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Examining Importance of Respect in the Classroom

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Abstract

The term respect is a very powerful and complicated concept, which is involved in governing the interrelationships of humans. This qualitative literature review study focuses on analyzing the importance of respect among people and specifically between teachers and students. A semi-structured interview was used to collect the data. Through the literature review, the gap was identified, and through the interviews, the importance of respect in a classroom and beyond was understood more clearly. Results suggest that respect is essential for the positive development of relationships between students and teachers, especially in the environment of the Vedic educational system. Recommendations are proposed as to how the teachers can influence the atmosphere in a classroom to benefit the students and to be able to draw more respect from the students.

Keywords: Respect, teachers, students, interpersonal relationships, dignity, recognition, own example.

Introduction

For any society across the globe, the education of their children is crucial. It has been naturally going on for as long as the human race has been present. In fact, it is an ongoing process among all the different species of life too. In nature, the birds, the beasts, the fish, and the insects all teach their young ones how to survive and reproduce. However, human beings have an advantage over other living beings in their potential to develop higher cognizance and consciousness (Stern, 2017; Stockholm University, 2017). It is important for society to take care of their children and teachers (Greene, 2019). When students are feeling respected by their teachers, they focus more on their learning, become more motivated, and so the process of learning becomes smooth (Mokracek, 2021).

To give respect to others is quite natural for the human being, or at least it should be. Many would agree that the respect we feel due to others is guided by the respect we feel due to ourselves, and therefore respect, as understood by the authors, encapsulates these themes as simply 'we treat others as we would like to be treated' (O'Grady, 2011). Some stress that relationships that are based on respect for others are the precondition of a healthy psychological environment (Sari, 2009). How people respect each other depends on interpersonal relationships. It should be the responsibility of a teacher to create an atmosphere in the school where students are respected. That enables them to grow with dignity. For that the teachers must be showing a good example to the students. A respectful classroom environment is defined as a space where all students feel safe, comfortable, and valued both academically and emotionally (Jones, 2022).

At present, the tendency is that students are developing a lack of respect for teachers and for parents as well. That is very dangerous. Therefore, it is important to look for ways how to enable for students to become more respectful. In a PDK poll (Greene, 2019) it surfaces how much less attractive the teaching profession has become because teachers do not feel respected. PDK gave a random sampling of those who considered leaving the profession a chance to explain why. Certain repeated phrases jump out: 'Lack of respect; no respect; too little pay and respect; we are treated like trash; tired of being treated like dirt.'

Literature Review

The dictionary defines respect for somebody or something as a feeling of admiration for someone or something because of their good qualities or achievements. However, defining what respect truly means is not that easy. According to some, respect has been looked at as an attitude or behavior, as a moral quality, and as an indicator for justness, while other times it is confused with acceptance, tolerance, or even fear. To do justice to the complexity of the term 'respect', researchers began to treat it not as a single variable, but as potentially differentiated types of respect (Mertz, 2015). One's respect for a person depends on the relationship between them. It certainly helps the relationship if this respect is mutual. In schools, students are obliged to respect the teachers, but also the teachers should give respect to the students. As long as there is mutual respect, students' success rate will rise and their attitude toward class and faculty will be very different (Jones, 2022; Mokracek, 2021; Celkan, 2015). That is an important point as it should be in a teacher's interest to see the success of the students. When the teacher commands respect from the students through his actions, he naturally draws respect from the students. However, when respect is demanded then it may not be lasting very long. In other words, we teach them by our example. This is the method of the acharyas or the previous teachers of a tradition (Das, 2014; p.55). It may be difficult at times to always act in an exemplary way. However, for the sake of our relationship, we should endeavor to execute our actions so that we can give our best example in any given situation, and be honest about it if we cannot. At the end, this endeavor will be appreciated and respected by the student, which helps deepen interpersonal relationships. Interactions between teacher and student are an integral part of classroom life and respect between teacher and student can help teachers to overcome the challenges they face in cultivating interpersonal relationships with their students (O'Grady, 2011).

All children should be treated with respect, by seeing them as young adults, and not perceiving them as incapable. They need our encouragement and support together with affection. However, they also need discipline to be able to appreciate and develop respect for authority. In other words, they need to feel cared for. To respect children is to treat them in a way that enables them to see themselves as persons endowed with dignity, that is, as having the equal standing to make claims on others (Giesinger, 2012). As Sari rightly points out, it is difficult to form an honorable generation that has self-respect and respect for others through individual growth without feeling their worth in an environment in which they are usually being punished, they can't explain their feelings and ideas as they are often humiliated in front of others (Sari, 2009). It is not possible to talk about respect at school without talking about others. Respect is a form of recognition and appreciation of the qualities and differences of others. It is essential because that exemplifies the act by which human beings have consideration for another, bearing in mind their interests, abilities, preferences, fears or feelings. No doubt, respect is one of the most important and primary actions that students can have among themselves and that let them know that each classmate is different in order to live in a better community (Corzo, 2017). On the other hand, for a human being to demean another is to deny them the respect and dignity they deserve (Sari, 2009).

Students must be respected, however, the teachers must be respected as well otherwise it will be very difficult for them to train others in respect and with respect. Respect between human beings can be regarded as a right, afforded to the dignity of another or the roles they inhabit, but also as an appraisal of another person due to their abilities or achievements (O'Grady, 2011). To maintain one's clear conscience and dignity, one has to learn to respect the constitutional right to live of every living entity, be it a human, an animal, or an unborn child. The essential principle is to respect the right to live (Eisen, 2018). To maintain our dignity and a clear conscience, we must learn to respect this principle concerning not only humans but essentially all living entities including unborn children and animals. Some studies show that the respect of teachers in the present process is decreasing (Greene, 2019). These signals should be taken seriously.

For respect to be real it must be commanded, not demanded. To highlight the importance of the positive character of a person, Śrīla Prabhupāda describes some traits of a negative character as inauspicious and these are people who are always arrogant or proud of possessing some type of education or so much wealth. They desire to be worshiped by others, and demand respectability, although they do not command respect. Over trifles, they become very angry and speak harshly, not gently. They do not know what should be done and what should not be done. They do everything whimsically, according to their desire, and they do not recognize any authority (Bhaktivedanta Swami, 1972; 16.4). The spiritual value of respect is maybe one of the most

imperative actions to be promoted in daily school life because it is the base of human relationships and allows a good coexistence between groups (Corzo, 2017).

In Vedic education, the student and the teacher need to develop mutual respect for the proper realization of knowledge. *Tṛṇād api su-nīcena taror api sahiṣṇunā amāninā māna-dena kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ* - this statement indicates that one can hear or speak about Vedānta philosophy through the disciplic succession. One must be very humble and meek, more tolerant than a tree, and humbler than the grass. One should not claim respect for himself but should be prepared to give all respect to others. One must have these qualifications to be eligible to understand Vedic knowledge (Bhaktivedanta Swami, 1974; Ādi 7.68 purport).

Problem Statement

Respect in the classroom environment is important (Jones, 2022; Mokracek, 2021; Corzo, 2017; Celkan, 2015; Sari, 2009). However, even though the word respect is frequently used in everyday life, respect is rarely explored between people, and in the classroom (O'Grady, 2011). Showing respect is a central or dominant element of the ethics of care and a vital contributor to sustainable teacher-student and student-student relationships (Thompson, 2018). Many teachers today are faced with a school reality that requires them to not only engage in behaviors of a teacher but also in those of a friend, parent, or social worker. Therefore, some teachers feel overwhelmed and do not always treat their students with respect (Mertz, 2015). The teachers also feel lack of respect from students and authorities too (Greene, 2019). To approach this problem, the Vedic educational system may offer a proposition on how to deepen the atmosphere of respect in a classroom.

Objectives

This study aims to define respect and analyze its influence on interpersonal relationships. It also suggests how these relationships and the atmosphere of respect may be improved. The authors plan to explore the meaning of respect, and its practical effect on the life of people, particularly school children, and induce contemplation on how could respect between teachers and students be enriched.

Methodology

The authors have decided to use qualitative research design with literature review and interviews as the data collection method. Literature review is very powerful tool to identify the gaps in knowledge; establishing the need for the research; broadening the horizons of the researcher; and preventing the researcher from conducting research that already exists (Western Sydney University Library, 2017). Interviews are very useful because highly specific data can be obtained in a very short space of time. The interview is also useful in providing a general overview of people's thoughts (McGrath, 2018). For the purposes of this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen.

Every valid research has its rigorosity based on data (Shirindi, 2018), without which it could as well be only the mental speculation of the author. By data is generally meant any information that has been either collected, observed, generated or created to validate original research findings. Although usually digital, research data also includes non-digital formats such as laboratory notebooks and diaries, but these are rather unique and were not used in this research. This research focused on quantitative data collection which was acquired by coding in scientific program Atlas.ti (Verma, 2016).

Coding is the process of labeling and organizing collected qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them (Elliott, 2018). When coding, labels are assigned to either words, phrases or even whole sentences to properly capture and represent important and ideally recurring themes in each response.

Another very important topic is the choice of codes. In this area the coder is left with many choices otherwise it would lead to objectifying a subject that is by nature subjective. Even though it may seem too open to

speculation there are certain procedures proven by practice. One of these is a choice between inductive and deductive coding, also known as ground-up or top-down coding (Linneberg, 2019).

Inductive coding is a ground-up approach where codes are derived from the data (Linneberg, 2019). The reader does not start with preconceived notions of what the codes should be, but allow the narrative or theory to emerge from the raw data itself. This is usually used for exploratory research or times when it is required to come up with new theories, ideas or concepts.

Deductive coding is a top-down approach that starts by developing a codebook with an initial set of codes (Linneberg, 2019). This set could be based on research questions or an existing research framework or theory. Afterward, the coder reads through the data and assigns excerpts to codes. At the end of the analysis, the codes should still closely resemble the codebook with which it has started off. This is desired for a pre-determined structure with a clear vision of final findings. For example, program evaluation studies may utilize a deductive coding approach.

In practice, a combination of both has been chosen. The codes were constructed so that they cover all desired characteristics which together form a codebook - respect, humility, tolerance, selflessness, caring, completeness, happiness, high ideals, practical use, responsibility, trust, and many more but also negative complements such as lack of concern, social stress, uselessness, etc. They have been chosen partly before starting to code, but a considerable amount has been added throughout the coding for better characterization of the input data.

At present, there are not too many schools following the curriculum of Vedic education, and whatever schools are there, they are not easily approachable. For that reason, the authors have selected people, through purposive sampling, from three social groups connected to these schools and with them conducted 17 interviews – namely 5 with students, 5 with parents and 7 with teachers.

The authors had a basic structure of questions working as the guiding path through interviews and then they adapted to individual interviews with more detailed questions taking certain mentioned topics into detail. It was measured that students and parents hold teachers in high regard and respect and that the teachers emphasize how respect helps the students to inquire submissively and thus learn seriously.

Results and Discussion

It was found that the teachers and students mentioned respect as the leading characteristic, among humility, respect, selflessness and tolerance as well as other key values such as caring, concern and authority, which can be seen in Figure 1 as a graph or in Figure 2 in a table.

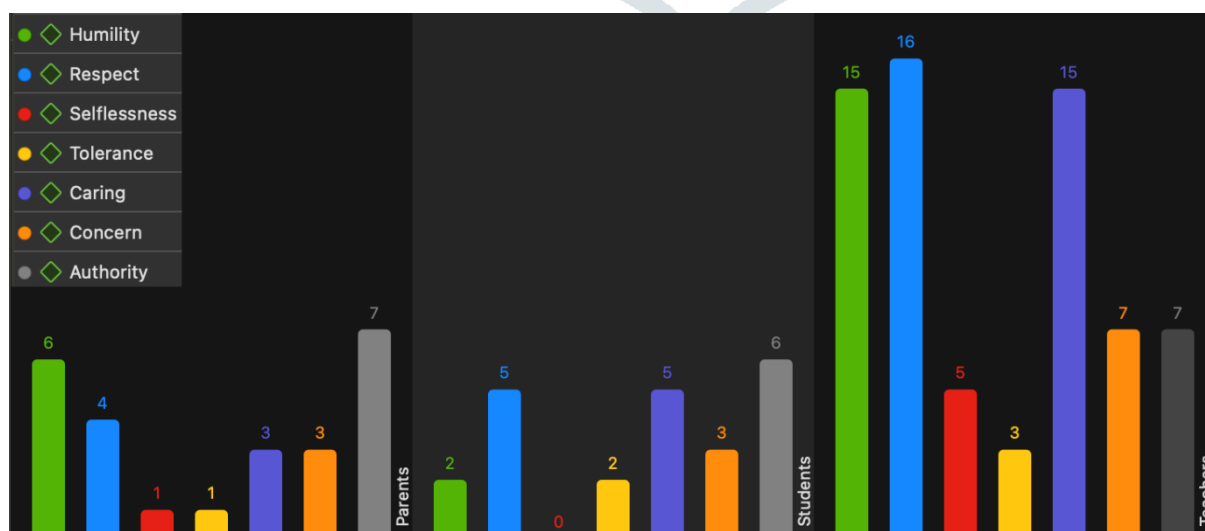


Figure 1 - Mentions

	Parents	Students	Teachers	Totals
● Humility	6	2	15	23
● Respect	4	5	16	25
● Selflessness	1	0	5	6
● Tolerance	1	2	3	6
● Caring	3	5	15	23
● Concern	3	3	7	13
● Authority	7	6	7	20
Totals	25	23	68	116

Figure 2 - Code analysis table

We also learned how deeply respect is connected with other good qualities, on which we have focused our analysis, namely humility, selflessness, caring, high ideals, responsibility, and authority, which can be seen in Figure 3.

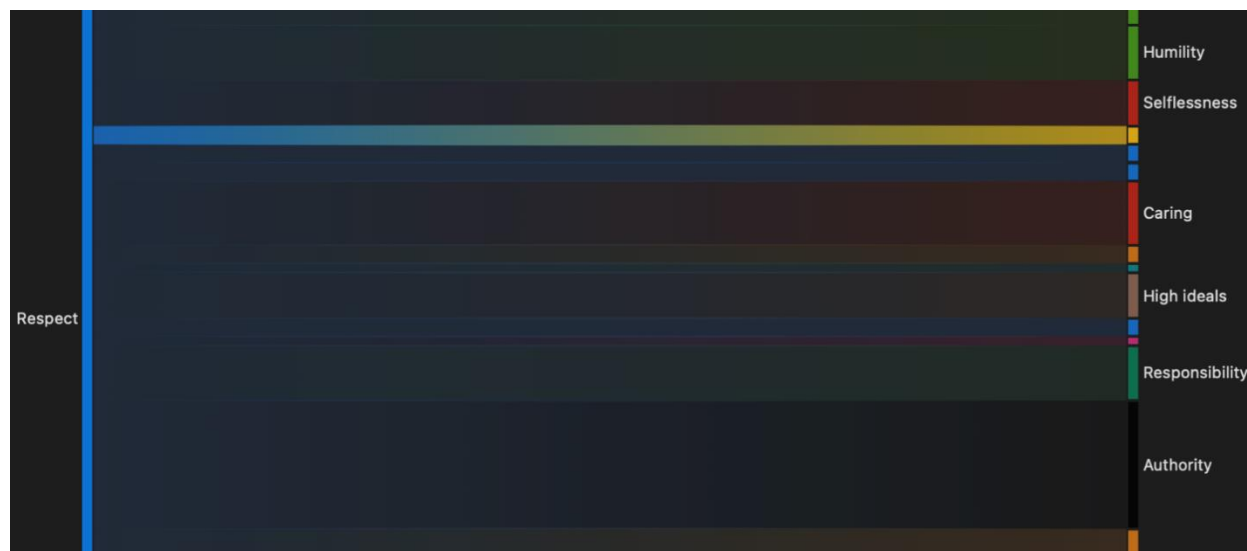


Figure 3 - Connections

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research involves collecting non-numerical data (in our case text through interviews and literature review) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences which are later analyzed and coded to get quantitative data for output. The situation is therefore changing from objective assembling information to subjective tagging words, which therefore has to be connected with some reliability and validity.

The analysis was measured in two criteria: Intra-coder and Inter-coder reliability. Intra-coder reliability corresponds to one person coding the same documents after some considerable period of time whereas inter-coder reliability consists of two different people coding the same document. Measurement has been computed as a number of the same codes matching minus non-matching codes divided by the total number of codes. Matching codes are considered those codes, which are the same and label the same sentence/paragraphs whereas non-matching are those which significantly determine different opinions on a given sentence/paragraph. Both output reliability of the dataset in percentage. For inter-coder reliability, we asked an independent researcher to label the same documents and codes matched on 782 (391 pairs) of a total number of 812 codes which sum to 96,3% reliability. For intra-coder reliability, we coded the documents on the 8th of September and then on the 2nd of October, where 764 (382 pairs) codes matched out of 804 which gives 95% reliability. In neither, it was found that the coding comparisons were significantly different. Both of these reliabilities are fairly high which shows consistency of measurement.

Codes were constructed so that they cover all desired characteristics we are looking for - respect, humility, tolerance, selflessness, caring, authority, completeness, happiness, high ideals, practical use, responsibility, trust, and many more. However, we set also negative codes e.g. complements such as lack of concern, social stress, uselessness, etc. Therefore, it was concluded that the results are valid beyond a reasonable doubt, which ensures the validity of the given outputs.

Conclusion

Altogether we can see that respect has not only influence on the characteristics of a human being but is also strongly connected with human values such as caring or responsibility. Respect is, therefore, a very needed aspect to have for a healthy atmosphere in a classroom and in fact in any community, which covers not only university-size communities but also smaller ones such as families or larger state-size communities. In all of these, it is a structure that is needed and that naturally creates some hierarchy based on authority, which has its roots in respect.

Recommendation

To establish a structure where people are respected by each other, it is necessary that individuals in such community develop refined character qualities. How to develop such qualities can be understood from the Taittirīya-upaniṣad, Śikṣā-vallī – The self-realized teacher instructs the students thus – speak only the truth, act according to religious conduct, do not neglect your studies and try to please the teacher. In this way maintain the traditions of family lineage and disciplic succession. Never neglect your duties or anything which gives a good result. Do not fail to study and preach; carry out your duties toward your authorities well. Respect your mother, father, teachers, and guests, and treat them appropriately. Always act in such a way that you will not be criticized, and execute work that is glorious (Das, 2014; p.19).

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