices
33. Treating students equally and fairly
34. Responding sensitively and empathically to students’ situations
35. Encouraging students
36. Correcting students’ errors
37. Giving good advice and suggestions

Attitudes:
1. Caring
2. Warmth
3. Kindness
4. Flexibility
5. Sincerity
6. Welcoming
7. Valuing (students and their accomplishments)
Receiving Respect from Teachers (continued)

Attitudes (continued):
8. Acceptance
9. Understanding
10. Light-heartedness
11. Concern
12. Interest
13. Approachability
14. Openness
15. Empathy
16. Sensitivity
17. Patience
18. Love of teaching
19. Interest in subject
20. Eagerness/willingness to help
CHAPTER 10

THE AGE-APPROPRIATENESS/INAPPROPRIATENESS OF ADULT ESL

How Age-Appropriate Is Adult ESL?

As evident in the student and teacher interviews, ESL instruction was not always viewed as age-appropriate. At times, students complained about ESL teachers who talked to them in a manner that failed to recognize their cognitive and emotional maturity as well as their experience as adults. This appeared to be far more common among older participants in this study. Some teachers also mentioned times when they had witnessed teachers talking to students in ways that failed to recognize that they were speaking to fully-functioning adults.

Probably the most obvious ways teachers treated students as children were by referring to them as “kids” or “my kids.” It is important to note that the majority of students did not feel that this was disrespectful; however, they often interpreted it through the lens of their own cultures where teachers took on more parental roles. To some students, referring to students as “kids” or “my kids” was a term of endearment. To others, it was inappropriate and disrespectful.

Students, however, mentioned not being treated as adults in the way they were corrected or reprimanded for not coming to class on time, not having their homework, not raising their hands, or not knowing the correct answer. In these cases, the tone of voice
the teacher used was what reportedly made teachers appear to be instructing in ways that were deemed inappropriate for adults. Teachers who did not treat their adult students in an age-appropriate manner were described as being sarcastic, frustrated, annoyed, naggy, or angry.

Students also reported feeling treated as children when certain games, songs, or other activities were used which were perceived as unessential to the learning of English. Diane’s use of her candy basket as a means to elicit answers to questions was seen as an extremely childish and disrespectful to student participants at CCS. Although I had expected students to feel similarly about the stimuli teachers used to get the attention of the students (i.e., lights, bells, etc.), most did not associate these means with being treated as children no matter how strange or disrespectful they found these techniques to be.

**Toward an Understanding of the Pedagogy/Andragogy Conundrum in Adult ESL Contexts**

The story of Diane was a great puzzle to me during the time of my research. I was perplexed by how a teacher who manipulated students with candy, talked to them in a voice that seemed like she were speaking to children, and pushed and prodded students into poses for pictures, was also regarded as “respectful teacher.” During my tenure as a colleague and researcher at ELIS, people praised Diane, and both Mary and Gary alluded to Diane in their discussions of what constituted a respectful teacher. Students also loved Diane, and although I asked them not to use the names in their interviews, some spoke of Diane as a respectful teacher. Why?
In Chapter 1, I mentioned that I became interested in the topic of my research because I had witnessed ways of teaching in the field of ES/FL that at times seemed inappropriate for the instruction of adults. One of my primary pursuits, then, became one of discovering how ESL students felt about ESL teachers’ pedagogical approaches and methods of instruction. In studying adult learning theories, I became acutely aware of the specific needs of adult learners, especially the needs to have one’s experience respected and the need for an emotionally safe place to learn.

In Chapter 2, I illustrated the comparison between pedagogical and andragogical models of instruction. Table 1 shows the contrast between these two very different models of instruction: a pedagogical approach to instruction which understands the learner as dependent and sees motivation as something external, and an andragogical, more adult-like approach to teaching that encourages the learner to “forsake dependency” and sees learner motivation as something more internal. Many of the ESL classrooms I observed, including Diane’s, followed what Freire referred to as “The Banking Approach” to instruction and appeared more pedagogical than andragogical. In Diane’s case, her students appeared quite happy with her approach and none reported finding it oppressive.

As I observed Diane’s way of communicating with her students, how she managed classroom behavior, and the types of activities she chose to incorporate in her lessons, I again witnessed a way of teaching quite foreign from other types of adult learning situations I had previously encountered. As I typed the transcripts of my observations of Diane’s classroom, I felt that future readers would find her behavior to be
strange at best, or perhaps even appalling. The nagging question, however, was why did her students and colleagues regard her as an example of respect?

Mann (1990, p. 57) notes that the presentation of very generous gifts brings high prestige to the giver, and I believe the answer the aforementioned question is largely related to this point. Diane generously gave the most desired “gifts” in the respect exchange. The most highly valued gifts of respect, or the ones most frequently mentioned to by students, were gifts of time, availability, correction, compassion, and encouragement. Diane freely gave these gifts, as noted by Diane’s students, colleagues, and academic director. While I was a teacher at ELIS, I remember Gary telling me that he often had to tell Diane to go home because she spent a great deal of time helping students after classes. Gary also expressed his concern for Diane not taking care of herself because she spent so much time offering assistance to students. When asked to give an example of respect that he witnessed at ELIS, Gary said, “Everything Diane does…. She is compassionate to students to her own frustration. She’s just an extremely compassionate woman.”

This case seems to suggest that when these gifts are present, the prestige of the giver is raised to a level that appears relatively free from criticism in other areas. In my interview with Gary, he repeatedly said that respectful communication was “from adult to adult.” He also described teachers who were too “directive” or who “told” rather than “asked” students to do certain things as being disrespectful. However, I frequently observed Diane’s “directive” ways of communicating with students and times she spoke with students as if she were speaking to a child. During one interview, a teacher at ELIS mentioned a particular teacher who spoke “like she was verbally petting a dog.” I cannot
prove that this was Diane, but at the time of the interview I could not think of another
teacher who spoke to students like this, other than Diane.

What is also interesting is that Gary held strong views that ESL should be taught
in a way that is appropriate for adults. The following exchange illustrates this view and
his explanation of why he felt some adult ESL teachers taught the same way they would

teach children:

Mark: You keep mentioning that respectful teaching is from “adult to adult.”
What do you think of activities or behaviors that are generally seen more
in elementary classrooms but are also found in ESL classrooms as well?
…Or teachers who use bells or lights to get students to pay attention?

Gary: I recently interviewed a teacher who told me that she was a university ESL
instructor, and she tells them [her students] that she’s a mother hen. I
would be lying if I didn’t say that this immediately put me off and to think
that I don’t see that as a respectful approach to adults.

…I’ve used the light switch thing as a means of getting students to go to
classes. My gut is the bell bothers me…ringing the bell to get attention. I
have not seen that the light bothers students, or have read that in their
faces. I wouldn’t have thought so, but I have done it...

Mark: Why do you think teachers use these methods?

Gary: I think this is because most teachers’ experience tends to be from their K through
12 experiences, and it’s an easy way to rely on what they believe a classroom
looks like.

At a later point in the interview, Gary also explained his view that the hierarchical nature
of earlier educational experiences provides the guide for many ESL teachers. However,
he did not feel this was beneficial, because he also stated, “that without proper mentoring,
this continues.” He went on to explain:

When I approach the students like we are colleagues in the journey of language, it
makes so much more sense… We’re all [teacher and students] working for the
same end. In coming from that perspective, then, there is adult-to-adult dialogue.
Then, it’s the same way as talking to friends.
Gary’s views align themselves with both TESOL’s perspective regarding the instructions of adults and andragogical principles of teaching. During our interview, Gary also expressed how treating ELIS students as adults demonstrated respect. However, he was unable to see Diane’s behaviors as anything but respectful.

Gary and most of Diane’s colleagues were not the only ones who found Diane to be a respectful teacher. In my interviews with students at ELIS, students rarely mentioned communication that was disrespectful and none related incidences of disrespect directly traceable to Diane. One possible explanation as to why students at ELIS may have been reluctant to describe teachers like Diane as disrespectful may have been due to a perceived debt they felt to their “patron/parent.” During the time of my observations, Diane taught many of the lower-level classes. Many of the student participants in the study were Diane’s former students and a few had her as a teacher during the time of research. Diane had provided many of these students with their foundational English courses. She had also given a great deal of support to students as they traversed the initial stages of adjustment.

As an ESL teacher of beginning, intermediate, and advanced level students, I am aware of the special bond that exists between teachers and students, particularly ESL beginners. The role the teacher plays is generally more teacher-centered because students are highly dependent due to their language limitations. Beginners, especially those found in IEPs or those new to the United States, are often in need of emotional support as they face a variety of challenges in their unfamiliar surroundings. In terms of the patron-client ties, they lean heavily on their patron-teacher, and reciprocate with loyalty, respect, and
appreciation. Scott (1972) states that “a debt of obligation binds the client to patron” (p. 93), and I would contend that this “debt of obligation” is especially strong between ESL beginners and their teachers. The need to reciprocate is a salient feature of the patron-client dyad, and loyalty to one’s patron is a common way to balance the equation. It is my assertion that this loyalty is shown when students withhold commenting negatively about their teachers.

It is also interesting to note that when I described Diane’s use of candy to students at CCS, they generally felt, regardless of their time the United States, that this type of behavior was inappropriate for adults and disrespectful. Hamza, in particular, appeared noticeably disturbed when I described how Diane used candy to elicit answers and exclaimed, “We’re not two or three-year-olds!” Without an obligation to a patron, students appeared to be free to describe the behavior as “disrespectful” and “childish.”

Finally, I believe the nature of the patron-client dyad allows some students to accept teacher behaviors and ways of communicating that resemble parent-child communication patterns. During my interview with Tatiana, she explained that teachers in Colombia can refer to their students as muchachos and expressed that she was not bothered by teachers treating her like a child during ESL classes. She, like several other student participants, felt when teachers referred to them as “kids” or “my kids” that this helped students feel close to their teachers. Other students said that it was okay to treat students like children because when “ESL students learn a language they become like children.” Several others shared that when teachers treated ESL students like they were their children that this “showed I have a close relationship with my teacher.” An
exchange with Sammy illustrates the feelings of some students regarding both the use of childish games and teachers calling students their “kids.”

Mark: If you saw a teacher have his or her students play games in class, and these are a lot of fun, but they’re for children, not what people would normally think were for adults, what would you think?

Sammy: The first thing that appeared in my mind is that the teacher is so kind, so polite, so respectful... He just wants to get involved with his or her students, by any method... I respect him for doing this.

Mark: Would it be wrong for a teacher to talk to their adult students as if they’re children or call them “kids”? Is this okay?

Sammy: It’s cute to say that. They are just trying to build a relationship...show us they care.

Additionally, students at ELIS often described their school as a “family” or “home” and seemed to both accept and enjoy the familial ties, including their roles as “children” in this environment. Some students, especially those in earlier stages of acculturation, may be able to accept activities, games, tone of voice, behavior management techniques, etc., that are more frequently associated with children, or may also even be able to accept being called a kid if this could be interpreted as a bond between the teacher and student. Respect, then, in this context could be considered the communication of a relational bond to students who needed a “patron” and teachers who desired a “client.”

**Toward an Understanding of How to Make the Adult ESL Classroom More Respectful**

In order to make the ESL classroom a more respectful place to adult students, the teacher must be open to challenging established ways of doing things. Classroom activities that appear quite normal in American classrooms, where teachers and students share similar understandings of symbols and rituals, can become quite complicated matters in the multi-cultural context of adult ESL. Therefore, it is important that any new
activity a teacher introduces be accompanied by an explanation of the purpose of the activity and how it relates to the development of English proficiency. In this study, students recounted times when they felt teachers failed to communicate respect by introducing games or activities that did not seem connected to learning. In order to teach respectfully, the teacher must begin by choosing activities that relate to the cultural practices of students or by explaining how and why the activities serve the students’ interests. When students fail to understand the purpose of games or activities, they felt disrespected because they failed to receive what they felt the teacher was obligated to share—her or his wealth of knowledge.

Another way to make learning more respectful is by allowing students the opportunity to reflect on activities and discuss their effectiveness with the teacher. Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter (2003) state that new ways of teaching should be introduced in cross-cultural settings if they promote positive changes. They advocate for experiential learning activities that include a time for students to reflect upon the learning process. Teacher and student participants in this study did not mention these types of learning activities in their interviews, nor did I witness experiential learning activities during my observations. However, many students expressed that they felt respected when teachers both listened to them and gave them voice in the learning process. Allowing students the time to discuss and reflect after learning activities would serve the dual purpose of helping students feel “listened to” while giving students “more voice.”

Finally, this study showed that ESL students are able to accept a number of different teacher behaviors, even if they deem them to be “strange” or “unusual.” The use of bells, lights, and whistles was viewed as foreign ways of regaining the student’s
attention; however, when faced with a choice of various methods, students chose “being
asked to be quiet” as the most respectful. Asking for student input as to the types of
behavior management methods that should be used in the classroom, coupled with a
willingness to adapt ways of teaching to make them more respectful, would do much to
ameliorate any conceptions of disrespect. The question, therefore, should not be “Is this
activity or behavior acceptable?” but whether it is the most respectful it can be.

The power differential between teachers and students is a part of our educational
system. Whether this power is used to dominate or empower adult students is largely in
the hands of educators. Through true relationship and dialogue, a respectful and more
equitable world is able to exist in classrooms, even in the midst of other unequal social
realities.
In this final chapter, I will provide summative answers to the research questions presented in chapter 1, discuss the implications of this study, and make suggestions for more respectful communication within ESL contexts. It is important to note that the results of these findings are true within these particular contexts: an IEP and a community college in a southern region of the United States. As a teacher and researcher in other parts of the United States, I have become aware that the degree of respect within the adult ESL context varies considerably by region, institution, and classroom.

Conclusions

How Is Respect/Disrespect Communicated to Students in an ESL Context?

Throughout the interview processes at both CCS and ELIS, I gained an enormous amount of data regarding the question of how students understood the communication of respect/disrespect within the adult ESL context. As I sifted through the data, it became apparent that students believed respect was communicated via the following four concepts: respect as intentional appreciation, respect as caring relationship, respect as supportive help, and respect as comfortable space. In most cases, disrespect involved the absence of any of these four aspects. Building off of Sung’s description of various forms
of respect, this study also led to the discovery of 11 forms of respect: presentational respect, salutary respect, acquiescent respect, andragogical respect, spatial respect, consultative respect, care respect, celebrative respect, linguistic respect, kinesic-paralinguistic respect, and professional respect.

What also emerged from these findings was the prominence of an analogous patron/parent teaching role as the one most closely aligned to students’ understanding of respect and how students and teachers in this study understood the communication of respect in terms of a reciprocal exchange (see Table 9). As the patron/parent role suggests, students were not interested in a superficial relationship, but a familial-type role. Like other roles, this role changed depending on the needs of students and appeared to lessen with acculturation and as students found other support systems within their individual contexts.

**How Do ESL Teachers and Students Differ in Their Understanding of Respect/Disrespect?**

Although there appears to be more congruity between the way teachers and students understood respect in terms of the four concepts outlined in this research project, a good degree of incongruity existed among the themes that comprised these concepts. Students placed more emphasis on acknowledging and valuing students’ accomplishments, experience, and age; showing care; encouraging students; accepting students; spending time with students; and greeting students. Both teachers and students mentioned that rules were important to the communication of respect; however, teachers
placed greater emphasis on the establishment of rules, whereas students stressed the importance of clearly explaining rules and expectations.

The greatest differences between teachers’ and students’ understanding of how respectful communication took place in ESL contexts, however, were in regards to teachers’ apologies, error corrections, non-verbal communication, the creation of comfortable learning atmospheres, and asking students for help. Nearly all student participants mentioned these as important components of respectful communication although teacher participants rarely (or never in the case of “asking students to help”) mentioned these aspects. Teachers, however, placed more stress on the idea of the mutuality of respect and application of the Golden Rule.

**How Do Students Respond to Perceived Disrespect?**

When asked how they had or would respond to a teacher who communicated disrespect, student answers varied greatly. Generally speaking, most students expressed that they would feel embarrassed, sad, or angry; and several mentioned that they would hate a teacher who showed them disrespect. The most commonly reported behavioral response to disrespect, however, was to discuss it with the teacher to determine why the teacher communicated in a disrespectful manner. Some mentioned immediate, direct confrontation, while others said they would talk to their teacher after class. Dropping the class or leaving the school was the second most common behavioral response to disrespect. Finally, students reported that they had or would avoid interacting with a teacher who had communicated disrespectfully. It is also interesting to note that unlike Buttner’s (2004) student participants who claimed they would retaliate by being
disrespectful to teachers who communicated in ways perceived to be disrespectful, the participants in this study never mentioned this in their responses.

**Do Students Find ESL Instruction Age-Appropriate?**

As evident in both the student and teacher interviews, ESL instruction was not always seen as age-appropriate. Student participants complained about ESL teachers who talked to them in a manner that failed to recognize their maturity. Older participants as well as those who had spent more time in the United States seemed to be more sensitive to not being treated as an adult. Teacher participants also mentioned times when they had witnessed teachers talking down to students or instructors who appeared to be unaware of the fact that they were interacting with fully-functioning adults. Through both discussions with participants and my own observations, the aspects of classroom communication that seemed the least age-appropriate involved the correction students received, the implementation of various behavior management techniques, the use of certain games and learning activities, and the references teachers made to students as “kids.” What this study also indicates is that the particular nature of the patron-client roles that ESL teachers often play may lead to a type of cultural blinder to the age-inappropriateness of certain types of attitudes and behaviors.

**Implications**

**Implications for Cross-Cultural Educators of Adults**

Knowles, Knox, Rogers, Freire, Vella, Wlodkowski, and many others offer adult educators a great wealth of information concerning adult learning and teaching. Generally, authors in the field of adult learning propose an andragogy/pedagogy that
takes into account the experience of the adult learner. They pose a way of teaching that focuses on the learners' needs, relating learning to lives of the learner, the benefits of collaborative learning, and the production of citizens who are better able to make a contribution in a democratic society. What few of these authors in the field take into account are the cultural differences that determine how teaching roles are understood and negotiated by teachers and learners in intercultural classroom contexts. In an increasingly global society, the awareness of different conceptions of good and respectful teaching is vitally important. A one-size-fits-all approach to one's teaching role is no longer effective in multi-cultural classrooms so prevalent in the United States.

What this study shows is that teachers must also be familiar with and be willing to appropriate different types of teaching roles. In Teaching Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching, Lingenfelter and Lingenfelter (2003) demonstrate that western teachers have often made grave errors by imposing their own beliefs regarding teaching and learning on their students. By imposing one's own teaching role on others, one also judges others' conceptions of teaching and learning as inferior, inadequate, or ineffective. This study exemplifies the fact that other teaching roles may be more effective in cross-cultural settings. Although many North American adult educators would be uncomfortable describing their role as parent or patron, this study shows that this role is often expected and at times perceived as more respectful than other roles. This study calls for a broader conceptualization of good teaching and a willingness to continually challenge one's own assumptions.
Implications for TESOL and ESL Instructors

Although little has been written on the subject of respect in TESOL and in ESL instruction, there is an assumption that ESL teachers have an *apriori* obligation to respect their students and treat them with dignity because of their students' innate value as human beings. How this is enacted, however, has not been always been clearly defined. Assumptions can be dangerous creatures, especially when the communicators have message sending and receiving systems that are vastly different. Respectful interchanges with students are largely shaped by teachers, and I believe in many ways the teacher embodies the respectful environment.

Implications for the ESL Teaching Profession

Current economic factors place a great deal of strain on instructors in the field of TESOL. Full-time instructors generally work more hours, have less time off, and pay for a greater percentage of healthcare and other work-related benefits than they did in the past. Part-time teachers are often not compensated for hours beyond their instructional time. Therefore, many part-time instructors simply do not have as much time as they would like to spend with students, prepare lessons, grade papers, etc., and many have to work several positions in order to provide for themselves and their families. It is important to note that students in this study aligned the communication of respect with the teacher's presence, availability, helpful corrections, as well as caring behaviors that extended beyond the instructional time. Therefore, ESL teachers must engage their school administrations and with society, until there are more full-
time positions and better working conditions for part-time instructors that allow more student access to teachers and more time to attend to students’ needs.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the concepts of respect presented in this research do not necessarily require time beyond the allotted periods. Attentive listening, being present in the classroom, engagement with students, and treating students as inherently worthy of respect do not take longer, but they do require the intentionality of the teacher. Acknowledging students’ experience, abilities, talents, and uniqueness, also require an ethic of care and respect rather than an abundance of time. However, outside stressors, such as time constraints, often hinder and impede respect by taking attention away from students.

If TESOL believes in an ethic of respect and care, then there is a need to continue the fight for conditions that allow respect and care to flourish. The dialogue must continue among teachers and with students regarding what constitutes respectful/disrespectful communication. Racial impartiality and equitable treatment of all students needs to be an ultimate goal. As was revealed in this study, many teachers mentioned either disrespect within the field, a colleague’s disrespect, or their own disrespectful ways of communicating; however, none of the participants mentioned how they dealt with these violations of respect. Additionally, the teacher interviews revealed how instructors appreciated the opportunity to discuss the communication of respect, their challenges to respect students, and self-awareness of the need to improve their communication. As mentioned in Chapter 3, teacher participants described how the qualitative interviews were a helpful opportunity to reflect on respect in ESL contexts, and one teacher expressed that the interview was an appropriate metaphor for respectful
teacher-student communication. Without judging teachers’ attitudes or behaviors, several teachers became aware of ways they had not communicated respectfully with students. They also discovered types of students that challenged their ability to communicate in a respectful manner. To me, this speaks of the need for a safe space where teachers can voice their concerns regarding respect and challenge attitudes and behaviors that are disrespectful within the field. It also speaks of the necessity of a place where teachers can reflect on the ways their schools and classrooms dehumanize rather than honor the humanity and human experience of those within its walls. The concepts of respect and the forms of respect presented in this study provide a springboard for further discussions on respectful communication within ESL contexts.

Nel Noddings’ (1984) ethics of care, commonplace in the field of education, has not found the same foothold in the field of TESOL. Since care was such a predominant concept in participants’ understanding of respect within this research study, it is also an ethic that needs considerable attention in both teacher training and curriculum development.

The issue of disrespect in ES/FL contexts is also one that needs to be thoroughly addressed within the field of TESOL. Although it seems obvious, the need to refrain from attitudes and behaviors that communicate disrespect is still in need of attention. According to Shono’s research, “the issue of respect and refraining from using condescending language when communicating with language learners has not been...discussed in the literature on second/foreign language teaching of adults, and it is a concern that must be differentiated from both foreigner and teacher talk” (p. 170). As Shono also contends, there is a difference between “foreigner talk” and “teacher
talk” (both of which are intended to aid and/or scaffold listening comprehension) and talk that leaves students feeling disrespected or belittled. Since many adult ELLs’ speech is plagued with a variety of errors, it is sometimes difficult for instructors to remember that they are teaching intelligent adults. However, it is imperative that teachers instruct in ways that intentionally honors their students’ age, experience, and personhood.

Furthermore, the implications of this study on pedagogical practices are many. Although mentioned in established literature, the importance of teachers being explicit in terms of rules, assignments, activities, and homework as well as the need to explain why these are important to learning were themes echoed by student participants and a key component of students’ understanding of respect. The importance of meaningful, abundant, and respectful correction was also vital to students’ understanding of respectful teacher communication, and much of what students shared in this regard was in direct opposition to contemporary thought on error correction. Therefore, what language teachers need to explore with students are acceptable means of correction that both meets students’ needs for feedback yet does not overwhelm the learner.

Additionally, humor and its place in the ESL classroom is an issue that needs further discussion. Two types of humor existed in the minds of the student participants involved in this study: a safe, helpful type and an anxiety-producing, harmful type. I believe humor will be respectful if instructors consider the following:

1. Does it have an educative or corrective message (yet not bring into question the essential worth of all human beings)?
2. Does it lead to cognitive, emotional, and social equilibrium?
3. Does it imply self and other awareness and concern?
4. Does it have a gentle, healing, or constructive quality?
5. Does it act as an interpersonal lubricant thus constituting an asset?
6. Is it based on acceptance and centered on the students’ needs and welfare?
7. Does it strengthen, brighten, or alleviate?

*Based on Salameh’s (1983) suggestions for therapeutic humor (pp. 83-84).*

Finally, as schools seek to retain ESL students, they must also confront the question of why students sometimes leave ESL programs. Throughout the interview process, students shared how they had left one particular ESL program because they felt disrespected by teachers and/or the school administration. Students also shared how they avoided particular teachers because of the lack of respect they were shown. An understanding of what respectful communication means to students and a commitment to interact in ways that enhances this type of communication, seems pivotal to student retention and the further development of ESL and international education programs.

**Implications for Teacher Training**

Contemporary teacher education in TESOL has traditionally seen intercultural communication as an integral component of the teacher-training curriculum. In many foundational courses, ethical matters, such as respect, are also considered and discussed. However, what appear to be lacking are courses and curricula that specifically deal with adult learning and teaching. Although many texts devote a small portion of the text to matters of adult learning or teaching, this seems insufficient. As was evident in several of the accounts of disrespect recalled by participants in this study, students often found ESL teachers’ methods of instruction
to be more appropriate for younger students. Teachers were also aware of colleagues whose attitudes and behaviors were inappropriate for adults, and often attributed these behaviors to drawing upon their own educational experiences as children and young adults. Constructing curricula and activities congruent with principles of adult learning and these new findings regarding the meaning of respect have the potential to make a difference. Teacher-trainers who embrace and model a pedagogy that respects the dignity and uniqueness of all adult learners would also do much to address this crucial component of teacher effectiveness and infuse the curriculum with multicultural understanding of respect.

Although I had asked students not to mention the names of teachers in the interviews, students inadvertently said the name of several teachers when telling stories about how teachers had communicated respect. During the teacher interviews, I was interested in seeing any “common denominators” that existed among the teachers students deemed as respectful. Along with certain attitudes and behaviors, the teachers that students most often found to be respectful also were ones who reportedly spent a good deal of time reflecting on their teaching.

This study also showed that teachers and students do not always understand respectful communication similarly. Teachers repeatedly mentioned that their understanding of respect involved “doing unto others the way you would have them do unto you.” However, they applied their own cultural values to communicate respect and to interpret how their students communicated respect/disrespect. What this study shows, then, is that teachers need to gain a better understanding of their students’ conceptualizations of respectful communication. They also need to accept
and appreciate the differences in understanding, and seek to communicate with more intercultural competency.

Scholars and educators have been calling for greater incorporation of the student voices in the educational process. Freire (1970) contended that the absence of this voice was a form of oppression. In *Experience in Education*, Dewey (1938) showed that the experience, needs, and interests of the learner must be a part of the learning process if it is to be truly educative. The fact that incongruity between teachers’ and students’ conceptions of respectful teacher communication exists in this study and others illustrates that the voice of students has in some part gone unheeded. Yet, a pervasive belief in higher education and in ESL is that it is the job of the non-native speaker to adapt to the dominant academic culture. Those who espouse this view believe that this will better prepare students for future educational endeavors. Although there might be some truth to this, research also shows that traversing cultures is a formidable task. Without the correct language and cultural tools essential for success, non-native speakers are forced to adapt without the usual support systems. In my opinion, the creation of a third culture in the ESL classroom helps deliver this. I envision this “third culture” as one that resembles the mainstream academic culture; however, it also respects and celebrates the cultural differences that abound. This is a culture that provides space for students to experience the new culture, yet also honors the voices and values of those within this space.

One additional implication for teaching lies in the fact that ESL teachers are predominantly Anglo, yet they instruct a population that generally is not. Rather than assuming that ESL instruction is innately respectful, the fact that there are
stereotypes, biases, ethnocentrism, and disrespect within the field needs to be addressed so that these components can be eradicated. Multicultural understandings of ethical issues, such as respect, should a play more predominant role in foundational TESOL and applied linguistics coursework. A more diverse ESL teaching profession has and will continue to do much to ameliorate various barriers to respectful communication within the field. In addition, TESOL may want to develop a code of ethics that includes a description and definition of respectful instruction for professionals within the field.

Finally, I believe Howard Gardner’s *Five Minds for the Future*, explicates the importance of “the respectful mind” for a world of accelerating globalization. The essence of “the respectful mind” is a capacity to appreciate the differences that exist among people. Tolerance is not enough; respect requires more than just recognition of differences but a sincere acceptance and valuing of those who belong to different groups. Gardner holds that where the capacity to respect others from different cultures may have been an option in the past, it is now a vital capacity—one that educators must seek to develop in themselves and inculcate in their students.

**Implications for Further Research**

**Researching the teacher.** Further research is necessary to clarify and expand what has been learned regarding the communication of respect within ESL contexts. Specifically, it would be interesting to learn how institutions that offer degrees in TESOL and applied linguistics inculcate (or fail to inculcate) their future teachers with the ethics of care and respect. Many TESOL programs require a course in
intercultural communication. Although it was not part of this study, the impact of such a course and its role in how teachers communicate respect/disrespect might prove to be a worthy research endeavor.

Additionally, I believe more needs to be discovered regarding part-time ESL instructors’ conceptualizations of respect. Since it was far more difficult to schedule time to interview this group, and in the end only two were willing to schedule interviews with me, this population needs a greater voice in order for a more complete picture to be presented. This is especially important since part-time instructors make up such a significant part of the ESL milieu.

Finally, this study revealed a number of groups that ESL teachers found difficult to respect. The reasons behind this and the resulting biases and behaviors that extend from these beliefs are a cause for concern, attention, and additional research.

**Researching the student.** Another area in need of further research involves looking at individual cultures for their unique sets of beliefs regarding the communication of respect. Since this study involved 17 different cultures, some with only one participant, it is impossible to reliably describe their idiosyncratic conceptualizations of respect based solely on culture. It appears to me that respect research regarding the largest ethnic groups represented in ESL programs across the United States would prove a worthy pursuit.

Concerning research involving student conceptualizations of respect, it seems important to understand how ESL students differ from American college students in regards to their understanding of respectful communication. Additionally, there
remains a need to research how students from other countries communicate and reciprocate respect. Due to the lack of studies conducted on the topic of respect in higher education, this appears to be a particularly important area in need of further study.

One particular population I wish had been included in this study was of students who had left the research sites involved in this study. Students who leave before the completion of the ESL program would most likely be the best sources of information regarding disrespectful communication within these contexts.

Finally, this study revealed that older adult students seemed to be more sensitive to issues of disrespect within these two contexts. As Orem (2005) states, second language researchers have provided models for second language learners, however, these models often “prove to be overly simplistic and fail to take into account the complexities facing adults in their life roles” (p. 109). More research is needed to understand adult students, especially those who are older and not highly educated. How these students understand respectful ESL instruction is vital to the retention of a population that faces some of the greatest challenges in the workplace and in American society as a whole.

**Researching the institution.** This study revealed that students found particular schools and administrators to be disrespectful. The need to research the institutions in a variety of rural and urban locations would enable schools to more effectively evaluate their own performance, uncover areas in need of improvement, and assist in the retention of students. Furthermore, researching schools and
classrooms that have successfully developed an effective third culture could serve as a model of best practices for other institutions.

**Final Thoughts and Suggestions**

Being open to others, especially those different from ourselves, is to see them not as rivals and enemies but as brothers and sisters in humanity, capable of bringing light and truth into our lives. (Vanier, 1997, p. 145)

As humans, we are prone to reduce things in order to make them more manageable. At an early age we learn to reduce fractions to make working with them an easier task. ESL instructors teach students that native speakers reduce words and sounds to quicken communication and deemphasize words that are less vital to the intended message. Yet in many ways, we also reduce people. We sometimes group them by ethnicity, age, and personality type. In order to understand causality or predict future behaviors, students are at times stripped of their uniqueness and sorted in ways that seem to make the most sense. In this study, students at times became “the Koreans,” “the Saudis,” the Generations 1.5s, the Slackers, kids, etc.—their true names and identities were reduced and devalued.

I would like to now suggest some steps that can be taken to ensure more respectful communication in the classroom (as well as other contexts). First, I believe that respectful and effective communication begins with an awareness of one’s own culture as well as an awareness of the other cultures that inhabit the classroom space. Although awareness is an essential first step toward the amelioration of ineffective communication, I believe that this should also lead to empathy. True empathy involves an emotional component evident in a concern and compassion for another, coupled with a cognitive
component that involves a desire to know and learn about another’s culture (Stephan & Foley, 2002). Students need to be seen as equal members of the human family and celebrated for the true gift their lives are to the world.

Intercultural communication texts purport that effective communication (and I would argue respectful communication) also includes a number of different abilities or competencies. Samovar, Porter, and Stefani identify the following abilities: knowledge of self, an understanding of physical and human settings, an understanding of diverse management systems, emotional empathy, an ability to accept feedback, and the ability to learn about cultural adaptation (Samovar, Porter, & Stefani, 1997). Additionally, Dodd lists a tolerance for ambiguity, cognitive complexity, healthy self-esteem, innovativeness, an ability to trust people, and a strong acculturation motivation as factors that lead to intercultural effectiveness (Dodd, 1998). Finally, Jandt (2004) holds that effective communication requires that communicators have strong message skills, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills.

Marvin Mayers (1987) offers a checklist for mutual respect for Christian workers living abroad; however, several points are particularly germane to those who wish to communicate respectfully with those from other cultures, regardless of religious background:

1. Acceptance of the limitation of living standards of each culture.
2. As one gains knowledge of the limits of each living standard, one increasingly accepts positive aspects of each.
3. Lack of criticism of negative aspects of each culture. Differences are not necessarily inferior. It is wise to examine the reasons why differences exist and to be sensitive to them.
4. Ability to make comparisons between the cultures without accompanying negative implications. This is expressed in positive appreciation of the other culture along with one’s own.
5. Real contentment of lifestyle is experienced by each one residing there. This does not mean abandoning oneself or one’s personality. One’s security and satisfaction there is genuine.
6. Fluency in language.
7. Righteous indignation.
8. Expression of humility within the context of either culture one is involved with, not flaunting one’s own experience within the crosscultural setting.
9. Ability to distinguish between personal tastes, historic backgrounds, and moral issues (absolutes).
10. Understanding and practicing the ethical code within the other culture without strain and to the degree one’s own conscience permits. When one’s own conscience does not permit, the ability to express this in ways that highlight the issue but do not alienate the person.
11. Understanding the basic means of communication in each culture and handling this effectively, irrespective of age, sex, status, etc. (1987, pp. 66-67)

In light of what theorists have offered and participants expressed in this study, I offer the following suggestions for respectful communication for instructors working in adult ESL contexts:

1. Accept and continually grow in your understanding of your students’ cultures, educational backgrounds, life experience, and limitations.

2. Refrain from being critical or judgmental in attitude or behavior toward students. Differences should not be seen as inferior, but areas to be empathically understood. All cultural comparisons should lead to an appreciation for either the student’s or one’s own culture.

3. Never consider oneself (including one’s education, experience, abilities, and knowledge) or one’s culture better than that of your students. Teachers should see themselves as learners. An attitude of humility should be evident at all times.

4. Strive to practice a moral and ethical code that is honorable within your students’ cultures. However, this should not violate one’s own belief system.
If the teacher’s conscience does not allow for accommodation, explain the issue without isolating or alienating the student.

5. Endeavor to understand the basic dimensions of cultural variability within each culture and use this understanding as a guide to communication.

6. Consider and preserve the face and face concerns of one’s students.

7. Learn to see and interpret beyond the words of the communicated message.
   Value and develop an understanding of paralinguistic cues, and accept that nonverbal messages often trump verbal ones.

8. Consider explicit, clear, instructions and feedback as ways to communicate respect.

9. Apologize when you make mistakes; apologies have a great face-restoring quality.

10. Interact with students as fully-functioning adults with a wealth of experience.

11. Develop a practice of reflecting on one’s attitudes and behavior. Continually grow in understanding of one’s own culture, biases, weaknesses, and limitations. Allow this greater understanding to lead to growth and positive changes in behavior.

12. Create a third culture of respect in the classroom that honors and celebrates differences, learning, human experience, life circumstances, and the personhood of all who inhabit its space.
CCS’s and ELIS’s Student Suggestions Regarding Respectful Communication

This research was also an attempt to give voice to ESL students whose perspectives are often neglected in research studies. During my interviews with students at both CCS and ELIS, I asked them to provide suggestions as to how ESL teachers could communicate more respectfully with their students. In concluding this research project, I would like to present a composite of various students’ suggestions:

The big smile always have an effect. Don’t build this wall between you and the students—make it free so when the student feel badly there are no hard feelings, no complications. Don’t be complex when you speaking with your students. If you’re not complex, your students will then feel good and respect you more.

Take it easy on the student. Don’t consider them just as students…maybe as friends? Don’t order them to do something. They want someone to share with them, explain things to them, show them what they did wrong and why it’s wrong. Tell them the good things they do first, but then [mention] the bad things he did alone.

Don’t be too strict or too lenient. Be relaxed. Don’t be so serious when students don’t do their homework or come a few minutes late for classes. If you have to say something about it, say it in a funny way. Saying it in a nice, funny way makes me want to do it or listen. It’s the way you say it that makes it respectful or disrespect.

Talk about your culture; ask about mine. Talk about you; ask about me.

Help students to get to know each other. Let them talk about their names, where they’re from, their country, what they love to do, their culture, what activities they like. Give them time to express themselves. Let them know each other [their classmates] activities and interests, so students can make friendships and have something to talk about it.

Remember I am an adult. Treat me like a college student in America. Respect what is important to me.

Don’t look through us. Don’t rush when you teach or rush us when we answer. Listen.
REFERENCES


they are perceived by their students with reference to care and respect. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (Publication No. AAT 8407636).


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APPENDIX A

IS THE FIELD OF TESOL TRULY RESPECTFUL?

In “The Author Responds, (Un)Raveling Racism in a Nice Field like TESOL,” Kubota (2002) purports:

Discussing racism is often uncomfortable, particularly in TESOL and applied linguistics. The field of L2 education by nature attracts professionals who are willing to work with people across racial boundaries, and thus it is considered to be a “nice” field... However, this does not make the field devoid of the responsibility to examine how racism or any other injustices influence its knowledge and practice. (p. 82)

According to Kumaravadivelu, there is also “a stubborn persistence of cultural stereotypes in the TESOL profession” (p. 715). In particular, he found that stereotyping Asians as obedient, void of or deficient in critical thinking skills, and unparticipative is common practice in the field. Although not limited to the TESOL, Kumaravadivelu contends that the profession “has shown a remarkable readiness to forge a causal connection between the classroom behavior of Asian students and their cultural beliefs even though research findings are ambiguous or even contradictory” (2003, p. 710). He also admits:

...we as TESOL professionals largely deal with the unknown and the unmanageable. In our attempt to deal with the complexity of our task, we fall for simple, sometimes, simplistic solutions. We may be stereotyping our learners partly because it helps us reduce an unmanageable reality to a manageable label. ...So if our students fail to interact in class the way we expect them to, or if they fail to show that they engage their minds the way we want them to, we readily explain their behavior in terms of culture and cultural stereotypes. ...TESOL is very much conditioned and constrained by the binary categories of native and
nonnative speakers as well as by the predominance of Western perspectives to the teaching of culture. ...A critical awareness of the complex nature of cultural understanding and the problematic aspect of our investigative tools may help us open ourselves to alternative meanings and possibilities, thereby restraining our rush to stereotype the Other. (pp. 716-717)

Although this was not one of my original research questions, at some point during each teacher interview, I asked participants their opinion about whether they felt the field of TESOL was respectful. Two teachers chose not to answer the question. Josie explained, “I cannot make any statement about it [the field of TESOL] generally because I don’t believe in generalizations.” Another teacher simply ignored the question and changed the subject. One other teacher was not sure how she felt about TESOL.

Of the remaining seven teachers, there was more consensus that TESOL was indeed a respectful field. Maggie remarked that if teachers were not respectful, “they would not last long” and explained that certain teachers at CCS had been asked to leave because of their lack of respect. Gary felt that ESL teachers had more cultural exposure, and that this contact led to greater understanding of cultures and greater respect. Likewise, Nancy noted that ESL instructors give “greater leeway to other cultures” compared to teachers without cultural training. In my interview with Patty, she seemed to hold a belief that respect was in some ways a part of an ESL teachers DNA. She explained:

In general, I feel the field of ESL is more respectful than other fields because we are always taught...or because we deal with such diversity in the classroom, we inherently respect other cultures.... It’s inherent in any ESL teacher...in most people who are in ESL because they are respectful and interested in people from other cultures, so I don’t particularly find that [disrespect] to be a problem.

Kristan expressed an alternative view. She explained that ESL teachers and the field of TESOL were not necessarily more respectful, but were required to be respectful
because of the variety of cultures found in ESL classroom. Although Mary found her colleagues to be respectful, she was concerned about teachers with just a certificate or those who with little background in education and learning theory.

It is also interesting to note that although teachers in this study generally found the field of TESOL to be respectful, nearly half of these participants recalled blatant displays of disrespect from their experiences in EFL contexts. For example, Patty recalled a teacher in Morocco “who thought she was imparting her language to the savages,” and Mary described “ugly American teachers” in Japan who took advantage of their students economically, socially, and sexually. Gary also mentioned a type of disrespect or “bashing” he witnessed in Korea. During his interview, he described EFL teachers who showed disrespectful behavior toward their students and Korean culture, as well as those who were even “abusive.” Although he did not clarify what these teachers said about their students, he did state, “The things they would say...would just make your stomach turn.” Teachers expressed that EFL instructors often work in less developed countries and that condescension can arise from “a belief that these other countries somehow need us” and that students are “dependent” on their English teachers.

The field of TESOL attracts many extremely caring and giving individuals. However, the TESOL profession is also not immune from factors considered barriers to effective communication, namely stereotyping and racism (Kubota, R., 2002; Kumaravadivelu, B., 2003). As mentioned earlier, as both a teacher and a researcher there were numerous occasions when students were labeled by their ethnicity, and this label generally had a negative connotation. During the teacher interviews, instructors also used phrases such as “their little holidays” or spoke about students in ways that indicated an
“us” versus “them” mentality. It is the researcher’s position that any form of racism, stereotyping, and attitudes of cultural superiority are forms of disrespect because they depreciate the worth of another. Because the patron/parent role is one of a higher position, it appears that it may be more difficult for teachers to detect ways of communicating that reflect ethnocentrism and disrespect. However, as Kubota contends, TESOL professionals must examine any forms of injustice or disrespect that play a part in their practice as teachers.
APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe a respectful ESL teacher?

2. What are some examples of teacher communication and/or behaviors that have been truly respectful of ESL students?

3. Have you ever witnessed a teacher who communicated or behaved in ways that were disrespectful to ESL students? If “yes,” please describe; however, in no way provide information that would enable others to identify a specific person.

4. How do you believe respect can best be communicated to ESL students?

5. What strategies should teachers use in ESL classrooms to ensure a respectful classroom environment?

6. What are some factors that undermine respectful communication in the ESL classroom?

7. What makes an ESL teacher of adult students respectful or disrespectful?

8. If you were a teacher of ESL students, how would you show respect?

9. How would the most effective ESL teacher that you can imagine communicate respect?

10. How do you believe students respond to teachers they feel are disrespectful?
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Participant’s Name: _______________________

I authorize Mark Van Ness of the School of Intercultural Studies, Biola University, La Mirada, California, to gather information from me on the topic respectful communication in the ESL context. I also give my permission to Mark Van Ness to use the data and information collected in this study for the purpose of writing a dissertation for a Ph.D. degree and for any further publications that may arise from this study.

I understand that the general purposes of the research is to investigate how respect is communicated in the ESL classroom, that the researcher will interview me and take written notes. The approximate total time of my involvement will be one hour.

I am aware that I may choose not to answer any questions that I find embarrassing or offensive.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue anxiety or stress or have questions about the research or my rights as a participant that may have been provoked by the experience, Mark Van Ness will be available for consultation. He will also be available to provide direction regarding medical assistance in the unlikely event of physical injury incurred during participation in the research.

I understand that my real name or any other information which might identify me personally will never appear on any material, whether data or results, related to this study. All notes taken during our meeting will be stored in a locked file cabinet at all times unless in use, and computer files pertaining to the study will be stored on Mark Van Ness’s password-protected computer and saved under a pseudonym. All notes and files pertaining to this study will be destroyed one year after this study is completed. Confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher.
The potential benefits of the study include a greater awareness of how ESL teachers and students understand respect and how it is communicated, and more safe and respectful ESL classroom environments.

________________________________________  ________________
Signature                                             Date

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the researcher with your responses. The other copy you may keep for your records.

Questions and comments may be addressed to Mark Van Ness, (address and phone number at the time of research).