

Creating a culture of care: Implementing the I-CORT Framework 2.0 in teacher preparation

Tracy Hudson *

Department of Physical Education, State University of New York at Cortland, School of Professional Studies, , Cortland, New York, USA.

International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 14(02), 1294-1299

Publication history: Received on 07 January 2025; revised on 15 February 2025; accepted on 18 February 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2025.14.2.0483>

Abstract

Creating a culture of care in educational spaces is essential for fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. The I-CORT Framework 2.0 —Intentionality, Intersectionality, Care, Optimism, Respect, and Trust—provides a structured approach to cultivating this culture, ensuring that all students are seen as able, valuable, and responsible. Traditional teacher preparation programs often lack a comprehensive model for embedding care-centered pedagogies, particularly in physical education and broader classroom settings. The I-CORT Framework 2.0 addresses this gap by equipping preservice teachers with the necessary skills to create inviting educational climates that enhance student engagement and well-being. With the increasing demand for educational environments that support both social-emotional and academic growth, integrating the I-CORT Framework 2.0 into teacher preparation programs is a necessary step toward transforming schools into spaces where all students thrive. By doing so, institutions of higher education can align with K-12 efforts in fostering care-based pedagogies, ensuring a seamless transition in creating supportive learning communities.

Keywords: Preservice Teacher Education; I-CORT Framework; Trauma-Informed Pedagogy; Invitational Education; Culturally Responsive Teaching

1. Introduction

Education plays a critical role in shaping students' social, emotional, and cognitive development. However, creating inclusive and supportive learning environments remains a persistent challenge in both K-12 and higher education. Traditional teacher preparation programs often fail to equip preservice teachers with the tools necessary to cultivate classrooms rooted in care, equity, and student well-being. The I-CORT Framework 2.0—Intentionality, Intersectionality, Care, Optimism, Respect, and Trust—provides a structured approach for fostering a culture of care in schools, ensuring that all students are recognized as able, valuable, and responsible participants in their education.

While many K-12 schools have embraced culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices, higher education—particularly teacher preparation programs—continues to lag in preparing educators to lead with care. Without intentional training in care-centered pedagogies, new teachers may struggle to create inclusive learning environments, reinforcing systemic inequities. The rise in student disengagement and mental health challenges further underscores the urgency of integrating humanizing, equity-driven approaches into teacher education.

To address this gap, higher education institutions must align with K-12 efforts to cultivate inviting and affirming classrooms. Preservice teachers need structured preparation in care-based pedagogies, rather than relying on experience alone to develop these skills. Embedding the I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) into teacher

* Corresponding author: Tracy Hudson

preparation programs offers a concrete strategy for equipping future educators with the mindset and practices needed to build inclusive learning communities.

1.1. This article aims to

- Introduce the I-CORT Framework 2.0 and its theoretical foundation.
- Provide strategies for implementing the I-CORT Framework 2.0 in teacher preparation programs to create transformative educational spaces.

1.2. Overview of the I-CORT Framework 2.0

The I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024)—Intentionality, Intersectionality, Care, Optimism, Respect, and Trust—advances an equity-centered approach to education by fostering inclusive, student-centered learning environments. Expanding on Invitational Education Theory (Purkey, 1992; Purkey & Seigel, 1995; Purkey, Novak, & Fretz, 2020), it integrates social justice principles, culturally responsive teaching, and intersectionality to address the diverse experiences of all students.

Traditional education prioritizes standardization and compliance, often overlooking student agency and well-being. This iteration of the framework challenges that model by centering care, cultural responsiveness, and relational trust. Rather than simply inviting students into learning spaces, I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) ensures they are intentionally designed to affirm, uplift, and empower all learners. By addressing systemic barriers, it equips educators to create truly inclusive environments (Crenshaw, 2019).

The following figure illustrates the updated I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024), highlighting the interconnected principles of Intentionality, Intersectionality, Care, Optimism, Respect, and Trust as the foundation of an equity-centered learning environment. This model visually represents how these components work together to create transformative and humanizing educational experiences.

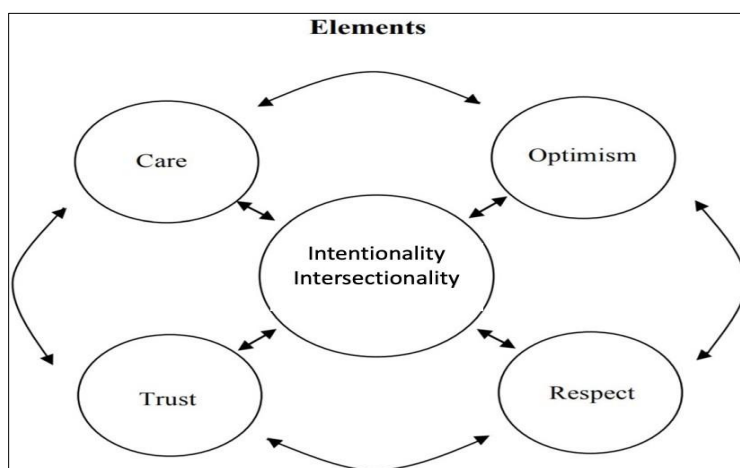


Figure 1 The I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024)

Rooted in a range of educational theories, I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) draws from Invitational Education (Purkey et al., 2020), Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970), the Ethic of Care (Noddings, 1984), and Growth Mindset research (Dweck, 2006). Justice-oriented scholars assert that for schools to be truly transformative, they must foster a culture of belonging, affirmation, and empowerment (Love, 2019). I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) embodies this vision, positioning Intentionality, Intersectionality, Care, Optimism, Respect, and Trust as the foundation for a humanizing and equitable educational experience.

1.3. Theoretical Foundations of I-CORT Framework 2.0

Invitational Education Theory: Invitational Education (IE) is a theory of practice grounded in a visionary act of hope, designed to cultivate human potential (Purkey, 1992). It emphasizes the inherent worth and capabilities of every student while advocating for equitable educational experiences. Recognizing that individuals engage only a fraction of their potential, IE asserts that educational environments either enhance or inhibit personal development.

Its primary objective is to create and sustain learning spaces rooted in Intentionality, Care, Optimism, Respect, and Trust (I-CORT). Serving as both a philosophy and a structured framework, IE guides educators in shaping meaningful and inclusive educational experiences (Purkey, Novak, & Fretz, 2020). As an evolving theory, it undergoes continuous refinement, with ongoing inquiry and emerging perspectives shaping its trajectory.

I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) extends this theory of practice by embedding intersectionality, acknowledging that students' experiences are shaped by multiple factors—including race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, and cultural identity. While IE focuses on welcoming students into learning environments, I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) ensures that those environments are actively designed to be inclusive, equitable, and responsive to students' lived experiences (Crenshaw, 2019).

Culturally responsive education emphasizes that students must see themselves reflected in their learning and that schools should affirm their identities rather than erase or devalue them (Gay, 2018). Love (2019) argues that education must be a space where students experience joy, intellectual challenge, and cultural affirmation rather than a site of control and compliance. By integrating intersectionality, I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) ensures that invitational learning is not just about being welcoming—it is about dismantling barriers that prevent full participation and success.

The Ethic of Care: Education is fundamentally relational. Care is not a passive emotion but an active commitment to student well-being (Noddings, 1984). Rooted in care ethics, I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) prioritizes empathy, student-centered teaching, and meaningful relationships. Care in this framework goes beyond traditional notions of kindness or encouragement; it requires educators to intentionally cultivate safe, affirming spaces where students feel psychologically and emotionally supported (Noddings, 2005).

Caring educators do not simply hope their students succeed—they actively remove obstacles that hinder their success. They recognize that social, emotional, and academic well-being are interconnected and that students cannot learn in environments where they do not feel safe or valued (Love, 2019). This principle is especially important in education systems where students—particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds—often feel unseen, unheard, and unprotected.

Growth Mindset and Positive Psychology: Optimism within the I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) is not about blind positivity but about creating an environment where students believe in their ability to grow and succeed. Research in growth mindset and positive psychology shows that students thrive when they see themselves as capable learners (Dweck, 2006; Seligman, 2011). However, this must be paired with real opportunities, resources, and affirming relationships.

The I-CORT Framework 2.0 integrates optimism as a way to counter narratives of failure and deficit-thinking, especially for students who have been historically excluded from educational opportunities. Rather than focusing on what student's lack, I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) encourages educators to highlight students' strengths, resilience, and potential. This kind of optimism is not about ignoring challenges—it is about ensuring that students have the support they need to overcome them (Love, 2019).

Respect and Trust: In many traditional educational models, respect and trust are conditional, granted only when students conform to institutional norms of obedience and compliance. However, the I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) challenges this approach, asserting that respect and trust must be foundational elements in educational relationships, not rewards for compliance (Purkey et al., 2020). Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of knowledge, this framework affirms their intellectual agency, cultural identities, and lived experiences as central to learning (Gay, 2018).

Respect within I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) is not about reinforcing authority but about recognizing students as co-creators of knowledge. In many classrooms, respect is misinterpreted as mere obedience, where students are expected to be silent and deferential. This narrow definition fails to cultivate critical engagement and intellectual exploration, reducing students to passive learners rather than active participants in their education (Freire, 1970). Instead, respect should be an acknowledgment of students' perspectives, experiences, and cultural identities, allowing them to meaningfully contribute to discussions and shape their own learning experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

A crucial element of respect in the I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) is recognizing that students have the right to accept, reject, or hold in abeyance messages that are presented to them (Purkey & Novak, 1996). This principle ensures

that students are not simply recipients of imposed knowledge but are empowered to engage in critical thinking and self-reflection. Classrooms that adopt this perspective foster dialogue over indoctrination, ensuring that education remains a liberatory process rather than a controlling one (Freire, 1970).

Similarly, trust in education must be given freely rather than treated as something students must prove they deserve (Love, 2019). Students thrive in environments where they feel emotionally and psychologically safe, yet many educational structures operate from a deficit-based perspective, particularly for marginalized students who often experience punitive discipline rather than relational trust (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Establishing trust requires consistency, authenticity, and relational accountability on the part of educators (Noddings, 2005). When students trust their teachers, they are more likely to engage in critical discourse, take academic risks, and develop self-confidence in their learning abilities.

Beyond fostering engagement, trust is also a prerequisite for student autonomy and leadership. Many educational models assume that students need strict oversight and constant control to succeed, reinforcing hierarchical teacher-student dynamics that suppress independent learning. However, the I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) challenges this assumption by calling for collaborative learning environments where students exercise agency in their own education. This shift includes allowing students to lead discussions, make decisions about their learning, and engage in reflective practices (Gay, 2018). When students are entrusted with responsibility, they develop a deeper investment in their education and a greater sense of belonging within the learning community.

To sustain a culture of trust, educators must also recognize the impact of systemic barriers on student experiences. Many students—particularly those from historically marginalized communities—have been conditioned to distrust educational institutions due to past experiences of exclusion, racial bias, and deficit thinking (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Trust cannot simply be assumed; it must be actively cultivated through equitable practices, culturally responsive teaching, and consistent advocacy for student well-being (Gay, 2018). By listening to students, validating their experiences, and intentionally dismantling harmful biases, educators help build classrooms where students feel seen, heard, and valued.

Ultimately, respect and trust in education must go beyond rhetoric and become lived experiences within classroom interactions. The I-CORT Framework 2.0 ensures that education is not about compliance but about empowerment. When students experience genuine respect and trust, they do not perceive school as a place where they must constantly prove their worth. Instead, they engage as full participants in an environment where their value is already affirmed. Through intentionality, intersectionality, and care-centered pedagogy, the I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) offers a transformative approach for educators seeking to create inclusive and student-centered learning environments (Purkey et al., 2020; Hudson, 2024).

2. Strategies for Implementing the I-CORT Framework 2.0

Preparing educators to create equitable, inclusive, and student-centered learning environments requires more than theoretical knowledge—it demands intentional application of research-based strategies that reinforce core pedagogical values. Research supports the need for experiential learning strategies that help preservice teachers internalize and apply equity-driven principles in diverse classrooms (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015). The following approaches provide concrete methods for integrating I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) into teacher preparation programs, ensuring that future educators cultivate the skills and mindsets necessary to create inclusive, care-centered learning spaces.

2.1. Embedding Framework Components in Lessons

Integrating I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) into lesson planning ensures that its core principles become embedded in teaching and learning processes. Educators should begin each lesson by reinforcing the framework's six components, helping preservice teachers understand their practical applications. For instance, in a teacher education course, students might examine how intentionality influences equitable instructional practices. When educators engage consistently with guiding principles, they are more likely to apply them effectively in their classrooms (Gay, 2018; Hammond, 2015). Embedding these components ensures that preservice teachers see their direct application in diverse educational settings (Purkey et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2017). Moreover, fostering a culture of care and respect through structured pedagogical frameworks like I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) supports student engagement and social-emotional development (Noddings, 2005; Zaretta, 2015).

2.2 Case Study Application

Case studies offer preservice teachers real-world applications of I-CORT Framework 2.0, enabling critical analysis of how Intentionality, Intersectionality, Care, Optimism, Respect, and Trust influence classroom dynamics. For example, a case study on culturally responsive teaching might explore an educator's efforts to develop an inclusive curriculum for multilingual students. This method fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills, encouraging teachers to apply I-CORT principles in designing strategies that promote trust and respect among learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Banks & Banks, 2019). Research suggests that case-based learning enhances preservice teachers' ability to navigate complex educational environments by equipping them with equity-driven instructional strategies (Howard, 2010).

2.3 Perspective-Taking Through Dialogue

Structured dialogue exercises enhance empathy, inclusivity, and relational trust among educators and students. Perspective-taking encourages critical examination of how students' diverse backgrounds shape their educational experiences. For example, structured discussions could require preservice teachers to role-play as students, educators, and parents from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, analyzing how intersectionality affects learning environments. Dialogue-centered learning, as emphasized by Freire (1970), fosters critical consciousness, equipping teachers to challenge biases and implement equitable teaching practices. Hooks (1994) similarly argues that democratic learning spaces are essential for inclusive pedagogy, while Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) highlight how structured dialogues help educators confront implicit biases. These practices ensure that future educators develop cultural competence necessary for effective, inclusive instruction (Milner, 2010).

2.4 Reflective Journal Writing

Reflective journaling allows preservice teachers to analyze experiences, identify biases, and track growth in applying I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024). Documenting reflections on lesson implementation and fieldwork helps educators evaluate their integration of intentionality, care, and respect. For example, after teaching a lesson on trauma-informed practices, a preservice teacher might assess how their strategies supported student well-being. Research emphasizes the value of reflective practice in bridging theory and real-world application (Noddings, 2005; Schön, 1983). Furthermore, structured reflection fosters self-awareness and continuous learning, allowing educators to adapt their instructional approaches to meet the needs of diverse classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

By embedding I-CORT Framework 2.0 into lesson planning, case study analysis, structured dialogue, and reflective journaling, educators can prepare preservice teachers to cultivate equitable, care-centered learning environments. These strategies ensure that future educators internalize and apply the framework's core values, creating learning spaces that empower all students. Through intentional implementation, I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) equips educators with the tools to challenge systemic barriers, foster culturally responsive instruction, and affirm diverse student identities.

3. Conclusion

The I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) is one of many research-based approaches that promote equity and inclusion in education. While it offers a structured model for embedding intentionality, intersectionality, care, optimism, respect, and trust, its effectiveness depends on deliberate integration within teacher preparation programs, professional development, and institutional policies. Higher education institutions, teacher educators, and policymakers must take intentional steps to embed these principles into curricula, faculty training, and educational reform, ensuring that future educators are immersed in care-centered and justice-oriented practices during their training.

Preservice teachers cannot be expected to create inclusive classrooms if they have not first experienced relational trust, culturally responsive pedagogy, and critical reflection in their own preparation. Faculty must model these values through their teaching while providing structured opportunities for engagement with equity-driven pedagogies. This commitment to reflective practice and intersectional awareness is essential for preparing educators to navigate diverse learning environments effectively.

The urgency for change is clear. Schools continue to face systemic inequities, student disengagement, and mental health challenges, reinforcing the need for transformative educational practices. The I-CORT Framework 2.0 (Hudson, 2024) provides a pathway to disrupt these patterns by fostering learning environments that affirm, uplift, and empower all

students. Achieving this goal requires collaborative action from teacher preparation programs, school leaders, and policymakers, ensuring that education functions not only as an academic pursuit but as a force for social progress.

This framework must serve as more than a theoretical guide—it should be a catalyst for a more just, humane, and empowering educational system for all.

References

- [1] Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (2019). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (10th ed.). Wiley.
- [2] Crenshaw, K. (2019). *On intersectionality: Essential writings*. The New Press.
- [3] Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Doing what matters most: Investing in quality teaching*. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.
- [4] Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- [5] Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- [6] Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- [7] Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin.
- [8] hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- [9] Howard, T. C. (2010). *Why race and culture matter in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*. Teachers College Press.
- [10] Hudson, T. (2024). *The I-CORT Framework 2.0: Creating a culture of care in education*. [Unpublished manuscript].
- [11] Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.
- [12] Love, B. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.
- [13] Milner, H. R. (2010). *Start where you are, but don't stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today's classrooms*. Harvard Education Press.
- [14] Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. University of California Press.
- [15] Noddings, N. (2005). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- [16] Purkey, W. W. (1992). *Invitational education: A holistic approach to successful schooling*. Charles C. Thomas.
- [17] Purkey, W. W., & Novak, J. M. (1996). *Inviting school success: A self-concept approach to teaching, learning, and democratic practice* (3rd ed.). Wadsworth.
- [18] Purkey, W. W., & Seigel, B. L. (1995). *Becoming an invitational leader: A new approach to professional and personal success*. Humanics.
- [19] Purkey, W. W., Novak, J. M., & Fretz, J. S. (2020). *Developing invitational education*. International Alliance for Invitational Education.
- [20] Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press.
- [21] Sensoy, Ö., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- [22] Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- [23] Zeichner, K. M., & Liston, D. P. (2013). *Reflective teaching: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- [24] Zaretta, H. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin.