

December 2019

## Responding to racial incivility in classrooms: Hospitality and responsibility

Nathalie Piquemal

*University of Manitoba, Canada, nathalie.piquemal@umanitoba.ca*

Dave Misir

*University of Manitoba, Canada, ummisir@myumanitoba.ca*

Rebeca Heringer

*University of Manitoba, Canada, heringer@myumanitoba.ca*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jger>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), and the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#)

This Refereed Article is brought to you for free and open access by the M3 Center at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Global Education and Research by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usf.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Piquemal, N., Misir, D., & Heringer, R. (2019). Responding to racial incivility in classrooms: Hospitality and responsibility. *Journal of Global Education and Research*, 3(2), 181-192. <https://www.doi.org/10.5038/2577-509X.3.2.1081>

---

# Responding to racial incivility in classrooms: Hospitality and responsibility

## Authors

### Corresponding Author

Nathalie Piquemal, Education Building - Room 230, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, R3T2N2, Canada

## Abstract

This paper considers the relationship between education and hospitality in the specific context of moments of incivility in classrooms, with special attention to racial/white resentment. The authors reflect on the extent to which nurturing intellectual candor with interpretive charity (Callan, 2011) can be extended to incivility shaped by white resentment. They contend there is a need to approach hospitality as responsibility (Levinas, 1969, thereby suggesting conditions for student agency. The relationship between the educator as host and giver of hospitality and the students as guests and respondents is discussed (Ruitenbergh, 2011b). The paper argues the role of the teacher is key to ensuring those at the receiving end of the perceived attack are able to reclaim hospitality by being given the space and the means to respond to the offense with agency. This paper discusses the need for parameters balancing free speech and teaching moments with restoring agency to the marginalized *others*. Finally, the study proposes responding to racial resentment requires framing teaching moments within an ethic of responsibility which aims to restore agency for those on the receiving end of racial incivility.

## Keywords

ethics, incivility, teaching

## Revisions

Submission date: Apr. 8, 2019 ; 1st Revision: Aug. 5, 2019; 2nd Revision: Aug. 13, 2019; 3rd Revision: Dec. 9, 2019; Acceptance: Dec. 9, 2019

## Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

# Responding to Racial Incivility in Classrooms: Hospitality and Responsibility

Nathalie Piquemal<sup>1</sup>, Dave Misir<sup>2</sup>, and Rebeca Heringer<sup>3</sup>

Faculty of Education  
University of Manitoba, Canada  
<sup>1</sup>nathalie.piquemal@umanitoba.ca  
<sup>2</sup>ummisir@myumanitoba.ca  
<sup>3</sup>heringer@myumanitoba.ca

## Abstract

This paper considers the relationship between education and hospitality in the specific context of moments of incivility in classrooms, with special attention to racial/white resentment. The authors reflect on the extent to which nurturing intellectual candor with interpretive charity (Callan, 2011) can be extended to incivility shaped by white resentment. They contend there is a need to approach hospitality as responsibility (Levinas, 1969, thereby suggesting conditions for student agency. The relationship between the educator as host and giver of hospitality and the students as guests and respondents is discussed (Ruitenber, 2011b). The paper argues the role of the teacher is key to ensuring those at the receiving end of the perceived attack are able to reclaim hospitality by being given the space and the means to respond to the offense with agency. This paper discusses the need for parameters balancing free speech and teaching moments with restoring agency to the marginalized *others*. Finally, the study proposes responding to racial resentment requires framing teaching moments within an ethic of responsibility which aims to restore agency for those on the receiving end of racial incivility.

**Keywords:** ethics, incivility, teaching

## Introduction

Educational policy places a lot of emphasis on respectful, safe, and caring educational spaces for all learners, recognizing the need to better strive for the inclusion of marginalized voices. Notwithstanding the aims of social equity and being welcoming to the world, education is commonly shaped by inhospitality (Ruitenber, 2018). Indeed, educational research shows that incivility remains a major concern in post-secondary settings (Connelly, 2009). Feldman (2001) contends psychological factors which contribute to incivility are three-fold: “a need to express power over another, a need for verbal release due to frustration over an apparently unsolvable situation, or a need to obtain something of value” (p. 137). Furthermore, research on responses to incivility appears to often focus on interpersonal factors, meaning on the perpetrators and the receivers (Edmonson, Bolick & Lee, 2017), leaving potential social factors out of the equation. As educational spaces become increasingly shaped by cultural diversity, the risk of cultural misunderstandings increases (Gutiérrez, Larson, Raffaelli, Fernandez, & Guzman, 2017; Mansouri & Jenkins, 2010), especially because educational spaces are commonly marked by white structures, social orders, and expectations (Bryzzheva, 2018; Ruitenber, 2018). Therefore, an area of major concern is the rise of classroom incivility due to racial factors (Alexander-Snow, 2004; Delpit, 2006; Hirschy & Braxton, 2004; Hollingsworth, Patton, Allen, & Johnson, 2018). This type

of incivility can be infused by racial resentment and expressed as racial contempt through various levels of micro-aggressions (Codjoe, 2001; Harris, 2017; Harris & Linder, 2018; Harwood, Mendenhall, Lee, Riopelle, & Hunt, 2018; Schick, 2014). Racial resentment can be defined as “a general feeling related to notions of deservingness for racial groups” and “may also encompass anger, bitterness, or concern related to one racial group’s beliefs about the deservingness of special considerations on the basis of race for another group” (Wilson & Davis, 2010, p. 16). Research shows that the expression of racial resentment has a negative impact on minority students’ academic achievements, broadening the gap of systemic inequality (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012; Keels, Durkee, & Hope, 2017; Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevárez, 2017; McKown, 2013). As such, teachers’ roles in responding to classroom incivility motivated by racial resentment is worthy of research attention. For the purpose of this paper, we define racial incivility as disrespectful behaviour motivated by racial resentment, specifically discourteous verbal and non-verbal behaviour which socially undermines members of racial minority groups, thus threatening the well-being of these individuals and of the classroom community.

An interesting take on incivility in the classroom is that of Callan (2011), who urges educators to engage, rather than silence, those who express derogatory perspectives about a particular cultural group despite potential harm, as long as these perspectives are expressed as intellectual candor. A basis for such argument is the importance of the pedagogical act itself, meaning the responsibility to recognize the teaching moment, which, in turn, may help address further stigmatization. In a different vein, educational researchers have taken up the notion of how one welcomes or receives the other (Derrida, 2000; Levinas, 1969 in order to delineate a better understanding of the process of creating safe, caring, and respectful learning spaces (Molnar, 2012; Ruitenberg, 2011a, 2011b, 2018).

In this essay, we propose to consider the tension between the pedagogical responsibility to take up teaching moments in cases of racial resentment and the ethical responsibility to provide safety while restoring agency to those affected by this type of incivility. This paper considers the relationship between education and hospitality in the specific context of moments of incivility in classrooms, between individuals from different racial groups, and with special attention to incivility shaped by racial resentment. Specifically, this study discusses the relationship between the educator as host and giver of hospitality and the students as guests and respondents (Ruitenberg, 2011b) within educational spaces. This relationship is investigated when white resentment, expressed for example as racial contempt, leads to incivility, thus potentially jeopardizing safe educational spaces. As Ruitenberg (2018) claims, “It is clear that hospitality cannot be said to have taken place if white educators fail to see, interrogate, and change the ways in which the educational spaces into which they seek to receive racialized students are marked by whiteness” (p. 258). As such, the metaphor of the educator as host and giver of hospitality, and the students as guests and respondents is relevant as long as educators’ work is motivated by a concern for racial equity.

As we reflect on the extent to which nurturing intellectual candor with interpretive charity (Callan, 2011) can be extended to incivility shaped by racial resentment, we contend there is a need to approach hospitality as responsibility (Levinas, 1969, thereby suggesting conditions for student agency. In other words, we argue if one is to approach ethical education as hospitality in classrooms with students from systemically marginalized backgrounds, there is a need for parameters balancing free speech and teaching moments with restoring agency to the marginalized *others*. Levinas’ seminal work on responsibility to alterity provides guidance for such reflection.

Using the works of Derrida and Ruitenberg, we began by differentiating hate speech to intellectual candor, followed by a definition of hospitality with special attention to the relationship between the host and the guest in educational spaces shaped by differing, and sometimes, conflicting, perspectives. We then reflected on the extent to which Callan's perspective on intellectual candor (2011) connects with an ethic of hospitality in cases of incivility marked by racial resentment. Finally, we proposed that *hosting* racial resentment requires framing teaching moments within an ethic of responsibility that aims to restore agency for those on the receiving end of incivility expressed as racial resentment.

### **Hate Speech Versus Intellectual Candor**

For the purpose of this paper, it is important to distinguish the difference between intellectual candor and outright hate speech. Intellectual candor can be described as a form of free speech, where participants have the freedom to voice their opinions as intellectual contributions, even if their views may potentially offend other participants such as classroom members. In contrast, hate speech is a direct attack on a person or group of people usually based upon a number of different attributes such as race, religion, or a disability. Callan (2011) clearly articulates that the classroom is not a place for hateful discussions and reminds us that

To silence a student on grounds of incivility is not merely to mark her speech as uncivil; it is to mark its substance as intolerable so, a breach of decorum grave enough for a teacher to authoritatively indicate that such a thing simply must not be said in the classroom. (p. 4)

The classroom is not the environment to provide a platform where one can voice hateful ideas and or opinions, as this would violate human dignity and impinge on the teacher's ability to provide hospitable educational spaces to other members of the class. Callan makes it clear that what is under consideration is ethics, rather than a legal right such as free speech.

The problem which arises, however, is that we may not always be able to categorize incivility in the classroom as either acceptable and worthy of pedagogical engagement or unacceptable and in need of silencing. We specifically focused on incivility as racial resentment, which may be neither innocuous intellectual candor nor hate speech. As the leader of the class, the teacher has the role to provide a nurturing and hospitable environment that continually caters to the best interests of all classroom members who share the space. We begin with a reflection on the notion of hospitality.

### **Hospitality: The Tension Between Retaining Mastery and Giving Space**

Derrida's stress on the notion of unconditional hospitality (1997) and Ruitenberg's articulation of hospitality (2011b) provide essential ground and direction to the understanding of the philosophy of hospitality and education, thus providing a basis for understanding the tension between retaining mastery (or ownership) and giving space in the relationship between the host and the guest. Looking back at the root of the word, Derrida (2000) points that hospitality (*Hospitalität*) is the right every person has not to be treated with hostility. Despite being a stranger, every human being has the right to be treated as a friend or ally, rather than an enemy. Derrida introduces the notion of guest and host which Ruitenberg (2011b) later further elaborated in the context of education. Tension can already be found in the concept of hospitality itself, as the owner of a place must remain the host, the authority, while the guest must feel as if they were in their own home. How, then, can we define hospitality if the notion of being welcome can never be fully operationalized without being conditional or contradictory?

In order for one to understand what hospitality is and how it can be operationalized, Derrida claims first it is important to understand people cannot not fully grasp what hospitality is. It is not just an intention and an experience, “but it is also an intentional experience which proceeds beyond knowledge toward the other as absolute stranger, as unknown, where I know that I know nothing of him” (Derrida, 2000, p. 8). But from the moment one defines the other as stranger the condition is there: hospitality towards the one *who is not* me or what I am (family, nation, state, citizenship). Hospitality is also a *should-be* rather than a *being*. That is, because of its contradictory nature, hospitality is an experience which does not last, it “can only pre-form itself in the imminence of what is ‘about to happen’” (p. 8). Additionally, Derrida (2000) perceives hospitality as something close to captivity, where the host becomes the hostage of the guest because the host is only a host insofar as there is a guest. As he stresses: “the hostage is security for a possession: the hostage is a guarantee for the other, held in a place and taking its place” (p. 9). Therefore, hospitality is not merely a one-sided act of pity or compassion because it is only with the presence of the stranger of that one can be the host: “This responsible response is surely a *yes*, but a *yes to* what is preceded by the *yes of* the other” (Derrida, 1998, p. 21). Hospitality, then, is intentional, but without a beginning. It is towards the other but without asking *who*. It is an obligation towards the stranger which at the same time confirms and delimits one’s freedom. Hospitality is welcoming (i.e., receiving) the face that goes beyond the *I* in such a way the receptivity of receiving determines the ethical relation, “where ethics does not barter in the traditional terms of consciousness, agency or ego, but of susceptibility, vulnerability and responsiveness” (Sinha, 2018, p. 217). It is, then, only in this place of vulnerability of the host that hospitality can begin to take place.

Derrida offers a distinction between unconditional and unlimited hospitality (an ethic of hospitality), which he refers to as impossible but as an ideal to strive towards, and conditional hospitality (the laws of hospitality), which are structured around rights and duties. Absolute hospitality does not demand reciprocity or limitations, thus suggesting removing any social contract. Derrida recognizes such hospitality can occur within the realm of existing laws. As such, the relationship between the host and the guest is marked by limitations, a social contract by which the host retains ownership of her home: “‘Make yourself at home’ means: please feel at home, act as if you were at home, but, remember, that is not true, this is not your home but mine, and you are expected to respect my property” (Derrida, 1997, p. 111).

Therefore, embedded in the phenomenon of hospitality at one’s home are three key concepts which are analogous to the classroom: the host (teacher), the guest (student, or, in Derrida’s and Ruitenberg’s works, the other or the *stranger*), and some form of social contract, namely the conditions by which offering hospitality occurs.

Based on Derrida’s work, Ruitenberg articulates how this notion of hospitality provides a more ethical educational framework, informing the school’s responsibility towards the student. But, while acknowledging the necessity for constraints, Ruitenberg slightly moves away from Derrida’s notion of *retaining mastery* and articulates the host’s duty to enable the guest to respond with agency. In other words, the guest can change the home: “The ethic of hospitality is not about my right as host to hold onto the home as it is, but rather about my duty to help the Other grapple with the inheritance of that home” (Ruitenberg, 2011b, p. 136). As Sinha (2018) reminds, teachers do not own the classroom (which is a limitation to the host-guest analogy). Rather, they are also guests who have been appointed with the responsibility of welcoming the others in a hospitable environment.

However, there is a constant tension between “being too hospitable and not being hospitable enough” (Ruitenbergh, 2016, pp. 533-534). Being in a position of power, the host has the ability to control the environment; however, being too controlling can remove autonomy from the guest, and giving up all control relinquishes the power of the host. The host is essentially performing a balancing act. As Ruitenbergh describes, “hospitality is all about giving space—but without the host fully surrendering the space to the guest, because then he or she would no longer be host” (Ruitenbergh, 2011b, pp. 134-135).

Initially in the host-guest relationship, the guests are welcomed in the new space, but naturally feels restrained because they have not fully learned about their new environment. However, over time it is the host’s job to ensure her guests feel welcomed and *received* in such a way that they no longer feel restrained but empowered to make changes to the space (Ruitenbergh, 2011a). Ruitenbergh explains when the host empowers guests to make changes to their newfound space, the host allow guests to fully enter the world offered by the host and begin to make their own unique place in this world. This transition begins to change the role of the guest from that of a receiver to that of a respondent, or possibly from a follower to a leader. If the goal of the host is to prepare her guests to become respondents to their world, then the place of preparation must provide opportunity and power to respond.

I can only respond because I have been received into a world, and others can only respond if I welcome them in turn—even though the world into which I welcome them will be different from the one into which I was received. (Ruitenbergh, 2011b, p. 137)

In this way, both the host and the guest co-construct how the space operates, which entails the student sharing a mutual responsibility for each other and the space, including all members and keeping them accountable.

### **Incivility as Intellectual Candor**

A question which arises is: how does hospitality play out when guests compete for the same space? As Ruitenbergh states, “As soon as the host has to respond not to a singular but multiple guests, one guest’s needs and demands are necessarily weighted against another’s” (2011b, p. 139). It would appear very difficult for the teacher to maintain unconditional hospitality for all his or her guests, as sometimes it appears the guests are in competition for the space. Rather, the teacher host performs a balancing act, creating a space for individual voices in the classroom while maintaining hospitality. This job becomes seemingly more difficult when the respondents in the class become critical of each other and hostility arises.

Ruitenbergh (2018) recognizes it can be very challenging for both students and teachers to share a space in which their different opinions are not always received well. Due to the authority associated with being the host, the educator must assume the role of mediation or arbitrator and ensure hospitality to every guest. In a similar vein, Bryzzheva (2018) contends teachers have the control to

monitor in verbal and non-verbal ways whose stories and what stories are most welcome, whose emotional safety will be guarded, what emotional expressions will be legitimated, what types of disagreements and with whom are deemed appropriate, and how deviations from our unspoken norms will be disciplined: sometimes via silence, sometimes by switching the topic or via non-verbal expressions. (p. 251)

Thus, recognizing racial equality is at stake when these types of systemic micro-aggressions occur becomes the first step in mediating incivility. When and how mediation takes place, however, will have a major impact on the well-being of the guests in terms of guests putting their differences aside, the likelihood of further hostility arising, or, in a worst-case scenario, someone *choosing* to leave the home. In that way, “hospitality extended to one guest can be limited if it threatens the hospitality that can be extended now or in the future to another guest” (Ruitenberg, 2018, p. 260). Agreeing with Ruitenberg, Sinha (2018) argues a student should be silenced when he or she is “espousing overtly racist or homophobic views, or is dominating the conversation with views that lack any understanding or desire to understand the experiences and structural realities of those who are marginalized or oppressed” (p. 225), which would impinge on other students’ arrival.

Callan (2011) investigates the role of the host when students express themselves in a way which is uncivil and may hurt others in the classroom. In Callan’s view, the only time for silencing is when a student’s perspectives are entrenched with hate or racism, or clearly directed at another student. Otherwise it is important to acknowledge the judgment made and constructively challenge students’ thinking. In doing so, educators should assume intellectual candor is at play, meaning the student has made an intellectual contribution in good faith, even if it is hurtful to others (Callan, 2011).

In the process of challenging incivility, the host must also teach why the protagonist’s comments were perceived as insulting, and provide a more diplomatic approach to raising the issue and speak to his/her concerns: “the student’s derogation of her peers was itself uncivil is also something to be taught here, though if it is really to be taught, rather than merely declared, it will require some verbal precision and a cool temper” (Callan, 2011, p. 14). Callan takes the approach of *interpretive charity*, where every party involved should give the benefit of the doubt and assume that intellectual candor is, indeed, at play rather than taking offense at one’s speech. This approach encourages one to look for the best in others, always willing to give the benefit of the doubt to others when limited information is provided.

However, as suggested earlier, there is a continuum in incivility, meaning some forms of incivility do not necessarily fall within either intellectual candor, which is worthy of pedagogical engagement, or hate speech, which is worthy of silencing. In what follows, we argue incivility marked by racial resentment, while not hate speech, may not be interpreted as intellectual candor either. How, then, does hospitality play out in classrooms?

### **Hospitality and White/Racial Resentment**

As Levinas’ philosophy delineates, ethics consist of recognizing and valuing difference, rather than containing it. Consequently, a major problem is posed when Western epistemology persists in condemning the difference, which only serves to accentuate racism and exclusion. Conversely, Molnar (2012) argues difference leads educators to a place of vulnerability, which many can find uncomfortable. Such fragility, however, is not expected to be only on the side of the educator. The potential threats of the unforeseeable, the unmanageable, the *deconstruction* (cf. Derrida, 1997) of the at-home, affects every guest (i.e., student) as the encounter of difference may lead some to become resentful and uncivil to others. This reflection focuses the resentment that comes from the encounter of racial difference, which the literature refers to as white/racial resentment.

As classrooms remain predominantly shaped by mainstream values, education privileges dominant perspectives, meaning their ideas of who owns the place and who the stranger is (Bryzzheva,



2018). In that way, even teachers who aim at racial justice are inevitably influenced by their historical-racial habits, thus unintentionally re-creating and reinforcing a White space. Notwithstanding, “Facing race and racism is essential in restoring a racially and ethnically conscious right-relation” (Bryzzheva, 2018, p. 249). Consequently, a key factor in addressing racial inequality in education is the need for teachers to critically reflect on their own social positioning so as to recognize incivility which may otherwise remain invisible to them.

Seeking to depict the reasons behind the rejection of anti-racist education among white settlers, Schick (2014) defines white resentment as “a response to the inability to maintain white space and therefore, white supremacy” (p. 97). Schick points to a constant avoidance and negative reaction, whether by parents, educators or students, to the inclusion of aboriginal history and culture in the school curriculum, as often happens in a Canadian context. According to her, such situations happen due to a collective and emotional sense of superior identity that is shaken by the least threat of *the different*. The threat, however, is not on the difference in itself as if it were unknown, but in how the difference interrupts the way in which their identity is constructed, such as the supposed white disadvantage, victimization, innocence as well as their heroism despite the *challenges* faced during the settler domination.

Research focused more specifically on racial resentment correlates with the race-neutral social constructs found in the aforementioned insights on white resentment (Feldman & Huddy, 2005; Rabinowitz, Sears, Sidanius & Krosnick, 2009). For example, Wallsten, Nteta, McCarthy, and Tarsi’s study (2017) contends racial resentment measures prejudice against African-American college athletes, further demonstrating how this prejudice affects how Whites feel about funding for minority athletes. Carstarphen et al. (2017) tackle racial resentment as tied to a rhetoric of power and privilege which maintains racial inequality. The authors assert the importance of local narratives in the possibility for reconciliation and restorative dialogue. Competing for space may take different forms depending on different social, political, historical positionings (e.g., Native Americans, minority immigrants, racialized minorities). As race remains tied to power, racial resentment must be deconstructed around the understanding of entitlement and exclusion.

Therefore, white/racial resentment can be understood as a process in which one fights for the identity of one’s integrity through the denial of the other. In other words, if the other’s success thwarts mine, then it must be suppressed. If two cannot stand together at the same place at the same time, then I must stand alone and will not tolerate the opposite. The implications of such reaction for education can be easily seen not only in how non-dominant perspectives have been suppressed from school, but also in how these reactions serve to reinforce racism, intolerance, and the perpetuation of the hegemonic discourse.

Aiming at a hospitable classroom inspired by a vision of racial equity, Bryzzheva (2018) discusses how the white supremacy affects even those who intend to promote a hospitable education. The author then questions how people can create an environment that is hospitable for every student and not only for Whites. After all, as Schick (2014) demonstrates, such *whiteness* can be reflected in at least three ways. Firstly, when their sense of belonging is threatened, Whites exhibit color-blindness. A tentativeness to suppress the difference emerges as a way to maintain the control of power. Secondly, the dominant culture also knows how to perpetuate its own power, and therefore acts in ways that will maintain its privileges. Consequently, dominant culture individuals will further direct rules and processes so as to illustrate and develop their dominance. As such, when white/racial resentment is expressed in the classroom, it is hurtful to those at the receiving end,

because it expresses hostility. As a result, minority students' sense of belonging in what ought to be a hospitable space may be threatened.

Nevertheless, if educators understand intellectual candor as "the fact that the student has made an intellectually relevant contribution to academic discussion in good faith" (Callan, 2011, p. 7), it would appear incivility expressed through white/racial resentment does not fall within the category of intellectual candor nor does it fall within the category of hate speech. *Hosting* white/racial resentment while ensuring hospitality remains for those at the receiving end of white/racial resentment is a delicate pedagogical act that commends balancing the need to teach and challenge misconceptions with the need to provide justice and agency to those at the receiving end of the expressed resentment. In a similar vein, Bryzzheva (2018) notes that oftentimes harmful actions may not be (explicitly) racially-motivated. Consequently, it is up for the facilitator (i.e., teacher) to ensure reflection and discussion can take place with agency and responsibility among participants (i.e., students).

For the purpose of this reflection, it is pertinent to connect Ruitenberg's idea of the educator as host and giver of hospitality with Levinas' (1995) ethics of responsibility, because of the moral necessity for the offender to take responsibility for the harm caused to another classmate. Levinas (Peperzak, Critchley, & Bernasconi, 1996) articulates that the other with whom one comes into face-to-face contact with is always one's responsibility. In short, educators cannot free themselves from this responsibility: "Before the Other (Autrui), I am infinitely responsible. The Other is the poor and destitute one, and nothing which concerns this Stranger can leave the I indifferent" (p. 18). Molnar (2012) applies Levinas's work on educational contexts to describe the ethical call to embrace and welcome the other, an interruption of self by the difference of others, where one's solidarity is shaken and undermined in encounters with others. An ethical relationship will only happen by protecting the uniqueness of the other, rather than complying to the dominant perspective of the room. Levinas, Molnar explains, calls teachers to realize diversity is not something to be *handled*. Conversely, teachers must see themselves as responsible towards the other's uniqueness, which is already present in the singularity of each individual's face.

Educators have the opportunity to model how to address differences constructively while maintaining a safe community for all. Ruitenberg (2011b) points to the importance of allowing students to be respondents with agency. She illustrates her thoughts by explaining a host accommodates a guest by allowing him or her to change the space, however uncomfortable that might be. After all,

[I]n every educational situation a teacher is confronted with a student who is fundamentally ungraspable, and the ethical challenge is to respond to this student in a way that lets her or him be in otherness, that does not seek to recognize or otherwise close the gap with this singular other. (Ruitenberg, 2011a, p. 32)

Ruitenberg (2011b, 2018) reminds educators that hospitality requires this ability to know when and how to either give space or silence voices. When teachers challenge a student's point of view, they do so to create a better understanding of difference. Addressing interracial conflict is a delicate task. When these views are presented in a civil manner, as the host, the educator must defend the offended while refraining from attacking the antagonist. The offended must understand the host will stand up for their rights, and challenge any viewpoint that can be demeaning or hurtful. The antagonists must be aware they are welcomed to voice their opinion if spoken in a respectful and civil manner, but in doing so they open up their opinion for critique.

Callan advises, “Teachers can engage in open dialogue with the student who makes a derogatory judgment of others, pressing for evidence and argument that would support the judgment, and offer considerations that might point decisively in a different direction” (2011, p. 13). If the end goal of educators is to encourage students to respond to their world, Callan argues, they must also strive for critical responders, students who show tact and discretion when responding. “We can have the educational benefits of candor, in other words, while providing strong protection to the interests of students most vulnerable to the hazards of candor in the classroom” (Callan, 2011, p. 15). Such approach, however, places most of the emphasis on the offender, leaving the offended in a passive state. Consequently, the role of the teacher is key to ensuring those at the receiving end of the perceived attack are able to reclaim hospitality by being given the space and the means to respond to the offense with agency.

We contend educators may not be able to assume intellectual candor is at play when incivility is marked by white/racial resentment, which means, in addition to expressing incivility, the offenders also show in-hospitality. Looking at incivility through the lens of hospitality, one would need to shift from the notion of *providing protection* to those at the receiving end of incivility to the notion of assuming responsibility and providing an opportunity to respond, thereby restoring a sense of agency. In other words, the act of providing protection may keep the offended guests in a passive state, while engaging them as respondents would give them an active voice, making them active agents in such context as well.

However, there is always a risk the host’s space can become controlled or guided by the dominant culture. When the teacher is responding to the dominant group the majority of the time due to class makeup, the minority can lose some control over the space and, in turn, lose confidence in the space and their ability to respond without persecution. This can also allow members of the dominant culture to feel overconfident in the space and respond in a manner detrimental to the minority. As hosts, teachers are faced with the dilemma of keeping the space safe for all, while addressing unsubstantiated views among the guests. If views are not thoroughly addressed they can be prolonged and potentially ingrained in the class culture, but, when addressed, there will always be guests feeling uncomfortable and possibly unsafe in their environment. Being a hospitable host, then, poses a tough challenge on educators.

How, then, might teachers approach incivility when they cannot necessarily identify the intended sentiment as neither intellectual candor nor hate speech? In light of Levinas’ call for responsibility to otherness, we propose the responsibility to the other is paramount and precedes intellectual candor. Responsibility requires educators to put the needs of the other before their own, even if it causes insecurity, requires them to change, or challenges their identity; for coming to terms with one’s insecurity may be what is needed for social change. Nonetheless, if the needs of the other were considered first, there would be no need for hosts to silence hateful or condemning words. If uniqueness could be indeed understood as irreplaceability by every guest, it would rather be an environment that shows unconditional love for one’s neighbour.

Therefore, it falls greatly on the educator’s role to understand “candor without open-mindedness is not much use to us” (Callan, 2011, p. 17). Educators ought to perceive hospitality as paramount and realize the responsibility to the vulnerable other must precede the teaching moment for the offender. It is up to the teacher to point to students beforehand that they all share a common place where every voice has to be heard with respect and everyone must arrive in the classroom with an open mind, including teachers themselves. Once it is understood denying responsibility is inconceivable, the goal of hospitality has to be kept upfront, even if it means embracing the risk

of what may happen. If the goal of the educational host were to create an environment, which nurtures their guests to become respondents to their world, classrooms would become safe spaces for students to voice opinions, concerns, and ideas. A safe space would enable marginalized students to feel empowered to address negative stereotypes and prejudices directed towards them. Creating space for marginalized students to respond must follow the teacher's own intervention, one that is to be about justice before it can turn into a teaching moment.

Indeed, as a teacher has not only control of the classroom but is also perceived as an authority, one whose credibility favours their speech, it is of uttermost importance for incivility to be addressed in light of justice for marginalized voices. Having race-consciousness in focus, that is, learning about each other as raced beings, is the first step towards racial justice (Bryzzheva, 2018). Debunking stigmas, prejudices, and historically ingrained racism should be cherished by every teacher-host as a mean to protect those at the receiving end of incivility while enabling them to become active responders.

### **Conclusions: Hospitality, Incivility and Responsibility**

Cherishing a hospitable environment is both the teacher's and the students' responsibility. If students brought this ethic to the classroom, the initial fear of intellectual candor becoming abusive would no longer reside. Students would no longer approach issues single-mindedly, and the teachers-hosts would no longer feel as if they were on a tightrope trying to navigate everyone's feelings. In a hospitable classroom environment, where teachers seek to receive students as respondents with agency, students would be free to respond without persecution, and responses would be thoughtful and mindful of potentially hurtful judgements. Classrooms are filled with opportunities to display and encourage this positive mindset. Moreover, such is not the case of the oppressed to become oppressors, in Freirian's terms. Rather, it is by giving voice to the marginalized that the whole spectrum of host and guests might become respondent agents. "Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both" (Freire, 1996, p. 26).

It is important to remember this discussion does not fall on the sphere of pity. It is not simply a matter of compassion either. One might have compassion for the poor. Yet, giving him a piece of bread will not take him out of poverty. As Freire (1996) discusses, "Any attempt to 'soften' the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity" (p. 26). If a teacher seeks a democratic education, what is required is firstly being informed of historically ingrained racism and prejudices in society and truly being willing to have their own preconceptions debunked. An educator must understand, prior to the teaching moment, the purposes of education. Teachers ought to come to class having clearly understood education is not an end in itself. It is necessary for a teacher to know the goals of education can be overlapping domains, each of them with its value. What is required of the teacher, then, is the virtue of knowing how to manage through them. Making wise decisions about when to silence students, for example, will depend on how the teacher perceives her pedagogical goal. It is not by merely inserting certain topics in the curriculum that one will allow students to become active respondents. It is in the unpredictability of each moment in the classroom that such opportunity arises. How a teacher directs such moments is where the difference lays. Allowing students to become respondent agents in a hospitable classroom is very much under the control of how, or when, a teacher gives voice to those marginalized. If a teacher does not have clearly in his or her mind, prior to their coming to class, how crucial their authority and guidance in the

classroom is, it is likely moments marked by racial resentment, hate speech, or even intellectual candor might not be addressed ethically.

Preparing today's youth to constructively respond to the world they are entering rather than simply socialize them to the norms of the dominant culture, allows them to be constructors of their own personal narrative. However, they must be mindful their narratives will in turn affect the narratives of others, as social interaction is an intricate web teachers and students are a part of. Building an environment welcoming to all requires hospitality be framed as an inescapable responsibility. If the space is truly going to be shared by all, everyone must be responsive to and responsible for difference as an intrinsic value in society.

## References

- Alexander-Snow, M. (2004). Dynamics of gender, ethnicity, and race in understanding classroom incivility. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 99(65), 21-31.
- Bryzzheva, L. (2018). "This is a white space": On restorative possibilities of hospitality in a raced space. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 37, 247-256.
- Callan, E. (2011). When to shut students up: Civility, silencing, and free speech. *Theory and Research in Education*, 9(1), 3-22.
- Carstarphen, M., Welch, K., Anderson, W., Houck, D., McPhail, M., Frank, D. . . . Corrigan, L. (2017). Rhetoric, race, and resentment: Whiteness and the new days of rage. *Rhetoric Review*, 36(4), 255-347.
- Codjoe, H. M. (2001). Fighting a 'public enemy' of Black academic achievement—the persistence of racism and the schooling experiences of Black students in Canada. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 4(4), 343-375.
- Connelly, R. J. (2009). Introducing a culture of civility in first-year college classes. *The Journal of General Education*, 58(1), 47-64.
- Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: The New.
- Derrida, J. (1997). *Deconstruction in a nutshell: A conversation with Jacques Derrida* (No. 1). New York, NY: Fordham University.
- Derrida, J. (1998). From "Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas". *Research in Phenomenology*, 28, 20-36.
- Derrida, J. (2000). Hospitality. *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 5(3), 3-18.
- Edmonson, C., Bolick, B., & Lee, J. (2017). A moral imperative for nurse leaders: Addressing incivility and bullying in health care. *Nurse Leader*, 15(1), 40-44.
- Feldman, S., & Huddy, L. (2005). Racial resentment and white opposition to race-conscious programs: Principles or prejudice? *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(1), 168-183.
- Feldmann, L. J. (2001). Classroom civility is another of our instructor responsibilities. *College Teaching*, 49(4), 137-140.
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, England: Penguin Books.
- Gutiérrez, V., Larson, R. W., Raffaelli, M., Fernandez, M., & Guzman, S. (2017). How staff of youth programs respond to culture-related incidents: Nonengagement versus going "full-right-in". *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 32(1), 64-93.
- Harris, J. C. (2017). Multiracial college students' experiences with multiracial microaggressions. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 20(4), 429-445.
- Harris, J. C., & Linder, C. (2018). The racialized experiences of Students of Color in higher education and student affairs graduate preparation programs. *Journal of College Student Development*, 59(2), 141-158.
- Harwood, S. A., Mendenhall, R., Lee, S. S., Riopelle, C., & Hunt, M. B. (2018). Everyday racism in integrated spaces: Mapping the experiences of students of color at a diversifying predominantly white institution. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 108(5), 1245-1259.
- Hirschy, A. S., & Braxton, J. M. (2004). Effects of student classroom incivilities on students. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 99, 67-76.
- Hollingsworth, L. D., Patton, D. U., Allen, P. C., & Johnson, K. E. (2018). Racial microaggressions in social work education: Black students' encounters in a predominantly White institution. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 27(1), 95-105.
- Johnson-Ahorlu, R. N. (2012). The academic opportunity gap: How racism and stereotypes disrupt the education of African American undergraduates. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 15(5), 633-652.
- Keels, M., Durkee, M., & Hope, E. (2017). The psychological and academic costs of school-based racial and ethnic microaggressions. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(6), 1316-1344.

- Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevárez, A. (2017). The “new racism” of K–12 schools: Centering critical research on racism. *Review of Research in Education, 41*(1), 182-202.
- Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority*. (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University.
- Levinas, E. (1995). *Ethics and infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (R. A. Cohen, Trans.). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University.
- Mansouri, F., & Jenkins, L. (2010). Schools as sites of race relations and intercultural tension. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 35*(7), 93-108.
- McKown, C. (2013). Social equity theory and racial-ethnic achievement gaps. *Child Development, 84*(4), 1120-1136.
- Molnar, T. (2012). Responsibility as the welcoming of difference: Thoughts on Levinas and a teacher’s experience. *In Education, 18*(1), 37-49.
- Peperzak, A. T., Critchley, S., & Bernasconi, R. (1996). *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic philosophical writings*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Rabinowitz, J. L., Sears, D. O., Sidanius, J., & Krosnick, J. A. (2009). Why do White Americans oppose race-targeted policies? Clarifying the impact of symbolic racism. *Political Psychology, 30*(5), 805-828.
- Ruitenber, C. (2011a). The empty chair: Education in an ethic of hospitality. In R. Kunzman (Ed.), *Philosophy of Education* (pp. 28-36). Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society
- Ruitenber, C. (2011b). Hospitality and subjectification: On seeing children and youth as respondents. *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures, 3*(2), 133-140.
- Ruitenber, C. (2016). Response to Doris Santoro’s review of Unlocking the World: Education in an Ethic of Hospitality. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 35*, 533-536.
- Ruitenber, C. (2018). Hospitality and embodied encounters in educational spaces. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 37*, 257-263.
- Schick, C. (2014). White resentment in settler society. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 17*(1), 88-102.
- Sinha, S. (2018). The racialized body of the educator and the ethic of hospitality: The potential for social justice education re-visited. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 37*, 215–229.
- Wallsten, K., Nteta, T., McCarthy, L., & Tarsi, M. (2017). Prejudice or principled conservatism? Racial resentment and White opinion toward paying college athletes. *Political Research Quarterly, 70*(1), 209–222.
- Wilson, D., & Davis, D. (2010, September). *Thoughts on moving forward with racial resentment*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA), Washington, DC. Abstract retrieved from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1644645>