

CHAPTER 7

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF RESPECT FROM PAST TO PRESENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Respect, throughout human history, has been one of the cornerstones of social life and the sustainability of culture, while its meaning and function have undergone change over time. From ancient civilizations to the present day, respect has been regarded as one of the most important virtues that individuals should possess (Küken, 2003, p. 15). However, it is not clear what respect should be directed towards. Family, state, the elderly, shared symbols, the individual, humanity, nature, all forms of existence—these have been accepted as the focuses to which respect should be directed during various historical periods.

In the Turkish Language Association (TDK) Dictionary, respect is defined as: “A feeling of love that causes one to behave carefully, meticulously, and moderately towards a person or a thing due to their value, superiority, old age, usefulness, or sanctity; reverence, deference,” and as a second meaning, “The feeling of avoiding causing discomfort to others” (Türk Dil Kurumu [TDK], n.d.). The first part of the definition describes respect as behaving carefully, meticulously, and moderately towards what is valuable. This can be expressed as a definition closer to the traditional understanding of respect. In many places where traditional relationships persist, acting at ease in the presence of parents and elders is seen as disrespect, and the opposite is seen as respect. This model of relationships is often criticized in modern times because it is not open to two-way interaction. A transfer from the elder to the younger is more common. In this communication model,

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This situation has both benefits and drawbacks. The benefits are that the child can be more productive, creative, and self-confident. However, being self-confident can also turn into a drawback. For, the “self” in childhood is a self that is under the management of instincts and impulses. A child who trusts this self is actually giving an important opportunity to their instincts, which in a sense means they are not disciplining their inner self.

Is a human being one who acts in accordance with their inner self, or one who disciplines their inner self? To be able to discipline the inner self, the individual needs a role model; they need to do things they do not want to do, and in this way, they need to discipline themselves.

Balancing these two approaches (respect comprehended through reason and respect based on distance) is a fundamental challenge facing today’s education system. Which approach is more effective can vary depending on the student’s age, developmental level, cultural context, and learning goals. For this reason, it is important for educators to develop a context-specific understanding of respect by considering the potential benefits and risks of both approaches.

In conclusion, the transformation in the meaning of the concept of respect brings important questions to the fore in the field of education. How can we find a balance between traditional and modern approaches? How can we both support students’ development as autonomous individuals and ensure they respect social values? The answers to these questions will play a decisive role in shaping future education systems.

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