CARING TEACHERS AND THEIR IMPACT: A PHENOMOLOGICAL STUDY OF STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of R. CURTIS BANKS find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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I would like to thank my family. I am grateful to my parents who have instilled in me a love for learning and a desire to achieve. My mother has spent countless hours tutoring and typing for me. I am thankful for my children, Brittny, Andy, Rebekah, and Spencer for their love and support. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my wife Dalene for her cherished sacrifice and concede that I could never have made it without her.
The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of caring from the student perspective. Research questions that guided the study are: (a) How do students define or talk about “caring” and “uncaring” teachers they experienced during their K-12 years? (b) How do students describe their experiences of being “cared for” by teachers or, conversely, of not being cared for? and, (c) What are the views of students in regard to the impact of caring and uncaring teachers on their schooling and lives? A phenomenologically-oriented, qualitative research approach was used in order to understand the participants’ experiences and perspectives. Phenomenologically-oriented interviews with twelve students who recently graduated from K-12 schools were used to collect data. As a result of the analysis of the study, eight themes of caring were identified within two general dimensions. These two core dimensions of teacher caring are pedagogical caring and nurturing caring. The themes that emerged regarding the dimension of pedagogical caring are helping students, using effective pedagogy, and giving students time. The themes that were revealed as nurturing care are establishing
personal relationships, treating students respectfully and positively, exhibiting concern for students’ personal welfare and well-being, guarding students’ emotional safety, and providing students with a feeling of being cared for. These themes emerged as a result of listening to students’ perspectives. Conclusions are stated as a conceptual framework that represents students’ perspectives on caring and uncaring teachers. The conceptual framework is that teacher caring is seen by students along two basic dimensions—pedagogical care and nurturing care. Each of these dimensions is illustrated with a variety of teacher behaviors represented in a two-by-two matrix. It is hoped that this study will bring awareness and a greater sense of the importance of caring in student’s lives and will serve as a catalyst for discussion and change in regard to giving voice to students, hiring teachers, and providing professional development for teachers.
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Dalene,
to our children, Brittny, Andy, Rebekah, and Spencer,
to my parents Richard and Jane Banks,
and to caring teachers.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

One of the most striking expressions of the importance of caring to students in K-12 schools is found in an excerpt from Pratt’s (2008) research; a fourth-grader states, “if a teacher doesn’t care about you, it affects your mind” (p. 2). The phenomenon of caring in schools has been widely discussed in the literature; however there is a lack of research on the concept of caring from the students’ perspective. This is a report of a phenomenological study that explores the phenomenon of caring teachers from the student perspective and how those experiences impact the students’ learning and lives. By exploring the experiences and perceptions of the students, this study hopes to bring awareness and a greater sense of the importance of caring in student’s lives and will serve as a catalyst for discussion and change in regard to giving voice to students and hiring and providing professional development for teachers. Additionally, implications for practice and further research will be presented.

Background

Caring has become an increasingly important concept in education in recent years. Baker, Terry, Bridger, and Winsor (1997) report that the importance of caring relationships with others is evident in many theories of child development (e.g. Erickson, 1963; Maslow, 1970), and the relationship between a student’s perception of a teacher as caring and the student’s ability to learn and work has been well established. They note
that, although the concept of caring has moral and ethical roots and has traditionally been
the work of philosophers, psychologists, and ethicists, its increasing appearance in K-12
education literature is evidenced by the emergence of dialogue about caring in
mainstream educational publications, including articles in *The Journal for a Just and
Caring Education, The Journal of Education,* and *The School Administrator.* These
writings support the argument that caring is important for developing an individual’s
psychological, intellectual, and social well-being, and therefore that a caring approach to
schooling is a prerequisite for academic learning. In alignment with this perspective,
scholars argue that caring teachers are essential to students’ well-being and learning.
How students feel about their school, their classes, and their relationships with their
teachers and peers strongly influences their sense of belonging and acceptance in school
and their academic engagement (Osterman, 2002). Further, the need for caring has
increased due to family changes and the deterioration of social supports (Esteve, 2000).

Unfortunately, the literature suggests that there are forces at work that mitigate
against a teacher’s ability to demonstrate caring. Public schools are being held
increasingly accountable for improving student achievement under federal “No Child
Left Behind” legislation and other initiatives, and have been mandated to provide
measurable evidence of their success in improving student achievement. According to
Forrester (2005), these education policies have given rise to a “performance culture” in
schools, which emphasizes targets, testing, and the monitoring and measurement of
teachers’ work and students’ learning. Forrester claims that schools are “modernizing”
the profession, changing the school culture from a feminine quality of nurturing towards a more masculine culture of management and performance. She argues that the meaning of “teacher” is essentially shifting to a focus on achieving, which devalues other important aspects of the teacher’s work that might be interpreted as “caring” activities. Positive attitudes toward teachers and teaching that have been valued by teachers, namely respect, trust and social status, are slowly being exchanged for increased surveillance, monitoring, and evaluation through assessment and measurement. Thus, the meaning of teachers’ work is increasingly reconstituted in terms of outcomes and performativity. Goldstein and Lake (2003) explain that teachers must contend with new legislative pressure, greater amounts of standardization, and ever more attention to bottom lines, outcomes, and accountability. The implication is that teachers increasingly see academic achievements as products and students as “performers,” rather than children in need of caring and nurturing (G. Furman, personal communication, July 2005). In addition, large class sizes, demanding daily schedules, and administrative tasks often inhibit teachers from building bonds of trust and relations with students (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995). Thus, there is a trend toward an impersonal treatment of students in schools, as Wexler (1976) warned many years ago.

To address these concerns, Noddings (2005) argues that we need to put the human dimension back into an educational system that has become dehumanizing by incorporating an ethic of care. Noddings defines caring for someone as the direct face-to-face attempt to respond to the needs of the cared-for. She explains that for a caring
relationship to exist there must be the one caring and the one cared-for. She also emphasizes the need for reciprocity. She argues that if the cared-for denies, doesn’t recognize, or doesn’t respond to caring, there is no caring relationship per se. This perspective coincides with that of communication theorists (e.g., Tevin & Hanson, 2004) who declare that the effectiveness of a message often depends upon the attitudes possessed by the receiver. In other words, “caring is perceived.”

To date, the research regarding caring interactions in schools has concentrated almost entirely on empirical studies of teacher caring behaviors as labeled and defined from educators’ perspectives. For example, Thibodeau and Hillman (2003) documented studies regarding how effective teachers are identified. They found that educators typically utilized peer nominations, students’ standardized scores, and response protocols where participants rank teachers in terms of relevant characteristics deemed important. As a result of these research methods, most of the education field’s understanding about caring comes from theories that are based on the observations or quantitative evidences of educators and social scientists (e.g., Noddings 1984, 2005; Starratt, 1994; Enomoto, 1997; Goldstein, 1998, 2003), rather than from the voices of the “cared-for,” the students in school. Thus far, there is a relative lack of research that focuses on the perspective of the “cared-for,” the students in K-12 schools. This qualitative study will focus on this topic.
Research Problem

Noddings (1984) defines caring as the face-to-face attempt to respond to the needs of the other, and caring is seen as an important element of the relationship between teachers and students in school. Research has established a relationship between a student’s perception of a teacher as caring and the student’s ability to learn and work (Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997). The literature also suggests that there are conditions that mitigate against caring relationships in school, such as the educational polices that have given rise to a performance culture in schools. If the value of caring relationships in regard to learning is to be better established, more research is needed that explores this phenomenon. While some studies have focused on teachers’ caring behaviors from the perspective of social scientists and educators, and other studies have focused on social, political, educational, and economic changes that impede caring, there is a noticeable lack of in-depth research concerning the students’ perceptions of caring and uncaring teachers and their impact on students’ development and lives. This is surprising in that it is only through understanding what the student perceives, defines, and recognizes as caring that progress can be made to improve caring relationships in K-12 schools (Riemen, 1998). Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the students’ internal experience of caring, a phenomenological inquiry is needed to explore students’ experiences and perceptions.
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of caring from the student perspective. Specifically, the study explores college students’ retrospective views of their experiences of caring and uncaring relationships with teachers during their K-12 school years and the impact of these experiences on their learning and lives. This study addresses the following questions:

1. How do students define or talk about “caring” and “uncaring” teachers they experienced during their K-12 years?

2. How do students describe their experiences of being “cared for” by teachers or, conversely, of not being cared for?

3. What are the views of students in regard to the impact of caring and uncaring teachers on their schooling and lives?

Research Methods

This study is an attempt to learn about students’ experiences with caring and uncaring teachers and the perceived influence caring/uncaring teachers have had on their learning and lives. A phenomenologically-oriented, qualitative research approach was used in order to understand the participants’ experiences and perspectives. Creswell (2003) explains that a qualitative research design is appropriate in order to “establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants” (p. 20). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explain that the phenomenological approach emphasizes the interpretive understanding of human interaction, rather than studying human behavior by objectively
explaining the relationship between variables. A phenomenological approach of in-depth interviewing allowed the participants in this study to reflect on and describe their experiences and explore and illustrate their perceptions.

Participants were 12 college-age students (five males and seven females) residing in the northwestern United States. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years. They came from various ethnic backgrounds including six Caucasians, two African Americans, two Pacific Islanders, one Hispanic, and one Native American. I interviewed each participant using a set of interview questions as a guide (see Appendix A).

Positionality

The qualitative research approach acknowledges the reality of the researcher’s own personal perspectives and values, which influence the design and conduct of a study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I love teaching and helping others to learn. Therefore, as a result of my background, experiences, and role as a teacher and a parent, my position cannot be overlooked as an important aspect to consider regarding my perspective and interpretation of this study. The positionality section in Chapter Three will explain in further detail relevant features of my personal background, attitudes, and values.

Research Ethics and Validity

This study focuses on students’ experiences and perspectives of having caring and uncaring teachers during their K-12 school years. Inasmuch as these experiences are highly personal and often related to a person’s self-worth, it was a concern and goal of the researcher to acknowledge, protect, and value the feelings and experiences expressed
by each participant. Therefore, care was taken not to interrogate, intimidate, or pressure participants into answering a question if they did not want to answer because of undue stress from potentially painful memories. Furthermore, care was taken to inform participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants’ identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms throughout the study. In addition, no information will be used in this report that would allow for the identification of teachers or schools, since participants may have divulged sensitive information regarding teacher’s abilities and weaknesses.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may be significant in several respects. First, as previously mentioned, there is a lack of research on students’ perceptions of caring and uncaring teachers. This study attempts to address this gap by giving consideration to the voice (expression, opinion, development, and life) of students. Second, this study is timely, given the demands of the current reform movement to place more emphasis on measurable academic achievement at the cost of caring about the individuals referred to as students. The findings of this study may illustrate the possibilities and value of a greater emphasis on caring within the context of current school reform. Third, the findings of this study may lead to specific implications for professional development and hiring practices in K-12 schools.
Report of the Study

The report of this study is comprised of five chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the study, including the research purpose and questions, methodology, issues of positionality, and ethics. Chapter Two provides a review of literature regarding the development of the ethic of care, the importance of caring in education, the expectations for teachers to care, and the obstacles to caring in schools. Chapter Three details the research methods of this study, including participant selection, data collection, the researcher’s positionality, and considerations of ethics and credibility. Chapter Four presents a thematic analysis of the data. Chapter Five discusses the conclusions and implications of the study’s finding for teacher preservice and training and the need for further research. It also includes personal reflections concerning lessons that I have learned as a result of this study.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

To provide a context for the study, this chapter reviews background literature that focuses on the themes central to this study. Specifically, topics included are an overview of the development of the ethic of care, the importance of caring in education, the expectations of students and parents for teachers to care, and the barriers and obstacles that mitigate against caring relationships in schools.

The Development of the Ethic of Care

The concept of care in human relationships originated in the field of psychology and moral development. Freud, Piaget, Erickson, Maslow, and Kohlberg were some of the social scientists who developed theories and models for human moral development that often utilized “stages” related to the development of moral awareness and behavior. For example, Kohlberg developed a model outlining six stages for moral development (Santrock, 1984). Kohlberg’s six stages were grouped into three levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. At the preconventional level, stages one and two were heteronomous morality (avoidance of punishment) and individualism, instrumental purpose, and exchange (to serve one’s own needs). The conventional level includes stages three and four: mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, interpersonal conformity (the need to be a good person), and conformity to the social system and
conscience (to avoid the breakdown in the system). Last of all, the postconventional, or
principled level of moral development, includes stages five and six: social contract and
individual rights (a sense of obligation to law for the welfare of all) and universal ethical
principles (the belief as a rational person in the validity of universal moral principles and
personal commitment to them).

Similarly, Maslows’ (1970) model delineated developmental stages in terms of a
hierarchy of needs; the lower the need in the hierarchy, the more powerful the need is.
These stages include physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem
needs, and self-actualization.

Carol Gilligan (1982) built on Kohlberg’s work and modified it to include
women’s perspectives. As Gilligan worked with Kohlberg, she became cognizant of the
difference in the ways males and females viewed human experience. She remembered
some work by Piaget in which boys seemed more rule oriented while playing games than
girls, who seemed more relationship oriented, even at the cost of playing or finishing the
game. Gilligan began to criticize the work of Kohlberg as exclusively studying males
without taking into account female perspectives.

Gilligan (1982) published the results of studies she conducted based on female
views in the book titled *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s
Development*. In this work, she argues that women’s voices or viewpoints had been
ignored in earlier work on moral development. From listening to women’s voices,
Gilligan proposed an ethic of care that was gender related. She argued that males tend to
view the world from a rational, rule, and principle based perspective, while females look at the world in the context of attachment and protecting and preserving relationships.

Subsequent to Gilligan’s work, Nel Noddings (1984) became the most well-known and influential scholar on the concept of caring in education. Relying heavily on Gilligan’s research, Noddings added that males tend to view the world through a lens of universal right and wrong (the ethic of justice), whereas females view the world as being situational and based on relationships. In other words, males view the world using autonomy and individualism and females view the world in relation to others. Noddings defined caring not as an attribute or virtue but as an action, something you engage in or do, rather than something you are. She explained that caring for someone is the direct face-to-face attempt to respond to the needs of the other. She argued that caring is feminine in the classical sense of responding, relationships, and reciprocity and that, for a caring relationship to exist, there must be the one caring and the cared-for. She argued that if the cared-for denies, or fails to recognize caring, and therefore does not respond, there is no caring relationship.

The concept of caring has implications for schools. According to Noddings (1984) and other authors (e.g., Osterman, 2002), schools should not be seen as just the dispensers of knowledge and information but places of nurturing relationships that are necessary for learning to occur. Noddings contends that, although they can profit from some business management techniques, schools are not businesses or factories. Schools, like homes, are special places in children’s’ lives. Noddings (2005) warns of those that
would convert education from a “public good” to a “consumer good.” She attempts to put the human dimension back into an educational system that has become dehumanizing.

George W. Noblit (1993) argues caring in classrooms is about the ethical use of power. He explains that teacher-centered teaching does not refer to traditional definitions of power and oppression, but instead assumes power used in the moral service of others. In other words, power is the moral responsibility for the education of children. He agrees with Noddings (1984) that in a caring relation, power does not render the other into an object, but rather maintains and promotes the other as subject. Power and caring is taking responsibility for creating a context for children to participate in, connect and construct relationships. The care giver must be strong and courageous so that he or she can use the good to “control that which is not good” (p. 35)

Ferreira, Bosworth, and Smith (1995) believe that it is important to conceive of caring not merely in terms of behaviors but also in terms of an underlying ethic that guides behavior. As an ethic, caring is not just extended through behavior, but can serve as a moral foundation for decision-making. Caring is more than just being concerned for others. As an ethic, caring is grounded in specific contexts that influence people’s ways of being in relation.

Robert J. Starratt has also done extensive work with the concept of care in education. In his well-known work, Building an Ethical School (1994), he contends that administrators’ tasks are to build ethical schools, which should incorporate three ethics:
the ethic of critique, the ethic of justice, and the ethic of care. The ethic of critique assumes that no organization is ethical towards everyone; some groups are advantaged while others are disadvantaged. The ethic of critique involves the questioning of bias, or unequal treatment, toward people served by a school. The ethic of justice is rooted in the ethic of critique in that critique of the system should lead to action. The ethic of justice promotes fairness in spending, fair use of resources, and fair treatment for all, regardless of gender, race, etc.

Starratt’s (1994) discussion of the ethic of care is based on compassion for others. Relationships are considered sacred and are based on absolute regard and valuing of others. He contends that the ethic of care is the willingness to accept people’s right to be who they are. It is not concerned about efficiency or productivity, such as increasing students’ standardized test scores or lessening the cost per pupil, but on compassion for others. Starratt (1994) argues that the ethics of critique, justice, and care do not have to be in competition with each other. He strongly believes that ethical administrators should strive to enact a combination of these three ethics.

Furman (2004) expanded on the notion of caring by basing it in communal processes, rather than in the relationship between two individuals. She argued that most of the work on ethics in education focuses on individual educators adopting specific ethical stances and ignores the “communal process” of listening, understanding, communicating, working in teams and engaging in ongoing dialogue, which results in the sharing of responsibility for the moral life of schools. Thus, she proposes an “ethic of
community,” which shifts the “locus of moral agency” from the individual to the community as a whole. Caring then becomes a quality of the community rather than one of relationships between individuals.

Enomoto (1997) conducted a study to see if it was possible to have a school incorporate both an ethic of justice and an ethic of care or if these two ethics were incompatible. Based on a case study of attendance problems at “Rivera High,” she developed a model wherein the ethic of justice was posed as being the opposite of the ethic of care. She observed that the attendance personnel, many of whom were volunteer parents, were very lenient. This leniency was defined as “caring” of students. Their leniency was frustrating for teachers, who did not feel supported in their approach to disciplining students for absences, which was based in an ethic of justice, or standardized responses to all students. As a result of her study, Enomoto concluded that schools tend to negotiate rather than reconcile the ethics of justice and care. She believes it is very difficult to reconcile these seemingly opposite ethics in schools.

Goldstein has added to the literature on caring in schools, writing many books and articles. In a 1998 study, she attempted to define caring by looking at the journal entries of preservice teachers. She reported that many teachers enter the profession based on romantic and idealistic definitions of caring such as “caring means being nice” or that caring is providing “smiles and warm fuzzies.” Goldstein conceptualizes the relational aspect of caring. Her generic definition of caring in classrooms includes images of a teacher being nurturing, supportive, nice, inclusive, responsive, and kind.
Montgomery (1991) looked at the nature of caring from the experiences and perspectives of nurses. What emerged from her interviews was an over-riding theme of caring she described as the “experience of spiritual transcendences” (p. 92). Spiritual transcendence was defined as “experiencing oneself in relationship as a part of a force greater than oneself” (p. 92). She argues that there is a distinct qualitative difference between helping relationships connected at the level of the ego and those connected at the level of something greater. This definition challenged some of the conventional understanding of the helping relationship. She clarifies that the nurses’ goal or intention was simply to connect, rather than to achieve any particular agenda. She further explains that “this way of helping is very different from the achievement oriented focus that has the goal of curing disease or eliminating problems, which is the masculine model of the hero rescuer, and while it is appropriate in many contexts, it can lead to disaster when caring is attempted from such a position” (p. 96). Finally, Montgomery concludes “caring becomes a self-enhancing way of being” (p. 103).

Parker J. Palmer (1998) adds a personal and moral dimension to the interpersonal (relationships) and communal elements of an ethic of care in education. He writes that great teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges within our inwardness. He declares that knowledge of oneself is more important to great teaching than knowledge of one’s students or subject matter. Palmer argues that great teaching is not a matter of technique but a matter of the heart. Caring connections by teachers are not founded in methods but in their hearts.
In summary, scholars have identified many dimensions of the development of an ethic of care in schools. The ethic of care in education has a moral dimension (Freud, Piaget, Erickson, Maslow, and Kohlberg), an interpersonal and relationships dimension (Gilligan, Noddings, Noblit, Ferreira), a communal dimension (Starratt, Furman, Enomoto), and a personal or self dimension (Goldstein, Montgomery, Palmer).

The Importance of Caring in Education

Caring is a fundamental aspect of education and schooling. Pomeroy (1999) has shown that a students’ perception of teachers as caring has a direct relation to the students’ perceived ability to engage in work and learn. Osterman (2002) suggests that “the primary condition necessary for the development of relationships is frequent and affectively positive interaction” (p.175). She refers to Baumeister and Leary’s work, who determined that the need to belong is indeed fundamental and is associated with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral health and well-being processes and patterns, and through its effects on engagement, is also linked to academic achievement.

However, family networks, the shared values of community, and other social supports to schools are deteriorating. Certo, Cauley, and Chafin (2003) explain how school personnel and the public often attribute low levels of student engagement to factors intrinsic to the child or the home environment. In fact, many school reformers (e.g., Noddings, 2005; Aldridge & Goldman, 2002; Esteve, 2000; Hansen & Wentworth, 2002) have described and listed changes in work patterns, residential stability, style of housing, sexual habits, dress, manners, language, music, entertainment, and, perhaps
most important of all, family arrangements as evidence regarding the need and importance to care. For example, Esteve (2000) contends that social support of the educational system by parents and the community has deteriorated. He explains that many agents of education who in the past made important contributions to the social, moral, and civic educations of young people have limited considerably their former valuable activities. The most important among these educational agents to have changed is families. This is largely due to the historical fact that many more mothers now work outside the home. Parents have much less time to spend with their children. The rise in the number of divorces and of single-parent families also contributes to the neglect of many children’s emotional, moral and civic education. Consequently, today’s parents have much less influence on their children. Schools report more emotional disturbances and anti-social behavior, so that the teaching of basic human relations and moral values formerly carried out by parents and relatives must now be undertaken by teachers.

Esteve (2000) also claims that there used to be a common agreement or understanding about what values should be imparted by teachers to the young of the community. In this united belief, education managed to establish certain core values to be reflected in school life and to be transmitted by the teachers. These values arose from an essentially convergent socialization process. Of course, the schooling of the whole population involves taking into our classrooms children from widely different cultural and linguistic communities. These children from different cultures often display different sensitivities because their education at home gives them different value judgments so that
they interpret some situations and classroom information differently from other children, and these interpretations provoke different emotions.

   Sadly, many educators and social scientists (e.g., Noddings, 1984, 2005; Osterman, 2002) believe that schools have not responded in an effective and caring way to these changes. Ferreira, Bosworth, and Smith (1995) claim the culture of schools and other social institutions are created from the attitudes, values, and interactions of the participants in them. In addition, these attitudes, values and interactions are shaped to some extent by the policy environment of the institution.

   Baker, Terry, Bridger, and Winsor (1997) cite Bowlby, who believes that from an attachment perspective, children require caring relationships to develop the complex behavioral, emotional, and social cognitive competencies that foster adaptation to schooling and sound mental health. They argue that children who experience positive, caring, consistent caretaking relationships develop both the competencies and security required for success in any social setting, including school.

   Wentzel (2002) found that young children’s adjustment to school is related to teacher-student relationships characterized by warmth, the absence of conflict, and open communication. He further explains that it is likely that students learn by observing their teacher’s behavior. Wentzel also informs us that, although modeling is not mentioned frequently as a characteristic of caregiving, its potentially powerful socializing effects have been well documented.
In summary, social changes have increased the need for schools to care. Students’ perception of teachers as caring individuals has a direct relation to the students’ perceived ability to learn. Children require caring relationships to develop the competencies that cultivate acclimatization to schooling.

Expectations for Teachers to Care

Lee Shulman, in a conversation reported by Carol Tell (2001), explains that nurturing is usually associated with parents, clergy, social workers, and all of the other people who jointly accept the responsibility for both raising and protecting children; but teachers, in particular, play a singular role in our society in nurturing students. Glenn (2001) suggests that there are many factors important for school effectiveness, but the most important is teacher quality. Research over the past decade has enabled us to better understand the characteristics and behaviors of teachers that students like or dislike.

A teacher’s potential influence is based on several factors. Tatar (1998) conducted a study to investigate the meaning of significant others in regard to adolescent lives from two perspectives: during adolescence and as adults looking back at their adolescence. In the study, participants were asked to choose the most significant family and non-family individuals in their adolescent lives. Tatar (1998) defines significant others as being persons (a) to whom adolescents feel attached and from whom they receive social support; (b) who have a potentially strong impact on their lives; (c) whose opinions are valued and respected by the adolescent; and (d) whose attitudes shape the adolescent’s self-perceptions. Tatar’s results indicate that most of the adolescents and
adults chose a parent as the most significant relative during their adolescence and unquestionably the prominent person that influenced the adolescent’s life. He also found that the quality of adolescent attachment to parents was a powerful predictor of health and happiness. Adolescents chose their mothers as the most significant family member in their lives and consider them to be the “emotional core” of the family. Fathers tend to be perceived as the “crisis managers.” Adolescents also more often chose peers they considered friends as significant others and characterized them in terms of present-oriented features. In contrast, adults were more likely to mention their teachers as significant non-family individuals in their lives and to characterize them in terms of their future impact and as role models.

Tatar (1998) suggested that adolescent pupils who lack adult guidance outside the school will be much more likely to choose teachers as significant individuals in their lives and to profit from such relationships. He concluded that peers generally contribute to an adolescent’s present needs, such as intimacy and reciprocity, while teachers with whom adults can easily identify are more related to the adolescent’s future.

Ferreira, Bosworth, and Smith (1995) refer to Goodlad’s study of 8500 parents nationwide to emphasize that parents expect their children to be in a safe school, to be known by someone in the school and to be provided with individual attention in both instruction and personal areas. They use Shane’s 1977 study to discuss what students’ seek from schools: (a) coping skills for dealing with a complex world; and (b) schools that care about them.
Tatar and Horenczyk (2002) conducted a survey in Israel on expectations parents had of teachers. They asked fathers and mothers to complete a written questionnaire dealing with their expectations of their adolescent child’s teachers. This questionnaire, The Expectations of Teachers, consisted of 12 items describing behavioral characteristics of teachers. The 12 characteristics came from three broad categories: (a) help and assistance (four items, e.g. “I would like the teacher to be interested in his or her problems”); (b) teaching competence (four items, e.g. “I would like his or her teacher to give interesting lessons”); and (c) fairness (four items, e.g. “I would like his or her teacher not to discriminate between pupils”). Three main findings emerged from their study: (a) Help appears to be the most important expectation parents hold regarding their children’s teachers; (b) mothers, in two out of the three scales, hold higher expectations for teachers than fathers; and (c) the gender of the child was found to be related to her or his parent’s expectations for teachers. Parents hold higher expectations for teachers in terms of help and competence for girls than for boys. Findings based on this representative sample of parents of school-aged children showed that approximately half of them consider teaching and imparting knowledge as the major goal of schools, followed by transmitting values, preparing for further study and work, developing personality, and educating for life in society.

In this same study, expectations for teachers held by elementary and senior high school students were classified in terms of three main categories: teaching competence, help and assistance, and fairness. Various studies (e.g., Tatar & Horenczyk, 2002) have
shown the first two characteristics to be central to students’ perceptions of the good teacher. They explain that their image of teaching competence relates to the teacher’s behaviors, such as explaining well, having strong control over the lesson content, being firm, keeping order in the classroom, and being well organized. Helpfulness combined with support and trust on the part of the teacher are major components of the relational aspect of the “good teacher” image. Elementary-school children perceive the job of a teacher as helping children, teaching them, and assigning work. However, young adolescents judge teachers on their ability to explain and their responsiveness to their individual needs.

In a study of the teacher-student relationship by students who had dropped out from school, Pomeroy (1999) found that students often cite public humiliation, especially shouting, as one of the most negative teacher-student interactions. Teacher behavior patterns that were found to be antagonistic and humiliating were telling students to “shut up,” responding sarcastically, putting young people down, and name-calling. Pomeroy (1999) discovered that the most consistent and common grievance was that teachers did not listen to students or that students felt that their point of view was not valued enough to be heard. In addition, Pomeroy’s (1999) study recognized discipline as a central aspect of teacher-student relations. He identified three central features to the disciplinary action advocated by young people. The first is that discipline is perceived as being fair; the second is that it is delivered in a respectful manner; and the third is that it is seen to be motivated by a concern for the student’s well-being.
In summary, a teacher’s influence increases with the strength of the teacher-student relationship, the lack of adult influence outside of school, and the increase of the student’s maturity and hindsight. Finally, students and parents expect teachers to instruct and behave in caring ways. For most parents and students, caring is embodied in the individual acts that caring teachers’ exhibit toward students. They consider caring teachers to be involved, polite, willing to provide help, responsive to their needs, and concerned for their success.

Barriers and Obstacles that Mitigate Against Caring in Schools

In the beginning, American schools were established as an extension of family, and it was believed that schools should be very nurturing places. Reciprocally, homes were places to support, practice, and reinforce learning. However, the educational reform movement based in standards and accountability, which began in the late 20th century, has helped to shift this relationship and the role of teachers in school.

Forrester (2005) explains that school reformers have emphasized the technical and structural aspects of schooling. This is evidenced by the specific requirements of increased testing, preparing pupils to enhance their performance, focusing on a school’s performance, and mandating that teachers perform in a way that demonstrates competent teaching. According to Forrester (2005), education policies have given rise to a “performance culture” in schools that emphasizes targets and testing and is overly concerned with the monitoring and measurement of teachers’ work. He explains that the notion of “performativity” becomes significant for understanding teaching as performing
when efficiency, effectiveness and competence have given rise to a new kind of professional teacher.

Policymakers’ notions of performance in schools are very much tied to meeting specific targets and measuring what is thought to matter (Morley, 1999; Tomlinson, 2001). Baker, Terry, Bridger, and Winsor (1997) explain that attention has been given to reshaping curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom management to improve academic attainment at the exclusion of the way students develop or are treated. Although they do report that most states have educational mandates for some form of “values education,” public schools are being held increasingly accountable for improving student achievement. Recent federal education legislation, namely No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has dramatically increased the role of the federal government in education by requiring states, school districts, and schools to focus on the outcomes of teaching, namely student test scores. The primary goal of congress in passing NCLB was to hold states and public schools accountable for improving student achievement. States have been mandated to develop measurable milestones in order to gauge their success in improving student academic achievement. The accountability mechanism is called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). There are serious consequences for schools not achieving AYP.

However, Amrein and Berliner (2003) report that investigations of the degree to which external tests motivate students to learn found that students depicted themselves as anxious, angry, bored, pessimistic, and withdrawn from high stake tests. They also report
that when the stakes get high, teachers no longer encourage students to explore the concepts and subjects that interest them. Feeling pressured to produce higher test scores, teachers are becoming more controlling and less patient, particularly with students who lag behind (Stipek, 2006).

This focus on measurable academic achievement, along with social, political, and economic changes, is transforming the role of the teacher. As a result of the formalization of schooling, teachers have acquired professional status (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The role of teacher has transformed from that of caring mentor to that of skilled professional. Some consider that an educational approach based in nurturing and relational principles may inadvertently reduce social status and professional respect for teachers (Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997). Characteristics and qualities that once defined professionals and were valued by teachers--namely respect, trust and social status--have been exchanged for technical skills and professional expertise. Professional legitimacy is rearticulated through this performative state of being, and acting professionally has taken on new meaning. Forrester (2005) argues that this emphasis essentially devalues or makes invisible other important aspects of teachers’ work that might be conceptualized as “caring activities.”

Esteve (2000) purports that, in addition to their classroom work, teachers must attend to different administrative tasks. They must allocate time for planning, counsel and orient students, attend to visiting parents, organize extracurricular activities for the pupils, and attend staff and other meetings. In addition to physical care and oversight,
teachers must care for the psychological equilibrium of the pupils, including their social integration, sexual education, intercultural education, health education, and drug abuse prevention education. He also explains that often teachers have to care for more than one pupil with special needs who are integrated into the class and who need very specific attention. Travers and Cooper (1996) explain that teachers are required to bring together the incompatible roles of friend, colleague, and helper with that of evaluator, selector, and disciplinarian. The multiplicity and diversity of functions performed by faculty are now so broad that adequate preparation and execution of the tasks of each responsibility is practically impossible without some effect on the quality of the performance.

Caring and performing exist side-by-side, and teachers wrestle with the demands of both. When greater importance is placed on one, the other is adversely affected (Enomoto, 1997). So in the current climate, where policy-makers are overly concerned with activities that can be measured (performance), these are given prominence while other activities (caring) become less visible (Travers & Cooper, 1996).

Thayer-Bacon, Arnold, and Stoots (1998) report that most teachers say they are caring and that is why they chose a career in education, because they care for students and want to make a difference in their lives. However, they argue, if one asks students how many caring teachers they have had during their school careers, we find a different response. Many say less than five. These authors explain that this response reminds us that while we may perceive ourselves as caring, that does not mean that others perceive us that way.
Therefore, caring is a receiver perception. Teven and Hanson (2004) remind us that Aristotle taught more than 2500 years ago that “an individual as a source of a message might contribute to the persuasiveness of his or her message” (p. 39). In other words, when examining the communication or interactions between two individuals, the effectiveness of a message often depends upon the attitudes possessed by the receiver. Thus, perceived caring is similar to Aristotle’s conceptualization of a speaker’s “goodwill” toward an audience. Teven and Hanson (2004) argue that various behaviors might influence those perceptions, including teacher behaviors. Unfortunately, most of the research regarding caring interactions in schools is based in the observations of educators and social scientists, and not on the receiver’s perception.

These selected articles conclude that a focus on academic achievement emphasizing technical and structural changes, increased teacher demands, and ignoring the perceptions of the receivers of caring have created obstacles for caring in education. These barriers to caring found in the research have drawn attention to the need to investigate the importance of caring in schools and the impact of caring on students.

Summary

The conclusion of this literature review is that caring matters, caring teachers do make a difference in students’ learning and lives, students and parents expect teachers to care, but that there are forces at work that mitigate against caring in schools. Further, there appear to be some deficiencies in the literature in regard to the essential character of a caring teacher-student relationship. Most of the research regarding caring interactions
in schools has focused on the observations of teacher caring behaviors as defined and theorized by social scientists and educators. There are few studies exploring caring in schools from the experiences and perspectives of the students, although some work has been done in other countries.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of caring from the student perspective. Specifically, the study explores college students’ retrospective views of their experiences of caring and uncaring relationships with teachers during their K-12 school years and the impact of these experiences on their learning and lives. The study was guided by these questions: (a) How do students define or talk about “caring” and “uncaring” teachers they experienced during their K-12 years? (b) How do students describe their experiences of being “cared for” by teachers or, conversely, of not being cared for? and (c) What are the views of students in regard to the impact of caring and uncaring teachers on their schooling and lives? This chapter will discuss the study’s research methodology, design and methods, my positionality as a researcher, and considerations in research ethics and credibility.

Research Methodology

Since the purpose of this study was to explore and understand participants’ experiences and perspectives, a phenomenologically-oriented, qualitative research approach was used. Creswell (2003) stated that the qualitative approach is appropriate in order to “establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants” (p. 20). Hudacek (2008) explained that the intent of a phenomenological study is to focus on
every day experiences, reflect on what is said about these experiences, and transform this expression into meaning. In addition, Rubin and Rubin (2005) state that a phenomenological approach to interviewing allows participants to clarify concepts and elicits depth and detail about the research topic. Rubin and Rubin (2005), Creswell (2003), and Bogdan and Biklen (2003) provided helpful advice and recommendations for the interviewing process employed in the design of this study.

Research Design and Methods

Participant Selection

This study used purposeful sampling to select participants. The intention of purposeful sampling is to select participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2003). Methodologists consider purposeful sampling as the most important kind of non-probability sampling to identify primary participants for qualitative studies (Groenewald, 2004; Welman & Kruger, 1999). Due to the difficulty of getting permission to interview minors (i.e., students in K-12 schools), I selected college-age participants (ages 18-25) who are able to articulate and reflect on their recent experiences in K-12 schools.

In selecting participants, an attempt was made to ensure diversity in the sample, specifically in regard to gender, ethnicity, and K-12 schooling context (e.g., urban and rural). The participants were selected based on their knowledge of, involvement with, and first-hand experience with caring/uncaring teachers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and accessibility to the researcher.
I began my search for participants during a pilot study (Banks, 2006) conducted in partial fulfillment of a research methods course at Washington State University during the Spring 2006 semester. I interviewed five college-age individuals for that study who were recruited through on campus announcements. These individuals were high school graduates who had experienced a wide array of teachers during their K-12 school years and had the ability to think retrospectively by looking back at those experiences. Further, they were old enough to articulate memories and give meaning to their experiences with caring and uncaring teachers. I included in the current study participants from this earlier pilot study. To expand the sample, I used a snowball technique by having pilot study participants refer others who have had experiences with caring/uncaring teachers (Creswell, 2003). I specifically aimed for greater diversity among participants during this second round of recruitment.

**Participants**

The second round of recruitment added 7 more participants to the sample for a total of 12 participants. Five were male and seven were female. The participants are pursuing an assortment of educational interests and come from a variety of educational, community, and ethnic backgrounds. Throughout this report, pseudonyms are used in identifying these individuals. Summary information on the participants' home states, gender, ethnic background and age is provided in Table 1.
Table 1. Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym of Participant</th>
<th>Home State</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnic Background</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldon</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmer</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherman</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ann is a twenty-one year old White female. She grew up and went to school in a medium-sized town in northern Idaho. She loved and participated in school athletics throughout her junior high and high school years. She is a college junior studying physical education. She believes her academic choice is partly due to the influence her teachers and coaches had on her during her K-12 school years.

Bill is a twenty-one year old African American male. He grew up in the Watts area in California with his mother and sister. He moved around a lot and attended at least eight different K-12 schools in California. Although Bill had good grades, it seemed as if he was always in trouble at school. Accused of being a pest, mocking other people, getting out of his seat, or just getting on someone’s nerves, teachers were “constantly on his case.” His mother recognized that problem, and he credits her with helping him get through school. He says, “we were in the hood, like a very bad area and she kept me out
of trouble and made sure that I was doing the right thing, always kept the mother’s eye.”

After being recruited by several schools, he came to the university on a football
scholarship. He is a senior and studying art education. He is a friend of another
participant, Kristin, and was referred to me by her.

Kristin is a twenty-five year old Native American single mother of three. Her
father is Lummi and her mother is Nez Perce. Kristin grew up in Northern Idaho
attending K-12 public school in a typical American medium-sized town. She says that
her elementary teachers always stood out as being the nicest. She has returned to college
after a brief absence and is studying liberal arts. Her mother assists Kristin with
babysitting. She is hoping to pursue law school after graduating.

Eldon is an eighteen year old White male who feels lucky to have even graduated
from high school. He grew up in an urban area in Washington State and liked elementary
school through second grade, but did not like his school years after that. He feels that he
had a lot of unpleasant experiences at school that really “turned him off.” He would go to
class everyday keeping his head down because he thought that he could just “roll by.”
He grew up thinking it was cool to get kicked out of class. He took a break from high
school for a year and started thinking about his future, something he had never done
before, and came to the conclusion that he wanted a high school diploma. He is currently
attending his local community college pursuing industrial arts and is unsure of future
plans.
Elmer is a nineteen year old African American male. He was raised in an urban area in Washington State. Although he does not know his natural father, he is very close to his mother, stepfather, and extended family. He has fond memories of spending summers with his grandparents in Baton Rouge, attending youth church, participating in field trips and volunteering service. He has two younger brothers who struggle with staying out of trouble and tend to blame bad teachers for making it hard for them. Elmer was involved in student government at his large high school. He enjoyed participating in football, wrestling, and track. Coaches were his most influential teachers and ensured that he stayed on top of his grades and did well in class. Elmer plays defensive back on his university football team. He is studying business and would like to be a dance club owner.

Susan is a nineteen year old female Pacific Islander. She graduated from a large high school in eastern Washington State in 2006. She reports that her mother had some difficulties communicating with the school because of language differences. They dealt with the language issue by having her father take the role of family representative and parent when dealing with the school. Susan was also there to help answer questions and for support. She credits music teachers for her love of piano and is currently studying music at college.

Kim is an eighteen year old White female. She attends a university in eastern Washington. She comes from a large family of six children and attended K-12 in a large school in Washington. She has always liked school. She enjoys school for the
socialization and the opportunity to increase knowledge and test herself. She was the
drum major in her high school marching band and was greatly influenced by her band
teacher.

Helen is a married twenty-three year old White female. She attended a large high
school in western Washington State. When she was younger she loved school, but as she
got older, she didn’t enjoy it as much. She participated in volleyball and basketball in
junior high school and loved the social aspect of school. She and her high school friends
formed “a real tight group.” The most caring teacher for her was a humanities teacher
that “pulled excellence out of me.”

Peter is a twenty year old White male. He graduated from a large high school in
eastern Washington. He participated in student government and was involved in sports
medicine as a trainer. He is currently attending a private religious university in the
Northwest and deciding between a degree in education or business. The K-12 teachers
that he remembers the most are the ones that taught him about life and about himself as
well as about the subject matter.

Sherman is a nineteen year old White male. He has one brother and one sister.
The sister has a physical disability and is mentally handicapped. He lived in a rural area
and drove into town to attend a large high school in eastern Washington. One of his
teachers “really got him interested in history.” He is currently attending his local
community college in an undecided major.
Lisa is a twenty-two year old female Pacific Islander. Her nationality is Tongan. Both of her parents were born in Tonga; her mother was raised in Tonga while her father was raised in Hawaii. Lisa attended a large high school in Utah with over 500 graduates. She is the third of seven children, with six sisters and no brothers. She was a good student during her K-12 years. She had caring biology and math teachers who made learning fun and made sure that she was able to move on to college after graduation from high school.

Mary is a nineteen year old Hispanic female. She lives with her Mexican mother and White stepfather. She has two younger brothers. She graduated from a large high school in eastern Washington. Teachers that taught her about manners and keeping binders organized and neat really meant a lot to her. She also cites body language and how teachers talk to students as important teacher attributes. After attending one semester of college at her hometown community college, she dropped out to get married and work.

Data Collection

Consistent with accepted methods for phenomenologically-oriented studies (Creswell, 2003), the primary method of data collection for this study was in-depth, open-ended interviews. Each individual participant was interviewed at least once. I began each interview with a couple of general questions about the participant’s liking of school and the number of teachers they had during their school years. The remainder of my interview questions was designed to allow the participants to draw on their own
individual accounts, paint a picture of the phenomenon of being cared for using their own stories, and to reflect on the impact of caring and uncaring teachers on their lives. (See Appendix A for a list of interview questions). The interviews were all at least 45 minutes in length, recorded on an audiocassette, and then transcribed. Each interview was conducted on the college campuses attended by the participants.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, I analyzed the data to establish common categories and themes of caring. The steps used to guide the analysis were according to accepted practices for qualitative research as described by Rubin and Rubin (2005), Creswell (2003), and Bogdan and Biklen (2003). First I read the narratives for a general sense of the message. Second, I re-read the interviews and identified and labeled the specific verbal characteristics, approaches to pedagogy, and stories about teachers who care at school. Finally, I reflected on the phenomenon being studied by revisiting each participant’s unique experience many times throughout the process and categorized common themes, looked for their interconnectedness, and synthesized meaning into an organized set of themes.

Positionality

The interviewing approach to qualitative research recognizes the fact that both the interviewer and interviewee are people with feelings, personality, interests, and experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I formally acknowledge that as the researcher I have personal perspectives and values based in my own culture and experiences as a student,
teacher, and parent that influenced both my motivation for this study and the lenses through which I viewed the data. This section will discuss relevant aspects of my personal background, philosophy, and values.

**Personal Philosophy and Values**

My experience as a White male growing up as a member of The Church of Jesus-Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Utah, where Christian teachings, family values, and educational standards were emphasized, has undoubtedly influenced the lenses from which I view life. All I have ever wanted to be is a father and a teacher.

My wife and I have four children. I am extremely grateful that I live in a place and time when educational opportunities are so available to me and my family. To date, my children have had over 110 school teachers. Including my wife and me our family has been taught by well over 150 different teachers. Those teachers represent some 65 years of influence. To say that these people have affected our lives would be an understatement.

I love teaching and helping others to learn. I believe that I possess the gift of being influential and value the impact of others’ example, counsel, and teaching in my own life. I believe that parents have the primary responsibility to teach their children and to oversee their social development, interpersonal relationships, dress and grooming; and that the purpose of school is to assist the parent in educating children. I recognize that not all children come from ideal home and family situations, and I support the idea that government and schools must see to it that all children have equal opportunity for
education. As an educator, I often assess my decision making by considering my own children. I want them to have school experiences where they learn and are appreciated for who they are without emotional damage. I expect schools to assist them in developing into healthy, well-rounded persons.

I value compassion and love the adage, “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” It is interesting to note that when I reflect on teachers who had the greatest influence in my personal life they are persons who sincerely cared for me, who took time for me or taught me something that I honestly needed to know.

I believe that schools should promote life-long learning. For example, putting too much grading weight on spelling in a music course could interfere with a student’s developing a love for music. I feel strongly that a student’s “eagerness to try” and their zeal for learning can easily be destroyed over that which is inconsequential.

My experience has taught me that most students don’t need discipline as much as they need encouragement. I value complimenting, strengthening and encouraging coupled with needed correction. Correction should be timely and specific and requires moral courage, because correction must be given without giving offense.

I value good citizenship. I believe in hiring teachers who are role models. Students don’t need plain knowledge; they need knowledge that makes sense and inspires. They need knowledge that helps them understand why learning and living are worthwhile. Consider famous movies about teachers or teaching. Test scores, if
mentioned at all, are of minor importance. The stories consistently focus on how the teachers inspired their pupils. I believe in teaching the good and the wholesome. I believe in teaching refinement. There should not be a place in education for books, poetry, drama, etc. that is degenerate and depraved. I do not believe in censorship, but that which is taught should be wholesome.

I chose to earn bachelor’s degrees in Psychology and Family and Human Development. My education and religious beliefs have greatly influenced my image of the role of a teacher and my perspective about people. I believe that all human beings have the capacity to learn. As a teacher, my job is to build people. I agree with Bolman and Deal (2003), who argue that our most important resource is people. Therefore, in addition to subject knowledge, teachers should be experts on human interactions and should be constantly trained in human relationships. I find it sad to note that in a study by Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack (1986) teenagers reported that only about 9% of all the teachers whom they had encountered in the course of their school careers had made a difference in their lives.

*My Professional Role*

I am a religious educator. As such, I value a professional who is current with scholarly knowledge and provides and uses accurate and timely reports. I recognize that one can learn from others and that continuing education is very important to professional growth.
I want my school to run on all cylinders! The one-cylinder school is the school where the principal handles all of the problems, makes all of the decisions and follows through on all of the assignments. Even when leaders and teachers understand and abide by what is established, a school that values the ethic of care will recognize that there will be occasions for exceptions to practices, programs, procedures, policies, and organization patterns.

**Personal Powerful Quotes**

Horace Mann once said, “the teacher who is attempting to teach without inspiring the pupil with a desire to learn is hammering on cold iron” (“Eclectic Magazine”, 1868). Hiam Ginott (1971) wrote,

“I have come to the frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher/leader I possess tremendous power to make a person’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a person humanized or dehumanized” (p.15).

Finally, I recognize that I have a somewhat ideal and romantic view regarding the role of teachers. It seems as if the nation is turning to schools and teachers in an almost desperate attempt to produce good citizens and a positive society. I believe that teachers have a potentially incredible power for good. Therefore, as a result of my family background, religious upbringing, and school training, my interest in the topic of caring teachers has increased. In addition, my outlook on the role and impact of teachers on
students’ lives has been enlarged. These factors have caused a strong need to listen to students’ voices and value their opinions.

Ethics and Credibility

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Washington State University. In order to ensure ethical research, it was essential that participants be briefed on the purpose of the research and asked to sign a consent form. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants’ identities are protected through the use of pseudonyms in this report. Rubin and Rubin (2005) caution researchers that “respect is shown in how you act toward your participants” (P. 98). In this study, I followed specific ethical practices, such as behaving in a polite manner, expressing appreciation to the participants and committee chairperson for their help, honoring the individual’s time and schedules, and valuing integrity by reporting accurately the intent, opinions and perspectives of the participants.

To enhance the credibility of the study, I used member-checking to determine whether participants thought that their interview transcripts were accurate and to allow participants to reflect on their perceptions and elaborate as needed (Creswell, 2003). In addition, I used open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their views authentically in their own words and have attempted to represent their views fairly and accurately in this report.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of caring from the student perspective. This chapter reports the analysis of the data collected through phenomenologically-oriented interviews with participants as described in Chapter 3. I found eight major themes in the data, which relate to two major dimensions for understanding caring teachers from the perspectives of students: pedagogical care and nurturing care.

The pedagogical dimension of care refers to teachers caring that students learn and succeed, having high standards, and holding students accountable. The nurturing dimension of care emphasizes relationships and refers to teachers caring about students’ general welfare and well-being. All of the participants referred to one or both of these dimensions in a single interview, sometimes overlapping within a single data excerpt. For example, in the following statement Bill characterized a caring teacher by first emphasizing nurturing behaviors of support and sensitivity, then referencing pedagogical caring by making sure students “know the work,” and ending by returning to the nurturing dimension of care as a teacher inquires about his well-being.

A caring teacher is always there for you, always sensitive, and making sure in the teaching perspective, making sure that you know the work, and go farther than teaching, also getting to know students and making sure that everything is ok with them.
Pedagogical Care

According to Stipek (2006), being a caring and supportive teacher does not mean coddling; rather, it means holding students accountable while providing the support they need to learn and succeed. She explains that supportive teachers insist students learn by encouraging them, paying attention to their work, giving them constructive feedback, refusing to accept half-hearted efforts, providing them assistance when needed, and refusing to give up on them. Furthermore, she cautions that holding students accountable without this support and encouragement is likely to discourage and alienate them rather than motivate them. My findings that students value effective pedagogical practices and perceive caring as more than “being nice” supports Stipek’s (2006) description of pedagogical care. The specific aspects of the pedagogical dimension of caring that I found in the data are represented by the themes of: helping students; using effective pedagogy; and giving students time.

Helping Students

Offering help to students is the most often mentioned quality of caring in educational research (McBee, 2007). Caring teachers are concerned with difficulties a student is having and doing everything in their power to help that student succeed. The participants in my study support this assertion by describing several different ways that teachers helped them as students. First, caring teachers helped students succeed. Bill said a teacher helped him by writing letters of recommendation even when he didn’t ask
her to. Lisa had a similar experience when she told about one of her math teachers in high school:

She was awesome at helping us. She went far and beyond at helping us with scholarships. Especially, for the special needs, the minorities didn’t have the opportunities to write up the scholarships. She made sure that we were able to move on to college after graduation. She helped me to get scholarships for college. A caring teacher is someone who is loving and patient and willing to help everyone from all walks of life, whether they are rich or dumb, or smart. They look out and around and when they see someone that is struggling, they help that person…everyone is equal.

The second way that caring teachers helped students was by helping them learn. According to Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden (1995), children reported that good teachers were those who helped them with their work, but did not demean them for needing help. A major finding of my study is that participants define caring as a student receiving support, help, and assistance with learning. In fact, I found that almost all of the respondents agree that helping students learn is caring. Some respondents felt that when parents are not available to offer love and support to a student, the help and support from a teacher becomes more meaningful.

Ultimately, when asked about the role of teacher caring, Kim responded by saying “making sure the students learn it, is caring.” She believes that when students just report information back it is “regurgitating,” not true learning. Some participants explained that non-caring teachers often teach from a condescending attitude of “I’m so smart because I went through all of this so listen to me.” Participants indicated that a caring teacher has an attitude of teaching that focuses on getting information to the student in a manner that they can understand. A caring teacher “sees it from it from our perspective, and listens to
our opinions, our ideas and our concerns.” Ann identified a Spanish teacher that wanted to help students and “was always willing to put forth extra effort and cared about us being in class.” Helen described a caring teacher from an 11th grade AP Humanities class that exhibited “a willingness to put forth extra effort.” He seemed intent on helping his students learn by demanding high expectations for comprehension and writing. This long excerpt from Helen’s interview vividly illustrates this dimension of caring:

He will be the teacher of my life. He was incredible. He was Jewish. And he always wore, what do they call them? The little hats on the back of his head. So he wasn’t shy to be who he was. He was very intelligent. And I would go to class and I would be scared to participate, scared I’d get called on because what he would do in class is he would ask a question, no one volunteers, so he calls on somebody and he would not give up on you until you were able to answer the question. So if we’re studying poetry and he says, “What does this line mean?” And you’re like, I don’t know or you give a real simple answer just so he’ll go to the next student, he wouldn’t let you do that. He would labor with you and help break it down and make you think about it, make you come up with ideas, and you know after that question was over, you felt like you got it or you felt good about it, you didn’t feel like you got passed over. And you almost understood it better so it’s scary because he’s doing this in front of the entire class even if it takes 10 minutes! And he was that way with everything. You know if you’re giving speeches with papers. He would make us write 20 plus page papers or during class he would say, “Ok 20 minutes. Here’s your topic, GO!” And we’d have to write about this topic. And he says, “if you don’t know what to write then you need to write, I don’t know what to write. I don’t know what to write. I don’t know what to write until you have some ideas that are coming.” So he really just made us be excellent.

And I brought my first paper; I’ll just show it to you. That he made us write. (Helen’s sample paper is displayed in Appendix B).

And every student’s paper looks like that. The first paper we got, and there’s like 30 people in those two classes. It was just insanely torn apart. You know, he’s like “this is rubbish, fix this, take this out, change this.” I got a C- and everybody felt crushed! But that’s just the kind of teacher he
was. And he only did this once. I think he was teaching us a lesson. Saying, you know, I'm not going to let this get by, I read the papers. And he just expected us to be excellent. And feel that.

As Helen showed me her paper, she held it with a certain reverence as if she held an important piece of her life in her hands. This participant kept the paper because it represented a lesson in life to her. She reflected,

I’ve never seen a paper so marked up like this! I mean, I look at this and I can remember when it sat in front of me and I was just cringing at the look of it! I kept it. I think it’s because it reminds me of what he expected of me. It reminds me that this teacher took the time to educate me on how to write a paper and no other teacher had ever done that before. Never before. I mean, I got into 11th grade writing rubbish like this, but by the end of the year, you know I was pulling some A’s. I did well in the class, but he pulled it out of me. So it (the paper) reminds me of that, to do better. It represents a lesson in life.

Using Effective Pedagogy

Participants commonly reported that teachers who use effective pedagogical methods exhibited caring. These effective techniques, according to the participants, included enthusiasm for the subject matter, keeping the class interesting and fun, having a sense of humor, using variety, and effective classroom techniques and management.

According to participants, having teachers who teach with passion motivates learning. Mawhinney and Sagan (2007) refer to Hoffman’s use of the term “pedagogic caring” as a passion for learning that emanates from the teacher. A teacher’s passion for teaching, learning, and for the subject matter has been shown to be an important part of effective teaching, not only in supporting positive relationships with student but in encouraging student achievement (Stronge, 2007; Thornton, 2001). Eldon explained in
his interview, “I like teachers that really get into their topics. When they were into it, then I could get into it.” Sherman identified a teacher who revealed a love for subject matter:

He really got into the teaching. You could tell that he liked what he taught and he actually made the class interesting instead of just getting up there and basically crowing on about something they know. He really got into the stories and he made the stories interesting. He really got me into history; He really got me to learn the presidents. Even now, I still remember at least half the stuff that he taught in that class.

Helen believes that because “most teachers love what they are doing, they love to teach, they love to bring knowledge, they love to see people learn something, be enlightened and ‘get it’.” She thinks teachers should love teaching, and because they love teaching, they would enjoy seeing the people they teach experience the joy of learning and the excitement of learning. They would “help students figure out their own talents.” Kristin said a teacher cares because “she wants you to learn, she wants you to get that knowledge into your head.”

I found in the data that as students mature, most begin to appreciate and value classes they considered difficult. Sherman explains how “harder” teachers manifest pedagogical care with regards to learning.

When I look back and look at the harder teachers I’ve had, those were the ones that actually cared about their students, and they’re the ones that want you to learn something. While I look back to a lot of my easier classes, they’re just trying to get done and get out of there.

In contrast, participants identified uncaring teachers as robotic. They described teachers who go through the motions of teaching without any enthusiasm. Seven
participants described uncaring teachers as the teacher who is “just there for their paycheck.” They teach by “going through the teaching motions.” Ann observed how a teacher’s apathy relates to a lack of caring,

I have noticed that some people seem like maybe they are tired of what they are teaching or maybe they go through their subject really fast. They know what it is; and don’t care or maybe don’t realize the students just don’t grasp it.

Kristin defined an uncaring teacher as a teacher that is “burned out.”

They’re there for a paycheck, and doesn’t like or doesn’t have a passion for what they’re teaching. An uncaring teacher is someone who does not try to intrigue or develop interest in a subject. They are just mean people who say rude things or inappropriate things.

Participants insisted that caring teachers who exhibit instructional skills make learning interesting, fun and enjoyable for the students. Kristin explained how interesting teachers can help keep students’ attention.

He was interesting. He would tell us life stories and he would relate them to what we were doing. I think he was big into outdoor and recreation and kind of hands on things and probably because that is something that I care about, I was able to connect with him more. And I like his stories… he was able to hold my attention.

In addition to being interesting as individuals, these teachers typically provide activities that make it easy to learn different concepts. For example, Ann and Susan spoke about teachers “who are always coming up with little things in class that make it fun.” Helen described a teacher that taught the class how to meditate. “He would do fun things like that, we’re all sitting on our desks meditating in class and he was just very in
tune with us.” Kristin remembered her computer technology teacher “made us put our hands underneath the board so that we would learn to type without looking at our hands.”

One of the most important pedagogical characteristics for teachers mentioned by students to make learning interesting was a sense of humor. Several students reported that teacher jokes or the exchange of jokes helped them to feel that their teachers enjoyed their students, were enthusiastic about their subject matter, and understood young people and their need for instructional variety and pacing. Susan describes a teacher that “definitely bestowed a love of math” on her students by the way she made learning fun. She said,

She made it entertaining coming up with little things in class. She made jokes or would say this is an easy way to remember this. We made up funny symbols for different things…She made it easier for me to learn math concepts…and the more that I wanted to keep learning, the better I got it stuck in my head, then I could help my friends and we all just enjoyed being in that math class.

In addition to humor and a pleasant atmosphere, students reasoned that using a variety of teaching methods, being flexible, and being willing to work with students conveyed caring. Susan said that caring teachers are “really nice, and open to teach you all sorts of ways to get to the solutions of problems.” She explained that a caring teacher is someone who is willing to change teaching styles to adjust to the students’ needs. She notes,

they are willing to be flexible in their scheduling and to help students if they need it, whereas, an uncaring teacher would just be very bland in class, boring, and probably lectures straight out of the book and doesn’t take time to try and incorporate other things from outside of the classroom, and they don’t really have open office hours.
Kristin defined a caring teacher as “someone who can listen, not only listen but hear what someone is saying to them.” She believes that it takes that kind of intentional attention to individualize the learning. She added,

Someone who is willing to see, go beyond the tests and the timing and understand that there is life that happens. I think a teacher really teaches. They find a way to reach the person they are teaching because not everyone learns the same. A good teacher is ever changing…always able to adapt to a situation and to students and to subjects.

Lumpkin (2007) reports that pedagogical caring teachers establish realistic and clear expectations for homework assignments, class participation, group and individual projects, collaborative learning experiences, problem-solving exercises, and examinations. Caldwell and Sholtis (2008) believe that engaging assignments keep students centered on the learning at hand. My findings that students identified caring as using a variety of learning tasks and making an effort to make learning exciting is in harmony with Lumpkin’s (2007) and Caldwell and Sholtis’ (2008) definition of pedagogical caring. For example, Eldon illustrated this aspect of caring by describing a shop teacher who demonstrated effective pedagogy techniques through a mixture of interesting problem solving exercises and class learning projects:

I had my shop teacher at high school and he was really cool because he would teach you everything, all of the tools and all of the equipment, and then you’d have to take a test on it and then when it came down to the project, he would make you figure out what you needed to do. It was kind of like, okay you are on your own, but if you ever need help, you could go to him and he would tell you the correct way. First he would ask you what you think, which was kind of cool because you know if someone comes up with a question, and then you answer back with a question, sometimes the students learn more, in my opinion. He would do that and he would ask what do you think needs to be done and then you would kind of explain,
and then he would tell you the correct way or that’s right and he would help you through the whole project if you wanted. I never really liked that kind of work, but after that, I kind of like it cuz uh, it was kind of fun.

Some participants emphasized the way teachers operated their classroom as a manifestation of care. However, their cited examples were usually illustrations of uncaring. In a negative case in point, Elmer referred to a teacher who was a poor example of caring when he said, “he was just really strict, they grade real hard and students don’t know why.” Susan described similar teachers that she had:

It wasn’t that I didn’t like them, but they just weren’t the best teacher. They were just very scattered in class and not very consistent in the way we were learning things. It seemed to just be him talking and reading out of the book.

Clearly, effective pedagogy skills are a very important part of describing the phenomenon of being cared for by teachers to the participants in this study.

**Giving Students Time**

A pedagogically caring teacher gives time to their students. According to Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden (1995), effective instructional strategies and classroom management techniques may free teachers to find the time to interact more often with students. The data in this study revealed that all twelve participants explicitly identified giving students’ time as a caring teacher behavior. According to Caldwell and Sholtis (2008), a caring teacher allows ample time for students to answer questions and does not get upset easily or display negative body language. The following example from the data confirms their assertion. After giving some over-all descriptions of how teachers care, Sherman specifically defined caring by mentioning a teacher’s attention, patience, and
taking time out of their schedule to help and tutor him without “getting frustrated if you keep messing up.” He said,

A teacher shows caring when they would take time out of their schedule to help you and tutor you. Say you were struggling… they wouldn’t get frustrated if you keep messing up, taking their time trying to get help and they would stay there. I remember having a few teachers that I went in for a little bit of help and they would stay there for like an hour just trying to help me… I know they’ve got places to be and things to do and I actually had a lot more respect for that teacher just because he would sit there and take time out of his schedule to help me over something that, you know, I could’ve studied a little bit harder.

*The Impact of Pedagogical Care*

The impact of receiving pedagogical care on participant’s lives is significant in several ways. First, by having teachers write letters of recommendations and assisting with scholarships, students were helped to succeed in future educational pursuits and career choices. Second, by holding students accountable while providing support, students learned “lessons in life” such as “not being satisfied by just getting by, but being excellent,” and that working hard produces feelings of accomplishment and achievement. These important incidental learned lessons were reported to have been utilized in other aspects of participant’s lives. Third, teachers who use effective pedagogical methods motivate learning and participants report increased memory of their learning. Further, participants describe an increased appreciation and value for inquiry and love for subject matter and life-long learning. Finally, with excellent pedagogical care students are able to “figure out” and discover their own talents and develop independence regarding their own learning.
Nurturing Care

The nurturing side of caring suggests that teaching goes far beyond technical skill. According to Stronge (2007), research reports that many survey and interview responses about successful teaching emphasize the teacher’s affective characteristics, or social and emotional behaviors, more than pedagogical practices. In addition, he says that the teacher’s psychological influence on students has been linked to student achievement.

McBee (2007) believes that caring encompasses the entire person. She explains that caring is not just being concerned with a student’s direct learning, but with their personal lives as well. Therefore, it is important for teachers to find out about a student’s family background, ethnicity, cultural neighborhood, life experiences, and so on.

Noddings (2007) insists that to have as our educational goal the production of caring, competent, loving, and lovable people is not anti-intellectual. Barrier-Ferreira (2008) argues that students should not find themselves as being described as “human resources.” She believes that what happens to a student outside of school affects everything they do in class. Without nurturing, teachers must depend solely on the pedagogical dimensions of caring--instruction and knowledge of subject matter, guidelines for planning, and effective teaching strategies--and ultimately, they must rely heavily on discipline and classroom management techniques. Findings in my study that students perceive that caring teachers get to know their students, develop friendships with their students, and care about students as individuals is consistent with Stronge’s (2007), McBee’s (2007), and Barrier-Ferreira’s (2008) definition of nurturing care. The specific
aspects of the nurturing dimension of caring that I found in the data are represented by the themes of: *establishing personal relationships with students; treating students respectfully and positively; exhibiting concern for student’s personal welfare and well-being; guarding the emotional safety of students; and providing students with a feeling of being cared-for.*

**Establishing Personal Relationships**

A caring teacher establishes rapport and gets to know students both formally and informally. Collier (2005) claims that the “keystone of teaching” is the relationship established between the teacher and student. She argues that relationships based in trust and friendship kindles the students’ attention and commitment to instructional activities. Stronge (2007) says “caring teachers know their students individually, not only understanding each student’s learning style and needs, but also understanding the student’s personality, likes and dislikes, and personal situations that may affect behavior and performance in school” (p. 2). Pena and Amrein (1999) suggest that making an effort to respect the thoughts, expectations, feelings and intentions of others may play a critical role in developing strong, healthy, enriching and intimate relationships. Teachers make caring a more explicit value in their classrooms through helping, talking to, and touching their students in ways the students themselves value. My findings that students value friendship and teaching behaviors and talk that are positive and encouraging supports other researcher’s (e.g., Salvage, 2006, Pena & Amrein, 1999) conclusions
concerning the significance of establishing meaningful relationships and the nurturing
dimension of care.

Although some of my participants expressed concern about not wanting teachers
to get too personal, participants liked it when teachers were quite friendly and asked
different questions about their likes and dislikes or about their extra-curricular activities
such as sports. Participants viewed teachers who got to know them and who interacted
with them as caring. They felt that a caring teacher knew their name and some of what
was going on in their lives. A caring teacher could walk down the classroom aisles, and
each student would feel as if he had a relationship with that teacher, even though there
may be 30 students in the class.

In contrast, Helen said that she had a teacher who taught Japanese who didn’t
“even know my name.” She said that she had little or no relationship with most of her
math teachers because “we were constantly doing equations.” Some participants felt that
uncaring teachers were robot like, nervous, or emphasized the teaching of lessons rather
than the teaching of students.

Mawhinney and Sagan (2007) believe that teachers who offer their students
genuineness and self-disclosure reveal aspects of themselves that allow students to see
them as complete people with emotions, opinions, and lives outside of school. According
to Rice (2001), “students are motivated to learn in classrooms with teachers they perceive
as caring and when they have a sense of belonging” (p. 104). He quotes Goodenow who
found that “students’ sense of belonging in a classroom impacts academic effort more
than an interest in academic subjects” (p.104). Murdock and Miller (2003) report that students’ perceived relationship with the teacher was the single best predictor of their feelings of belonging in the school environment, which in turn predicted positive school affect. Ann described the importance of relationships with teachers when she said “we were all like friends.” She talked to her teacher a lot about things other than school, and during lunch a lot of the girls would stay in and “she would let us cut her hair.” Bill described a relationship with a teacher as

being a real close friend, real tight and although he still had authority over us, he was like my mom’s age, he listened to the same music I listened to and sometimes the way he dressed, like he would come to school in jeans just like us, and we were like, ok, we knew we had that relationship right then and there.

Bill feels that caring teachers go farther than teaching; they also get to know students and make sure that everything is “ok” with them.

Mary told about a caring teacher who retired after Mary graduated and how she would visit her:

We would just talk about life, about how she was doing and how I was doing. When I was engaged I would talk to her about him, and she gave me advice about when she was younger and tell me what her kids were doing and what they did when they were my age and all this stuff.

Susan described how a caring teacher interacted with her and the other students in her classroom:

We would have time towards the end of the class to do the homework that she assigned and we would get into groups and talk over math or talk about life and she would walk around the classroom and she would sometimes interact with us in our social things so it was good. She was really open to us and willing to talk to us about anything. Even though we
were supposed to be doing math, we could be talking about a dance coming up or something and she would talk to us about it.

Kristin spoke about a caring teacher who mattered to her and helped her feel good about school. “He was kind of a fatherly figure. He treated everyone fairly. He wasn’t rude. And I think that makes a big difference.”

Stipek (2006) warns that “students who struggle academically typically have the worst relationship with their teachers” (p. 41). Some participants described what it felt like when teachers did not interact with them. They explain that if the teacher is a stranger with no emotional bond to the students, then the subject taught won’t make much of an impact. They gave as examples teachers who wanted to “brush off” students or caused students to feel overlooked. Peter said,

sometimes you get a teacher who is just not interested. It seems like they are just there for their paycheck, which is kind of a weird place for them to work. I had a math teacher of a very advanced class and he had about two A’s, and about 4 B’s, and about 7 or 8 C’s. I said, “you need to slow down because this class is just not getting it.” And he said, “it’s not my job to see that they get it. It’s my job to teach the subject. If they don’t get it, they don’t get it and I need to be working on a schedule.” Obviously, if you don’t get chapter 4 you’re not going to get chapter 5, 6, 7 or 8. So definitely more than half that class failed that year and they had to repeat the class again. And that, to me, shows someone who’s not as concerned with the students in a teaching environment. It’s not about the teacher, not really. I think it’s about the students and if you take the focus and put it in the wrong direction then it just won’t work out.

Participants describe these uncaring teachers as “being about them,” being robotic and that, further, teaching is “just a job.” Kristin described her relationship with an uncaring teacher:
I don’t like the woman. She just was very cold. I would describe her as a warden, not a teacher. She didn’t care if I was learning. She cared about doing things her way and if it’s not done her way then you know…

Participants noted the irony of being in a caring profession when “they are just there for the paycheck.” Kim said that in one class she “felt overlooked in the class because I wasn’t a certain athlete or something and because the people he chose to talk to were popular.” Another participant described a teacher who went there to do the work and then left giving the impression that she didn’t want to be there, she was “just going through her outline.”

*Treating Students Respectfully and Positively*

The way students are treated in teaching can be very personal and deeply meaningful. Fjortoft (2004) claims that “as educators we believe in the power of education to transform lives, not only through the power of the intellect, but also through the power of attitudes” (p. 2). Salvage (2006) argues that caring is usually expressed in individual one-to-one moments. She quotes the poet William Blake that “he who would do good to another must do it in minute particulars” (p. 21). Stronge (2007) states that “effective teachers care for the student first as a person, and second as a student” (p. 2).

One participant, Kim, believes that “school should be a place where kids want to go and feel motivated and feel they’re accepted, especially by the teachers.”

In addition to the expectations that teachers have for student learning, participants emphasized the role of encouraging talk. Participants report that caring teachers talk with them. Teachers can take a few minutes before class and talk with
students about the class or about every day things. It is through conversation that
students reveal their lives and teachers support and nurture them. Kristin described how
a teacher helped establish dialogue by arranging the desks in interesting ways. The
resulting conversation led to her self-discovery regarding her future college plans. She
said,

My relationship with him was I liked him as a person. I remember him
telling us stories, so I’m not sure if that was in class or…I mean we had a
very basic teacher student relationship. I would come to class and we
would interact. We would sit in class with others and that was one thing I
remember as well is that he had us sitting in class in a circle formation and
we could talk…he was not just talking to us, we were all…it was a
discussion. I like that open…instead of rows where you are sitting there
staring at someone’s back of their head. They were all set up around the
classroom so that we were discussing…but back to our relationship…we
had you know the basic teacher relationship and I remember that he was
encouraging. He wanted to know if I was going to college. He asked me
about my college plans and we talked about everything from his kayaking
trips to camping to you know anything else about our lives. We talked
about life experiences.

These discussions had an impact on Kristin’s decision to go to college. She
admitted that she probably would not have gone to college without this teacher’s
encouragement. In addition to discussion, she also referred to a different kind of “talk.”
She remembers Daily Quotes written on the chalkboard. The daily quotes were fun for
her. She remembers “reach for the stars” and other motivational quotes that she took
personally.

Teacher’s talk can be inspiring. How can you tell if teachers care? Lisa said,
“They know me by name and they know my work and you can tell by their comments
because they uplift you.” Talk is reciprocal, requiring each to listen and hear as well as
to speak. It is also through talk that teachers help with schoolwork. Thus, talk becomes the currency of caring (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995).

Bill spoke admirably of a “great teacher who spoke with me about everything.” He explained how he was interested in math, but ended up having to go to Saturday school because his grades started to drop:

He was like “why are you here?” and I was like, “because of my grades.” He said, “what’s wrong with your grades?” I said, “they are bad.” He asked, “why, there is no reason why you should be doing bad.”

Bill felt that this teacher could call him on his lack of achievement without offense. Communicating expectations, when the teacher’s talk was perceived as genuine and in his best interest, was viewed as a manifestation of this teacher’s care for him.

When asked what feeling participants experienced when caring talk happened, Ann replied, “I was just grateful, they were always encouraging.” She described a coach who always encouraged her to practice. She said that “her family was supportive of her, but not really.” Her coach really encouraged her. She said that her Spanish teacher would come early to school or stay after and “you could go in anytime and he would just help you and was really encouraging.”

Lumpkin (2007) says that caring teachers nurture students through affirming students’ efforts and talents. She explains that teachers who believe in their students’ abilities demonstrate that they care by placing the learners at the center of the educational process. She reports that “the theory of the Pygmalion effect, or self-fulfilling prophecy, when applied to education posits that if teachers continuously show that they believe in
students’ abilities, almost all students will respond with greater effort” (p. 158). Elmer related how his high school principal helped him feel needed and praised him. He told the story:

> Mr. Morton was always real positive and social toward me. If I needed something, he helped me out. He had me help him. He had some students doing this radio thing. Vote for the new school…and had this 30 second radio clip. So I had to go to the station. Sometimes he drove me, but he asked me if I could do that for him. I did that for him. If he would see me in the hall he would shake my hand and ask me how I was doing in my classes. He already knew how I was doing in sports because he would be there watching. He would meet my parents and always talk me up and tell them what a wonderful student I was and how happy he was to have me at the school. I really like him for that.

Positive ways in which teachers talk to students conveys caring. Susan described reassuring teacher remarks that “made an amazing difference in my life” when she felt that she “fell flat on her face” during a piano recital. Her teacher said,

> “you know what; it happens. You know, you have good times you sing, bad times you sing, good times you play, bad times you play.” They were like, “you know what, move on to the next one because you know you can do better than that so now you just have to work up so you can keep it consistent.”

Susan said that this talk “felt really good and comforting to me.” She confessed that it helped her self-esteem rebuild itself even after a poor performance. She believes that if you have a low self-esteem or don’t feel like you are very good at something, then you are not going to want to do it and just want to throw everything out the window and ask yourself why am I torturing myself like this?

Less caring teachers may actually extinguish students’ interest in a branch of learning. In addition, many of the participants believe that if teachers were more positive
and encouraging there would be more people staying in school. Booker (2006) found that the likelihood of students dropping out of school was decreased when students perceived their teachers as being supportive and encouraging of their academic achievement. In support of Booker’s (2006) findings, Susan supposed that some students quit school because of lack of confidence. More startling, she believes that a lot more students quit subjects. She said,

they attend, maybe not even the best, but they just kind of quit studying or whatever. But if the teacher is willing to say no, no, you got it, you just take this slow and easy and do it then you are more willing to push through and be like, you know what, I can do this. If someone else believes in me, that I can do it, then I am more willing to believe that I can do it.

According to Stronge (2007), caring teachers recognize that students vary in their motivation levels. He believes that caring teachers realize and deal with the fact that some students prefer to sit quietly on the sideline; however, he cautions, they do not stop involving them. By finding a way to motivate a student to learn, a teacher contributes to a student’s evolving attitude toward a particular subject or activity. Eldon said

I didn’t have the highest confidence in school, but I had a few teachers who understood that and they would treat me as though I were a good person. They wouldn’t pressure me to do anything that I didn’t want to do and they were just kind of really considerate towards me as a person because I really didn’t have high self esteem, and I think that really helped. They didn’t force me. I mean they did make me do things but they knew my limits.

Positive reinforcement and encouraging talk was mentioned by almost every participant as a critical aspect of caring. Students need and want to hear “good job.” Mary shared,
My teacher always told me, “you know Mary, you are really good at this.” At the end of my senior year she picked the top five students out of the whole class to go and get certified to be able to interpret at court houses and for me to get my certification as a translator. I was one of them. All the time she would just encourage me and let me know that I was doing a good job. I really like it. She was kind of an example. She was the interpreter for the school and so we were able to watch her. She always gave us incentives to do a good job. She just made it very fun. She would pull me off to the side and have me do special things for her like translate school flyers and they would be printed off and posted at the school. It made me feel special.

Students perceive kindness and compassion by the way teachers talk. Peter related a meaningful experience for him and his family that happened to his little brother who struggled because of learning disabilities and emotional problems.

I remember one thing where my brother was different, very different from anyone else in the class, always has been. A kind of special moment for him in elementary school, and he still talks about it. His 3rd grade teacher was so frustrated that she went down to the teachers’ lounge. She was afraid she was gonna choke my brother and this other teacher came in and just started talking to him and just, you know, got him calmed down. She took the extra time to get him to do this and do that. You know, she talked to him. When he looks back on elementary school he actually remembers this other teacher who wasn’t even his teacher and that wasn’t the only time that she ever did that, but just to see how profoundly that impacted even a third grader.

This story is significant because it illustrates the teachers’ influence on an entire family. I found in my study that giving students’ time was generally perceived as caring from a pedagogical perspective such as when time is given to help students understand the subject matter. However, I placed this story here as it illustrates the giving of time as an expression of being kind and compassionate, two core aspects of treating students positively in the nurturing dimension of care. By taking the time to help Peter’s brother
calm down, this teacher was not necessarily trying to help him learn, but treating him in a positive manner, providing an assurance that he was worth the effort.

Participants also related that teachers don’t always deal with classroom conditions in an effective manner. Some teachers treat students harmfully. McPherson and Young (2004) indicate “students report a variety of negative teacher behaviors, including putdowns, verbal abuse, rudeness, humiliations, insults and hostility” (p. 1). They also explain that students report that these teacher misbehaviors interfere with their motivation, as well as cognitive learning.

According to Newton (1999) caring teachers “avoid risqué, sarcastic, and esoteric comments, facial expressions, and gestures; they appear impartial, not impassive; assured, not authoritarian; firm, not rigid; professional, not stern; interested, not intimate; assertive, not defensive; tactful, not insincere” (p. 459). Talk that is embarrassing, derogatory or unkind gives students the impression that the teacher is “out to get them.” Talk that “jumps to conclusions,” accuses, or assumes the worst about someone causes students to turn inward and be less comfortable in giving their best effort and puts them on “pins and needles” because they don’t know how the teacher might react to innocent mistakes. Peter illustrated,

When I was a sixth grader I remember the teacher said don’t do something and I didn’t hear. She was passing out some objects and I did exactly what she said don’t do. I wasn’t even thinking about it and I didn’t hear her say that and she pulled me out afterwards and said “are you stupid or something?” And I thought, Oh, that’s an effective way to really make, you know, warm my heart here. She had no idea what was going through my head and so her saying that kind of hurt my feelings in my sixth grade heart. The point is, I think the key is to just understand what is really
going on and see what they see and know how to teach what they need to
be taught and help them progress from where they are at.

The way teachers talk can have a profound influence on whether students believe
a teacher cares about them or not. The tone of voice that they use should not be
condescending but rather that of an everyday conversation. Kim explained that the tone
of voice a teacher uses can be condescending. A little comment like “you don’t get
this?!” said in a negative tone of voice or sarcastically saying “ooooohh” (drawn out and
voice raised in the middle and lowered again at the end) when a student finally
understands a concept can be very intimidating and cause the teacher to be
inapproachable the next time a student needs help or clarification. Kim believes that
most students, when they get a “you still don’t get this?!” feel that they want to give up.
“It hurts.” McPherson and Young (2004) note that teachers engage in an assortment of
damaging behaviors in the classroom, the most likely of which to occur is the expression
of anger. Kristin described a teacher that she perceived as mean based on the fact that the
teacher yelled at the students during class:

I remember an 8th grade English teacher I had where she was mean. I
mean flat mean. And years later she asked me…she said something to the
effect, “do you remember when I was yelling at you?” I kind of thought,
how can I not remember that? She kind of apologized at that time. We
were learning grammar and syntax and sentence structure and nouns and
verbs and to this day I still, I can write but I can’t label things. And it is
because when she started yelling at me, I shut off. I think that still to this
day she has problems with that…

When asked about how that experience made her feel, Kristin added,

we were doing sentences and we were labeling each part of it. And she
yelled at me, she raised her voice and she said…and I don’t remember the
words, but she was telling me that I was stupid. She was like “why don’t you get this kind of thing?” And I remember that because she embarrassed me in front of my classmates and from that point I shut off and I did not like her. We did not connect at all.

According to Stronge (2007), many studies highlight the elements of fairness and respect in regards to caring. He believes that caring teachers should respond to student misbehavior on an individual level rather than condemning a whole class for the deeds of one student or a small group of students. Caring teachers continually display respect, understanding, and fairness regarding race, religion, cultural background, and gender.

Bill shared an experience he had with an uncaring teacher who was derogatory, lacked compassion and fairness, and engaged in a power struggle with him and his mother:

One teacher, she used to put us down. She used to put us really down. She used to cuss all of the time. I thought it was hilarious but some kids took it bad. She would get in trouble but she had been a teacher for so long, that they can’t just fire her, so she would come back just her same old self, and do the same thing. She talked us down by the things she did. For instance, I was sick for a week and I came back and an assignment was due while I was sick. School was really strict. I’ll never forget it. We needed to write vocab 5 times each. This week we had 40 words and I was sick so I couldn’t do it. So I started doing it 5 times each. The teacher said, “no, you were not here to turn it in on time. I’m marking you down you have to do it 10 times each,” and I said, “that’s 40 words, I was sick.” She was like ok, whatever and took me downstairs to the principal’s office. I had to sit there and write the whole time, just write. I didn’t get it done. I went to lunch and so I had to do it again. I missed out on all the assignments that day. I didn’t finish it. My teacher gave me more because I didn’t finish it; it went up to 20 times each. My mom was like no, there is no way, she talked to the people there and they were like, “he has to do it.” They wouldn’t back down, not at all. My mom said, “well then I am pulling both my kids out of this school.”

It is interesting to note that in addition to assigning Bill the task of writing an almost impossible amount of words, Bill did not get his other assignments for that day.
According to Townsend (2000), questionable discipline practices are especially problematic for African American students who continue to be disproportionately subjected to corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion. She adds, “the use of suspension or expulsion with African American students has wide-ranging consequences, among the most obvious is the denial of access to learning opportunities that occur when students are not in class or school” (p. 382). Therefore, as a result of Bill’s experience with a teacher who kept adding homework as a way of punishing him, I have to inquire if racial bias was at play in this account.

Students’ perceptions of teacher caring emphasize racial impartiality and that students expect teachers not to allow ethnicity to affect their treatment or expectations of students. Bill told of an experience that he perceived as being prejudiced toward athletes:

I had a physics teacher…I got through Chemistry no problem. I got through all my math classes, calculus and everything no problem. I get to this physics class and I am having trouble and I find out the teacher doesn’t like athletes. He is a really boring teacher too. He talks like the clear eyes guy, “Hello class.” I am trying to do the work still… I gotta get the grades. It will look good for college. I was telling him USC offered me a full scholarship to play football and he said “that’s the only way you will get a scholarship to USC.” I said, “I have a 3.7 GPA over all,” and he said, “this class doesn’t show it.” He just really talked down to me the whole time. Other athletes told me you shouldn’t have taken his class. I was like ok, but I am going to pass this class. I worked, I worked hard. He gave me a D. I was like no, I worked too hard and I did not earn a D. I had people in the classroom help me who got A’s, and I just got a D. I said, “you have to show me,” and he said, “it was my class participation that brought my grade down a lot.” He just talked down to me then he told me once that athletes take away from the smart students. I said, “how? Not everybody is born with athletic ability.” I said, “I wasn’t very athletic when I got into school, I was 135 pounds. I had to work hard, and if you work hard you can get there.” He wouldn’t buy it.
Helen spoke about a teacher she felt was prejudiced because of her religion:

I asked if I could not watch the rated-R movie and she just nearly gave me an “F” and said “well this is what we are doing in class. We’re watching this movie,” and so I had to complain about it and sent forth a complaint so that she could excuse me to the library or some other project. But from that point on, our relationship was different. So I felt that from her, that was definitely uncaring. That affected my feelings in class, my ability to feel like I could do my best, I felt like we had that tension now between us and that bothered me and that happened halfway through the year.

*Exhibiting Concern for Students’ Personal Welfare and Well-Being*

In the nursing field, research shows that when care and concern are presented to patients in terms of objective professional duties (e.g., checking vital signs, patient’s reflexes, and respiratory functions), patients have great difficulty translating that kind of objective nursing into perceived feelings of care (Paulson, 2004). Like nursing, my findings suggest that from a student’s perspective caring entails more than professional pedagogical duties, but an emotional, subjective interaction with the teacher, in which the teacher must display genuine care and concern for them, not just as students, but also as human beings.

The data reinforces this argument by showing that caring teachers not only understand but also watch out for students. The data indicate that caring teachers use common connections to attend, inquire, protect, and nurture youth. Teven and McCroskey (1996) believe that the factors that lead students to perceive their teacher as caring about their welfare include responsiveness, empathy, and understanding. Elmer defined a caring teacher by their awareness and responsiveness in assisting their students:
A caring teacher was anyone that would come up and talk to you outside of class, in the hallways. Actually notice if you were having problems. Notice something if you were reacting differently. They would want to know what they could do for you.

Kristin said, “to be caring is to take into account the other person and to be a caring teacher you have to be able to reach the other person.” Kristin described a teacher who listened and had an interest in her:

I remember on the first day just her talking about who she is and where she came from…her background. She described herself as a cowgirl. She lived in (town) and they did 4H showing and she talked about how in the shows parents would get upset, children would get upset and these kinds of things…and how that lead her to what she does now. She helped out so much…we have a very personal…way beyond teacher student relationship. I would go to her office and she would ask me…she had great listening skills. She would ask me what my needs and my wants were. And she tried to help me. Like she would ask me what’s going on with my life. How’s it going? What do we need to do to get you through this? What is going on kind of thing. I am really thankful for her. If she hadn’t given me the opportunity to share what was going on, if she hadn’t internalized it and said, well what do we need to do to help you to get this done or do we extend the time, I would have failed.

Bill recounted a great teacher, who “when she saw me stressing came and was like is everything going ok, do you want to talk after class?” Bill noted that if his grades ever started to drop or his teacher ever saw something unusual going on, she would ask if he “needed anything and is everything going alright?”

Peter shared a time when he felt that a teacher was watching out for him and cared about him personally. He said,

in my high school, there were some days when I would just feel really, really glum and it would be really hard. Days like those when I’d come to class and a teacher would just notice by how I looked that day that something was happening. When they could find words and notice and
say something, that was something that really affected me a lot and sometimes on days like that, just the fact that were willing to say something really helped me out a lot and made an impact.

Similarly, Susan offered,

A teacher who gets to know you on an individual basis and is willing to talk to other teachers about you and either says good things or bad things you know so that they can help you all around in all subjects.

Bill believes,

A caring teacher is always there for you, always sensitive, and making sure in the teaching perspective, making sure that you know the work, and go farther than teaching, also getting to know their students and making sure that everything is ok with them.

Caring for students’ welfare consists of empathy and understanding and includes “cutting students some slack,” giving students the “benefit of the doubt,” and believing that students will rise to the occasion. Eldon talked about how positive treatment by teachers helped him feel understood:

I’ll just say how it affects me. It didn’t really start affecting me until after I got out of school, which is when I noticed that these teachers were actually caring about me, and it helped almost shape who I was in a way. It made me want to perform better; I don’t know how to explain it really. Let me find some words (pauses). It gave me the idea that no matter what I do, that someone will still care about me… it kind of really helps you plan your future. For me, it was almost like they could kind of see what was happening. It was like they could see me and see what was wrong. There was no communication. It was almost like they knew what I needed, like they were inspired or something. Somehow, they just understood the kind of kid I was and were somehow able to make a difference.
Guarding Students’ Emotional Safety

Nurturing care includes teachers providing an emotionally safe environment. According to Stipek (2006), when students have a secure relationship with their teachers, they are more comfortable taking risks that enhance learning, tackling challenging tasks, persisting when they run into difficulty, or asking questions when they are confused.

Three participants shared that as future parents they want to have confidence that their children will be socially and morally safe at school and in “good hands” as they learn. My findings that students and their parents are concerned about students’ emotional safety at school supports Stipek’s (2006) research concerning the benefits of students experiencing nurturing and secure relationships with their teachers at school.

Bullying, derogatory statements, sexual harassment, and put-downs hurt kids, emotionally and academically. Kim explained,

You have to be strong to go to school because you are going to get hurt, but you shouldn’t… I guess I had a time in middle school where I felt it was literally living hell and I didn’t want to go anymore. I don’t think that a lot of teachers realize by giving me constructive criticism that it comes across as you’re beating me up. I mean emotionally and mentally and so sometimes it’s hard. When you have all that pressure it’s hard to think and yeah, it’s going to be hard, but it shouldn’t be unbearable. Teachers, students, you get that all of the time. You have to put up with it. So when you have teachers that are supposed to be teaching you, and be encouraging you to do your best, and they put you down, it’s hard, especially when you get it every day. It hurts. Thank heaven for teachers who knew that I was a good person.

Participants conveyed an appreciation for teachers who recognize that students are people and value them as equal, though younger and less experienced human beings.
Eldon contrasted the opposite ideal with a teacher who was mean and had a temper:

Mr. Klein, from middle school was really blunt and honest (laughs). So if you were making him mad, he would let you know and… (laughs). He would let the whole class know and then he would take you and boot you outside, even if you didn’t really do anything. He really had a temper… I got booted all of the time. That’s how I know (laughs). There was this core group that he would boot out (laughs). That’s another thing he did like if you missed the notes, you had to go and get the notes from someone else, who a lot of teachers are like that, but uh, he was just really rude about it. He would just get really mad, and sometimes he would even use words like “stupid” or “idiot,” mostly toward the people that didn’t even try. I don’t know if he was thinking that would make them try…

I observed during the previous statement that Eldon laughed several times, and I laughed with him. I said “you’re kind of laughing about it now.” He laughed again and said, “yea.” So I asked him, “why is that so funny? I am laughing too and I’m trying to think why it’s so funny.” He remarked, “cuz it’s so how we don’t think of a teacher isn’t it?” Plus, you’re kind of scared when you’re that age and he’s doing that, and now it’s just kind of funny because it’s just retarded. It’s not that scary.”

These teacher “put downs” and rude behavior were very intimidating when Eldon was a student in school. However, as Eldon looked back on it he saw his teacher as being “kind of a loser” and not very scary after all. Eldon then told of a time when this same teacher caused the female students in his class to feel uncomfortable by his inappropriate behavior:

Because he would flirt with the women, with the girls, in the middle of class he would like call on them and start saying like just stuff and uh, you could just tell that they hated it cuz, here’s this old 70 year old or 60 year old, however old he is and …yeah, he would do that to women. This is
like something that he would do, okay. Let’s say that this is a desk (makes a square with both arms) and a girl is sitting right there (behind the desk) (Eldon bends over) he would go and drop his pencil and go, “Oh”, then go like that and say, “you like that view huh”, or something like that (laughs). He would show them his back end (laughs).

Kristin shared a similar experience when she felt morally and emotionally threatened in school:

I remember a teacher doing something very inappropriate…now that I look back on it…he took a clip of a movie… in Forrest Gump that part after when, um…when the mother sleeps with the principal to get Forrest Gump into the school…and Forrest makes the noises of the principal. He did that over and over for weeks after that movie came out during the class, and he would laugh about it…ha, ha, ha…and this guy was, you know, he taught multiple subjects in our school and you know it was just very, very inappropriate. And to stand up and…you know, I didn’t say anything. We were in junior high and some of the kids would laugh and some would just be quiet. And I don’t think we really realized at the time how inappropriate it was for him to …you know, be quoting it. I didn’t personally know…but I knew it was kind of questionable behavior.

Some teachers display uncaring by threatening. One participant felt threatened by a teacher when told that if they didn’t do a certain thing they would fail the class.

Another participant was told that if he didn’t cooperate, “I’ll send you right to the office.”

Sherman shared,

The one teacher that I remember the most didn’t have any respect for her students. She treated us like we were real dumb. Everything we said, she acted like “you should know that already because I’ve talked about it already.” I’m one of those people…I’m a little slow to catch on to things sometimes. That was the most miserable class that I have ever been in, and I’ve talked to other students in the class and everyone in that class did not like that class.
Providing Students with a Feeling of Being Cared-For

Caring is sensed. How do students know if their teacher cares? “It’s a spooky thing,” said Kim as she laughed, “they can feel it.” She believes that students can sense a teacher’s care by the patience and time that they give to them. All of the participants discussed the connection between receiving a teacher’s attention and time and their own feelings of worth. Kim explained,

I’m not saying they have to be there 24/7, but, take math for an example, if there is a student who is having problems with a math problem, and the teacher is trying to hurry up, telling them what to do, the student is not going to feel like “Oh I am worth that time”. If a teacher is thinking bad thoughts about the student, you are not going to be able to teach them, because you’ll get frustrated and you’ll get…it won’t come across straight and the student will surely feel that. But if the teacher takes the time to make sure that they understand it, “do you understand this? Can you do it?” then they will feel they are worth that time and the teacher actually cares about them.

Lumpkin (2007) confirms that students know when they are recognized, understood, and respected for their unique abilities and interests by their teachers. She emphasizes that when teachers genuinely care; students sense it and respond by optimizing their commitment to learning and putting forth greater efforts to reach their potential. Kim talked about sensing connections. She said,

Caring teachers encourage. They take the time to get to know you so that you know there are actual feelings that they care about you as an individual, instead of just a student. They use those common connections to teach you and encourage you.
To enter a caring partnership, one has to be attentive, supportive, personally concerned, and loving. Elmer sensed his teacher cared when, “she knew that I played sports and she would go and watch.”

Mawhinney and Sagan (2007) report that although some veteran teachers feel that they have already “paid their dues” with appearing at extracurricular activities and leave this aspect of school life up to their younger colleagues, students very much connect with school staff who support such activities. Helen said that she felt like a “million bucks” when teachers came to her activities. She thought “wow, they really care.” She reported “performing a little bit better when she heard them cheering.” Susan commented that it was always nice when teachers came and supported you in your activities besides just in the classroom. She described a supporting teacher in this way:

She came to a lot of the concerts, because I sing, so she came to my singing concert and was just really supportive and caring, and then if I would go in after class sometimes if I had lots of questions, and I would just ask and she would really walk me through things and easily explain things so that I could understand instead of being rude, and it feels so good to go in and talk to her and then we would just chat and talk about volleyball and life.

Lisa said concerning a teacher she felt cared,

She was always willing to stay after school and help us in our studies and she would have studies at her house. We would have parties, dinner, and studies at her house. She loved us and wanted us to succeed.

When caring teachers take the time to get to know the students and show interest in their activities, there are actual feelings generated that those teachers care about them as individuals.
School is the place where children are developing themselves and they need encouragement. School should be an enjoyable place where students feel they are accepted. Kim explained,

You can tell by the way they speak to you showing respect, treating you as an adult, always having expectations higher for you and raising those. You can feel them caring by that and you know they are trying to bring out the full potential of you.

Finally, participants sensed all kinds of feelings associated with their interactions with teachers. Participants listed and labeled some of the positive feelings as: felt close to, felt comforted, important, motivated, wanted to do better, need to do my best, wanted to work hard, enjoyed, raised self-esteem, learned, helped, and saw my potential. Conversely, negative feelings included: ignored, felt hurt, put down, felt restricted, discouraged, threatened, picked on, impatient with me, prejudiced, bored, no interaction, didn’t feel liked, and wanted to quit.

The Impact of Nurturing Care on Students

The impact of nurturing care on participant’s lives is very significant in two major ways. The first is that nurturing care has an academic impact. Subject matter has a greater impression on participants who have an emotional bond with their teachers. In addition, when teachers believe in students, students respond with greater effort. These feelings of belonging are translated into increased academic motivation and the ability to listen, and therefore, the capacity to receive instruction. In contrast, teacher misbehaviors, including putdowns, verbal abuse, rudeness, humiliations, “brushing off” students or “overlooking” them, interferes with students motivation and learning.
Perhaps Kristin said it best, when she explained, “when she (teacher) started yelling at me, I shut off.” Emotionally “shutting off” students impacts students negatively by killing learning zeal, making teachers unapproachable, zeal, and denying students access to learning opportunities.

The second impact of experiencing nurturing care is the increased teacher influence on student’s lives and self-worth. Participants report their lives being changed for the better by the direction, answers, and encouragement teachers gave to them regarding life’s problems (e.g., mistakes, family, boy/girlfriends) divorce, death, future plans, and life direction and advice. In addition, participants testify that affirming talk by teachers lead to feelings of accomplishment, comfort and ability to try again following a failure, and increased self-esteem. Participants describe being uplifted and inspired by encouraging talk. They tell how compliments and being recognized and understood by their teachers help them feel like they are a good person. Feelings of self-worth changes how participants see themselves, approach life, and believe “that they can do anything.”

Summary

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of caring teachers from students’ experiences. Although this study concludes that learning remains the focus of teachers and schools, obviously, there is more to teaching than just dispensing information. Caring is very important to students.

Participants’ experiences and stories were used throughout this chapter to illustrate the major themes in the data. From the data the two core dimensions of pedagogical and nurturing care were identified. The dimension of pedagogical care was
organized according to the themes of helping students, using effective pedagogy, and giving students time.

Helping students was the most identified behavior of care. Teachers help students learn by using effective pedagogical techniques, having high expectations, assisting in their future academic goals, being aware of their strengths and weaknesses, giving students extra effort and time, and by not demeaning them.

The dimension of nurturing care was organized according to the themes of establishing personal relationships, treating students respectfully and positively, monitoring students’ personal welfare, guarding students’ emotional safety, and giving students a feeling of being cared for. The nurturing side of caring suggests that teaching goes far beyond technical skill. Therefore, this study concludes that from a student’s perspective, caring entails more than pedagogical duties, but is an emotional, subjective interaction with the teacher in which they display genuine care and concern for them, not just as students, but also as human beings.

Also evident in the data was a developmental aspect to the relative importance of these dimensions to students based on their ages. As the participants in this study reflected back on their school years, many mentioned the importance of the nurturing aspect of care when they were younger; however as they reflected on their high school years, most students emphasized their valuing of pedagogical care in the form of teachers who helped them learn.
The results of this study indicate that different stages of caring are needed in school children. Generally speaking, K-8 students value high nurturing. As students mature and get older high pedagogical care becomes more important. One example might be a student who is scared of his second grade teacher and feels quite devastated facing that teacher each day. But if a student is afraid of an 11th grade math teacher he can joke about it with his friends or at the dinner table with his family. Further, a teacher could never roll her eyes in a normal third grade class without hurting a student. However, in high school, students might well be able to brush it off, understand the sarcasm, joke with some camaraderie, and might not take it personally.

I identified, described, and named the following stages:

1. Nurturing Stage: Elementary School. Teachers act as a second parent. Students need personal attention and want to please the teacher. (They need physical and emotional feedback and to be provided with experiences for success)

2. Safety and Validation Stage: Middle School. Students are trying to adjust and understand all of the physical changes and emotions that accompany puberty. School is harsh; students can be emotionally beat up; their self-esteem can be a bit wounded; may have acquired self-defeating behaviors.

3. Becoming Emotionally Capable Stage: High School. Teacher acts as mentor/advisor, introduces possibilities, and provides vision and perspective. Students are not as emotionally dependent upon teachers. If knocked down, not emotionally crippled but can bounce back, are becoming emotionally mature. Can deal with real issues. (Need for assistance, encouragement, respect, time, and help, can learn from non-successful efforts)
Students need a different type of caring as they mature. The caring reflected from a teacher needs to adjust for each developmental stage. Although not abandoned, pedagogical care should build upon nurturing care and be enhanced by each other.

When caring is lacking for younger students they “act up” in class to attract attention or withdraw in fear of displeasing their teacher. When caring is lacking for high school students they tend to become disinterested, give up, rebel, collapse, and in extreme cases drop out.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of caring from the student perspective. Research questions that guided the study were: (a) How do students define or talk about “caring” and “uncaring” teachers they experienced during their K-12 years? (b) How do students describe their experiences of being “cared for” by teachers or, conversely, of not being cared for? and (c) What are the views of students in regard to the impact of caring and uncaring teachers on their schooling and lives?

Twelve college-age individuals were interviewed using phenomenologically-oriented interviewing techniques, as described in Chapter Three. Analysis of the data resulted in eight themes organized into two major dimensions: pedagogical care and nurturing care. The specific themes related to pedagogical care were helping students; using effective pedagogy; and giving students time. The themes related to nurturing care were establishing personal relationships with students; treating students respectfully and positively; exhibiting concern for students’ personal welfare and well-being; guarding students’ emotional safety; and providing students with a feeling of being cared for. In addition, for each major dimension of caring, impact on students was addressed. These dimensions and themes were discussed in Chapter Four. This final chapter will present the conclusions of the study in the form of a conceptual framework or typology for
understanding teacher caring from the student’s perspective. This framework is represented by a two-by-two matrix juxtaposing the pedagogical and nurturing dimensions of caring, resulting in a typology of four types of teachers. The conceptual framework will be further illustrated by vignettes depicting the behaviors of teachers in the four quadrants of the typology. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of this study for educators, administrators, and hiring committees, followed by my personal reflections.

Conclusions

The major conclusions of this study can be stated as a conceptual framework that represents students’ perspectives on caring and uncaring teachers. The conceptual framework is that teacher caring is seen by students along two basic dimensions—pedagogical care and nurturing care—and that each of these dimensions is illustrated with a variety of teacher behaviors. Thus caring teachers may be higher in one dimension of care than another, or high in both dimensions. In contrast, uncaring teachers are low in both dimensions. This conclusion can be represented in a two-by-two matrix that juxtaposes the two dimensions and creates four “cells” representing a typology of caring and uncaring teachers. An arrow that points from the top right cell to the top left cell represents the change in the type of caring dimension students generally perceive that they experience as they mature. Each cell is related to a set of teacher behaviors identified as caring and uncaring by students in this study. The matrix is displayed in Figure 1.
**Figure 1. A Typology of Caring And Uncaring Teachers**

The following sections provide vignettes of teacher behaviors associated with each of the cells of the typology: high pedagogical and high nurturing teachers, high pedagogical and low nurturing teachers, low pedagogical and high nurturing teachers, and low pedagogical and low nurturing teachers.
**High Pedagogical and High Nurturing Teachers**

Experiencing teachers with high pedagogical and high nurturing caring is the most desirable occurrence for a student. Students with this experience perceive teachers as able to present information in an organized, clear, enthusiastic, and creative manner. These teachers are perceived as taking responsibility for ensuring that students learn by being flexible and accommodating. They are seen as providing students with individual learning tasks if needed. For example, a female student is struggling in her 7th grade band class. She understands the music, but often fails the vocabulary tests because of poor spelling. The poor test results are causing her to hate band. When she approaches her teacher, he is very understanding and changes his music tests from a fill in-the-blank format to multiple-choice so that it no longer requires correct spelling. This pedagogical flexibility for the individual learning of the student combined with nurturing understanding helps to create and instill life-long learning and a love for music.

High pedagogical and high nurturing teachers treat students with fairness, courtesy, and respect. They make themselves available to students and their parents and are perceived as being approachable for help in learning and life. They communicate well by calling home when needed and giving individual students immediate verbal or written feedback concerning their work and their behavior.

High pedagogical and high nurturing teachers do not dwell on the scholastic aptitude of individual students only, but rather on the whole person. They care for the student first as a person, and second as a student. These teachers notice and are
aquatinted with the backgrounds, moods, activities and lives of their students. For example, a fourth grade student’s little brother is born with a serious and life threatening birth defect. The mother is now absent from the home, caring for the newborn in a hospital in another city. This little girl’s family dilemma is weighing heavily upon her. She becomes distant, lethargic, and her learning is suffering. Recognizing this personal crisis, the teacher makes up a reading contest geared towards this student’s love of and strength in reading. The girl is later rewarded by the school for doing well in reading. This caring gesture along with a barrage of hugs and compliments helped her participate and learn while dealing with a difficult family matter. She had a sense of connection and belonging while her family dealt with the more immediate problems at home.

Typically, Students who experience teachers with high pedagogy and high nurturing care flourish in school and later in life. They acquire feelings of being important, accepted, valued, helped, comforted, motivated, and their self-esteem grows.

*High Pedagogical and Low Nurturing Teachers*

Participants report many benefits to experiencing high pedagogical teachers such as effective teaching methods and classroom organization as described in the previous section. However, sometimes students perceive high pedagogical and low nurturing teachers as teachers who are focused on task completion, rather than with people. For example, a math teacher sets the learning environment stage on the first day of school by announcing, “I am a mathematician, not a teacher.” This remark immediately establishes
a perceived low-priority for students and their learning needs and a high-priority for the teacher’s personal knowledge.

High pedagogical and low nurturing teachers usually promote scores rather than process or quality. They value monitoring students, but with minimal support and encouragement. This approach often fosters student independence. However, these teachers may exhibit little patience with students who might need extra help or do not share the teacher’s enthusiasm for the subject matter.

High pedagogical and low nurturing teachers tend to establish rigid rules with little compromise for student’s affairs and circumstances and may emphasize strict obedience to staying on learning tasks. In addition, some of these teachers have a difficult time relaxing and feeling comfortable with students. They tend to be bored with what they consider idle chatter or conversation that doesn’t pertain to the subject matter being studied in class.

In the extreme, low nurturing teachers can be harsh, insensitive, and tactless. They can be poor listeners and impatient with misbehavior, fidgeting, lack of concentration, and tardiness when not taking into account student’s backgrounds or personal needs or situations. They may well resent the distraction of student questions. They often feel that it is more important to be right than to be agreeable and can be overly blunt, rude or given to anger when required to deal with typical youngsters’ behaviors. Younger students might feel these teachers are disinterested and difficult to please and
are seen as expecting high performance without offering assistance. Students’ perceptions of receiving help from these teachers’ can be difficult, cold, and detached.

High pedagogical low nurturing teachers are sometimes perceived as being patronizing and condescending. For example, a student attending a fourth grade elementary school is a challenged speller. He has a spelling test every Friday which consists of twenty words. This student studies hard but this subject is difficult for him. In November, he is determined to earn a perfect score on his spelling test. He spends hours memorizing, practicing, writing and re-writing over again the spelling list. When he takes the test, he is able to spell all twenty words correctly. However, he is marked wrong on three words because he didn’t capitalize them. The discouragement stemming from this perceived failure convinces him that he is unable to succeed in spelling despite his best efforts, and that he hates English, spelling and his teacher. He quits studying spelling and now parents and future teachers are left with the impossible task of motivating a student who is convinced that he hates spelling and cannot spell. This is a sad scenario given that this youngster was once burning with the desire to learn and succeed.

Students who experience teachers with high pedagogy and low nurturing care can be successful learners, but typically do not flourish in school because of previous perceived failures. They possibly will lose their zeal for learning, and experience feelings of frustration and low self-esteem in classroom situations. They are often discouraged and in despair when faced with the challenge of learning something new.
Low Pedagogical and High Nurturing Teachers

Participants gain from high nurturing teachers by developing emotional bonds to school which allow students to respond with greater effort and increased self-esteem as described in the first vignette. However, high nurturing without high pedagogical caring teachers are at times perceived as being more interested in being a “sage on a stage” and seeking student praise and attention, rather than helping students with real learning. They sometimes emphasize kindness over justice. They tend to be passive, poor disciplinarians and can be easily taken advantage of or abused by their students. Many low pedagogical, high nurturing teachers are highly emotional and easily frustrated, discouraged, and dramatic. They tend to emphasize self-sacrifice and enjoy being perceived as a martyr. Although these teachers sometimes enjoy sensitive and deep conversations with their students, remembering the thoughts and feelings shared, little significant teaching is accomplished.

Students perceive low pedagogical, high nurturing teachers as having little or no classroom expectations. They are apt to be pedagogically lazy and as a result of poor preparation, use lectures as their preferred teaching style. These teachers are likely to be easily manipulated and too often lack consistency in homework assignments, tests, and project deadlines. They frequently revisit issues that they feel intensely or strongly about.

Low pedagogical, high nurturing teachers tend to be too accommodating and inclined to be too quick to give answers. They do not allow students time to think,
discover, and take ownership in their learning. These teachers are frequently guilty of rewarding mediocrity in class work. They may well want to be popular and can be overly tolerant and permissive, lauding inappropriate student behavior for personal social gain. They may jeopardize their integrity by developing inappropriate friendships with students by having students call them by their first name or a nick-name. For example, a teacher designates a special section of the classroom to give doughnuts only to the students he sees as popular during high stakes testing.

High nurturing teachers are particularly important for younger learners. Although students who experience teachers with low pedagogy and high nurturing care feel close to their teachers, it may come at the cost of a lack respect for them. Extreme nurturing teachers may be some of the most damaging long-term educators because they enable lazy students to succeed and advance by being rewarded for poor performance. They do not require students to experience the consequences of their actions. Even highly-motivated students suffer at these teachers’ hands because they perceive that their efforts are being undermined when poor students excel or when sub-standard work is considered equal to theirs.

Low Pedagogical and Low Nurturing Teachers

Teachers perceived as low pedagogical and low nurturing are the least desirable teachers for a student to have. These teachers are perceived as only being interested in their paycheck. They invest a minimum amount of time and effort in their teaching. As a result, they are unprepared in their teaching and unpredictable in their methods which
results in perceived moodiness. Lessons are often old, stale, and outdated. These teachers use tests in an attempt to trick students, often administering exams that do not match the assigned homework or class discussion.

Low pedagogical and low nurturing teachers are not student-centered. They have difficulty assessing students’ needs, strengths and weaknesses. For example, at a parent teachers’ conference a teacher shows the parent the roll book/grade book where assignments are recorded. Each score is entered with a plus sign to represent completion of the assignment or a “0” to indicate that the assignment was not turned in. A problem occurs because these marks only measure whether the student turned in the assignment or not. It does not indicate a score of any kind or identify any specific area of weakness or excellence that might need assistance or commendation. Regrettably, the teacher relies on poor observations or tests to manifest the student’s strengths or weaknesses. However, information is often manifest at a point when it is too insurmountable or too late to help and the section, quarter, or course becomes a waste. As a result, the parent has inadequate indicators as to their child’s needs. Therefore the student cannot be helped or encouraged in any meaningful way.

Low nurturing teachers do not engage in meaningful interactions with their students and see their work only in terms of a paycheck. They tend to be robotic and apathetic, sarcastic and cynical. This negativity reinforces the student’s awareness of the teacher’s prejudice, lack of sympathy and malignity. Because they do not regard students
highly; they neither value nor remember what students share with them and they feel no obligation to keep promises.

Students who experience low pedagogical and low nurturing care by teachers in K-12 years typically feel neglected, ignored, confused, and hurt. Those who fail not only in school but in pursuing life generally have had too many experiences with this type of teacher. In the extreme, these students lose belief and confidence in the capacity of adults to care, the school system, and society in general.

Implications

The first implication of this study emphasizes the need for awareness. This study reinforces the emphasis that caring is a critical and essential component of educational success. Inasmuch as my findings support the research that a caring approach to schooling is a prerequisite for academic excellence, it is hoped that this study will encourage educators, preservice program administrators, and teacher hiring committees to not overemphasize the instructional aspect of teaching at the neglect of meeting the social and emotional needs of children. Teachers must be in-serviced, evaluated, and hired on their ability to relate to and care for students.

Second, learning involves a teacher’s ability to relate to students. Teachers should focus positive concern for students and value each of them as a person. This study purports that when student concerns are understood, when student needs are met, when student learning is a priority and when student voices are heard teachers will ultimately be successful in promoting lifelong learning, healthy self-esteem, and in
preparing adults to be ready to see success in society. Ideally every teacher will regard each student’s individuality as well as their performance. Policymakers and educators must understand and remember that students are not commodities and must be mindful of their individual worth and personal well-being as they teach them. Successful educators need to take into account a student’s personality, race, socioeconomic status, idiosyncrasies, strengths, learning needs and possibilities. When a teacher displays empathy, responds respectfully and with understanding, and uses appropriate self-disclosure teachers communicate caring for students.

Third, an emphasis on caring in schools must include discussions about establishing relationships with students and assessing their well-being. Although the more technical aspects of teaching dominate educators and policymakers thinking about what makes schools and classrooms valuable (Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995), a significant contribution of this study is that students perceive caring in terms of relationships and concern for students’ general welfare and well-being.

Participants agreed that although caring is not the formal goal of the schools, they feel that without a relationship with a teacher, students sometimes have little reason to fully commit to instructional activities. “To recognize caring in schools, you must examine the relationships developed between teachers and students (Collier, 2005). Although, it must be understood that there is no uniform pattern for creating wholesome and positive student-teacher connections, these relationships must be developed on an individual basis. Stronge (2007) states “effective teachers care for the student first as a
person, and second as a student” (p. 2). This may be most effectively achieved by teachers talking, showing interest, and displaying appropriate empathy, respect, and self-disclosure.

Finally, this study suggests that if the typical student is influenced by caring or uncaring teachers, then those same experiences for the at-risk student, the student with special needs, or the average child at an at-risk time during their life; would be even more profound or exaggerated. One cannot separate self-esteem and student well-being from academics and the ability to learn.

Reflections

My School Experience

Conducting this study has caused deep consideration and reflection about my own school experience as a student and as a teacher. In this section, I will reflect on my school journey and will share some of the things that I have learned from this study and how it has affected me personally. I will begin by recalling and reflecting on my own school teachers and conclude with lessons that I have learned about caring.

I went to kindergarten in Las Vegas, Nevada, first and second grades in Salt Lake City, Utah, third-sixth grade in a small town in southern Utah, and junior high and high school in northern Utah. I found that reflecting on my school years was difficult and frustrating at first because no particular memories of my teachers as being caring or uncaring stood out. I couldn’t remember anything. Finally, I stepped away from my computer, slowed down, and really started thinking about my teachers.
My first memory was participating in “programmed reading” in the first grade. Programmed reading was a series of books that students read with a bookmark that slid down the inside part of the page that revealed helps and answers as we read. The beginning books had lots of words like Sam and Ann, run and ran, that and than, pin and pan, etc. We could take the books home and my mom and I read them a lot. I excelled in this program and when I finished book #10 ahead of schedule, I remember sitting in my desk at the back of our classroom and overheard a couple of teachers in conference about my quickness in completing these books. They seemed puzzled. They wondered if I was actually internalizing the learning or just speeding through it. They had me read to them, “ooohed and awed,” and seemed convinced that I was a bright student. This was the beginning of perceiving myself as a “star student” and perhaps a “teacher’s pet.” I perceived many future school experiences as positive reinforcements of what I had come to believe about myself and how I viewed my teachers as caring persons. I now had these high academic expectations of myself and did not want to disappoint my teachers or myself. I think this experience caused me to “rise to the occasion” many times throughout my school years.

My second memory was an anticipation of going to sixth grade and having our sixth grade teacher. He had a reputation in our small grade school as being “cool.” He was young and athletic. At recess, he would often play athletic games with us. What a thrill to think that he would want to be with us. He organized “kickball” games. It is a game very much like baseball, same rules, bases etc. However, instead of using bats to
hit the ball, we kicked a red, rubber playground ball with our foot. Our teacher could kick it so far and so high! He would kick the ball so high that like a helium balloon, it would rise almost out of sight. Sometimes it would actually go the length of our huge grass playing field and across the street while still in the air. One afternoon, as a member of the other team, I went way back into the outfield and to the edge of the street. Our teacher came up to “bat.” He kicked the ball extremely high. It took a long time to come down, but somehow I was able to catch his kicked ball. It had never been done before in our school’s history and I never saw anyone else ever do it again. I was the “man of the hour.” My teacher showered me with praise for my athletic accomplishment. From then on, things were different between my teacher and me. We shared a unique and common bond that made me feel special to him.

My third memory is of the anticipation of my parents returning home from parent/teacher’s conferences. Each year as my parents reported to me what my teachers said, it was a boost to my ego. However, as time passed, I think that I began to appreciate my teacher’s comments about me as a person more than my academic status. Although I considered myself an “above average” student and academic comments were flattering, statements about me as a person were more meaningful. For example, I enjoyed being told that I was “liked,” “well-behaved,” or that I was a “gentleman.” I liked being liked! It was a little bit of an adjustment when I moved or advanced to middle or high school and teachers considered me as “just another student.” I thought, don’t they know who I am?
As a result of reflecting on my own school experiences, I see that I experienced what I report in this study, that as students mature, teacher caring transfers from high nurturing care into more of a pedagogical care. I learned that caring is not all “warm fuzzies and smiles,” and that teachers cared for me pedagogically as well as nurturing. However, I still valued the relationship piece within the pedagogical care as being important to me.

In summary, it seems I had mostly positive memories. I can hardly believe the impact that positive teacher’s comments about me, had on me. The most important thing that my teachers did for me was to help me feel like I was a good person. Although I agree that learning should be the focus of schools, in a way, much of my academic learning was almost a byproduct of the way I was treated by my teachers. Because I have been treated so well and have felt loved and cared for by my teachers all of my life, I know what being cared for means to students and very much desire that all students could feel safe, have a sense of belonging, and feel cared for at school. I believe teachers have a very important role as a caregiver as well as a “teacher.” I will not replace their parents, but in my role as a teacher, I want to help all of my students know that I care and hereby call upon my fellow teachers to care for children.

My Discoveries

There are several lessons that I have learned or rediscovered as a result of writing this paper. First, it is hard to measure or articulate such an ambiguous concept at caring. At first, I was torn between participant’s reports of teachers having no influence and
having great influence. Biased by my career as a teacher, I couldn’t understand why people couldn’t immediately recall how teachers had influenced them. Unfortunately, like children with their parents, good fortune, or blessings, I am not sure that we really appreciate or think about things that we take for granted such as a teacher’s influence on our lives. I discovered that it is quite a mental exercise to evaluate and articulate a subjective thing like teacher caring and influence. I learned that increased age helps us add to our understanding and realization of the influence teachers have on our lives. The influence of a teacher may not be evident in the classroom or immediately after, there is an interim, a waiting period. Sometimes teachers and students have no idea that what is being taught have found permanent place in the mind and heart of a student. For example, several years ago when my grandpa died, I attend his viewing as part of his funeral. While there, I saw my fifth grade teacher who came to pay his respects to my grandpa and our family. Surprised, I saw my former teacher differently, with adult eyes. I introduced him to my family and me. I wanted him to know that I turned out and felt an overwhelming desire to thank him. It certainly was a sentimental experience to see my teacher so many years later. He represented for me that day all of the teachers that I have had that have helped to shape me into who I am. I plan to send a note to each of my elementary and other influential teachers to thank them for what they have done for me.

Second, I am convinced that that teacher quality should include not only knowledge of subject content but teacher personality, values, and the ability to be
influential. I was surprised to learn how many participants in this study mentioned how they appreciated teachers who talked and taught them “about life.”

Newton (1999) reports that “most of the hundreds of hand written comments by students on teacher evaluations I have read are about personal behaviors and attitudes; not pedagogic methods, delivery skills, and subject knowledge.” Further, I believe that there is a gift to teaching. We can become teachers, very good ones, but we cannot teach with only an academic approach. Personally, I would not want to teach in front of a television camera. I want to see my students’ faces. I have discovered for myself that I love teaching students and not just the subject.

Third, is the role of love in teaching. Effective teachers care about their students and demonstrate that they care in such a way that their students are aware of it (Stronge, 2007). When caring teachers take the time to get to know the students and show interest in their activities, there are actual feelings generated that those teachers care about them as individuals. One of those feelings is love. Lumpkin (2007) emphasizes that when teachers genuinely care; students sense it. I have observed the hesitation or fear in using the word love very much in professional circles of education. I recognize that there may be professional, scientific, or moral problems related to the concept of love. Possibly, it is the ambiguity of the word or concept, maybe it is the political or societal taboo and it’s being associated with sex, or perhaps it is the moral dilemma about whether to pay someone to love children when we should naturally value and care for them.
Regardless, for just a moment, I would like to drop all pretenses and simply recognize its importance. I will not play the game of trying to define it. But, whether we want to recognize it or not, I have learned that people feel love or recognize the lack of it. I agree with Maslow that love is a basic human need and love for others matters, especially in the classroom. Noddings (1984) said, “feeling is not all that is involved in caring, but it is essentially involved” (p.32). Love is such an emotional investment. I have certainly discovered that loving others can be exhausting emotional work, especially when students are difficult to love because of their behavior, background, or attitude. But I believe loving students is part of the work of a teacher.

I am sure that giving natural love and caring is easy. However, I believe that teaching and other caring professions have a moral obligation to love and care for others. It is expected. I know that as a society we struggle with teacher gender issues and see love and caring as traditionally feminine. However, I do not feel that because giving love and care is a moral expectation as part of the role of teacher, that it somehow cheapens love and care. I simply believe that caring and teaching is rooted in love.

Finally, I have learned that the way we view children and youth has a lot to do with their perceived feelings of care and success. There is a connection between caring and self-worth. Caring teachers make students want to do better. Caring teachers who recognize the inherent and unique worth of students help them to see who they can become. In addition, these attitudes and behaviors can increase the students’ connectedness, positive self-image, and sense of self-worth. We sometimes are critical
regarding the lack of respect exhibited towards authority and adults by youth. However, I believe that respect for children is going down in our society by adults. We mistakenly think the depraved won’t hurt them. We correct, criticize or yell and don’t realize how hurtful and intimidating we can be. The influence teachers can have on people’s memories, confidence, emotional aches and scars, value and worth, shape people’s lives. Caring is the how of teaching
References


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difference from the perspective of preservice and experienced teachers.


Townsend, B.L. (2000). The disproportionate discipline of african american learners:


Appendix A

**Interview Guide**

1. Talk about a teacher that really mattered to you.
   
   A. Describe your relationship with that teacher.
   
   B. What do you think that teacher did, specifically that gave you that impression?
   
   C. Do you think that teacher influenced you? How?
   
   D. Explain any thoughts or feelings that you had when experiencing caring/uncaring teachers.

2. Tell me about a teacher you didn’t like or thought was a poor teacher? Why?

3. Tell me about a teachers who didn’t like you or had a negative impact on you?

4. If I asked you to talk about “caring” teachers, what does that mean to you?
   
   A. How do you know if a teacher cares about you?
   
   B. Tell me about any teacher’s impact on your school or career choice.
   
   C. Describe how a teacher has influenced any decisions you have made in your life.
   
   D. Describe how a teacher has influenced the kind of person you are.
   
   E. Are there any other ways that a teacher has affected or influenced you?

5. If I asked you to talk about “uncaring” teachers, what does that mean to you?
Appendix B

Gilgamesh is an epic written by the Sumerian people. It is about a hero, an idolastic goddess, and of brotherly kindness. The section dealing with Ishtar, Anu, and Enkidu exemplifies a religion based on greed. Ishtar takes these parallels of greed. She is lustful for Gilgamesh, acts with revenge because of her strength, and thinking only of herself. Ishtar's desires of lust, revenge, and selfishness are paralleled in this epic. It depicted her greed, and it ended someone else's life tragically.

The epic starts with the heroic King Gilgamesh and of his conquering. As it proceeds, Ishtar immediately sparked curiosity of the goddess Ishtar and lustful desires for Gilgamesh. Her desire was not for his beautiful body and not love from the heart. She desires her when she said, "A bright morning sun in the body of Ishtar, tomorrow will follow."

The desire of her heart was for her need to replenish. What kind of love is this when she offers something in return? It is lustful greed.

She wants Gilgamesh for her own desires and not have him for anything else. Her longing was for his body, not his love. What is it, LIEclassifier!"

Having values and morals, Gilgamesh could not stand for such audacity. He stood forth and spoke four of Ishtar. The words were of her evil, and he pronounced her as cold, and of the deadly words that would soon fall. He spoke of passed loves and the treatment of material worthlessness she gave to them. She was feeding rotten food and would feed it to Gilgamesh. The pierced heart of Ishtar was not calm; the words would now to repay Gilgamesh for his words. He was despite the fact that his respect:

Don't write so dramatically.
people of today whose goals and secret ways are like Ishtar: you would see the murderers, the criminals, seen off the streets, those who are negligent of all responsibility, those who have hardened their hearts, power and money lovers, and the people in society who are the criminals, the bad guys, and evil. Another negative point is that it is only getting worse.

There is a parallel between the two and a large number of people. I feel like Gilgamesh today, but especially compared with the character of Ishtar. From my experience when I am around such cold, narrow-minded people, I feel like Ishtar was like. My desire is to stay away and not be affected by such ill-mannered attitudes. I admire Gilgamesh for taking a stand and holding on to his integrity. He is a good example. More people should stand up today, take a stand, and override the evil. Too many people fall into the practices of Ishtar and we might now need to follow Gilgamesh.

You spend so many words on such simple stuff, endlessly repeating yourself. You need to develop ideas, not paragraphs by examples, analysis, and interpretation.

You write too dramatically. You narrate too much. You should be explaining or defending a point, not summing up the plot. What have you accomplished?

You were asked too much. Why is death to be feared, or revenge, or greed. She's guilty of lust, murder, illusion, and why do you call it all "sick"?