

Care as a Key Contributor to Student Learning and Teacher Effectiveness

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Abstract

This study examines how *care* is a pivotal factor in contributing to student learning as well as teacher effectiveness. In this context, care can be defined as actions that encourage students to learn and succeed. The act of caring requires both teachers and students to interact. This relationship acts as foundation that holds both parties together, producing meaningful pedagogical experience. However, care does not stand alone. It is supported by presence and emotions that prompts the caring act. Presence is an influential feature in caring as it maintains the intensity of the relationship. Emotions is important to control how the caring act will be executed. These aspects, care, emotions, and presence are interrelated, moreover, vital for the existence of the relationship. There are several constructive outcomes of caring on teachers and students. The act of caring allows teachers to be supportive and aware of their pupils as an individual and a learner. Therefore, teachers can create and offer authentic pedagogical approaches to meet and increase students' learning needs. In relation to that, care increases teacher efficacy. As teachers know and understand their pupils more closely, they have more confidence in constructing relevant instructional plans to implement for the students' learning development. Moreover, it will improve teachers to enhance their teaching skills. Thus, teacher effectiveness as well as classroom management is achievable. Developing a teaching relationship through care will impact pupils as individuals, bringing valuable connections into their lives.

Keywords: care, student learning, teacher effectiveness, teacher efficacy, classroom management

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Introduction

According to Osterman (2000), the relationship that students have with teachers is one of the fundamental predictors in student learning (as cited in Stipek, 2006). Learning is a process that requires effort, engagement, and motivation so students can achieve high levels of achievement. In order for them to reach this goal they also need a support system from their teachers, which is crucial to this progress. Based on Noddings (1992), academic goals cannot be met unless teachers provide students with a caring and supportive classroom environment (Noblit, 1993, as cited in Wentzel, 1997). In relation to that, a research study conducted by Woolfolk-Hoy and Weinstein (2006) revealed that students perceive that class interaction and cooperation is shaped by their relationship between their teachers and how supportive and caring they are (as cited in Wolff, Bogert, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2015). Loughran (2010) also suggested that teaching is not only an act of delivering knowledge to students in classrooms but is also a process of building a relationship between teachers and students; students and students; theory and practice; and students and content to create a meaningful pedagogical experience. Thus, this requires both teachers and students' involvement to make a difference in the students' learning experience and achieve a successful pedagogical practice.

Reflecting on these theories, it is clear that teacher's care play a significant role in students' learning outcome. Through care, students know they are respected, valued, and acknowledged as individual learners. Demonstrating care in such a way places them in the center of the learning process, and thus indicates that teachers believe in the student's abilities (Lumpkin, 2007). Thus, teachers would engage students in the learning process as well as encourage them to achieve higher goals. Furthermore, teacher will also be determined to develop teaching approaches that are appropriate so that it will meet with the students' learning needs. As teachers reflect on their instructional methods, they improve their teaching capacity. Understanding what teaching strategies are suitable for students can increase teacher efficacy (Collier, 2005). Collier (2005) also explains that enhancing teacher efficacy can have extensive impact in teacher effectiveness. By improving teacher efficacy, teachers are more familiar with what type of pedagogical approach is best used for what type of student. This results in effective teaching.

As stated previously, student learning is highly determined by the relationship they have with their teachers. John Macmurray (1964) stated that 'teaching is one of the foremost of personal relations' (p. 17, as cited in Noddings, 2012). To build relation with others one of the foundations of building a relationship is through care (Noddings, 2012). This paper will explore care in the education context. Firstly, the definition of care will be explained. Secondly, other aspects that support the act of caring will be elaborated. Thirdly, this paper will investigate the role of care in student learning and teacher effectiveness.

Definition of care

As a human being we are able to care, have an emotion or feeling for one another. Caring is defined as a value on how a person think they should view and relate to others (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995, as cited in Collier, 2005). When a person asks their friends or family how they are doing or when a teacher comforts a student

with a problem, these illustrate the act of caring. It applies to all relationships, whether it is between parent and child, teacher and pupil, or coach and player. The subjects in the relationships consist of *carer* and *cared-for*. Based on combination of Tronto (2010) and Noddings (2012) work, there are four stages of care which include; (1) attentiveness, where the *carer* becomes attentive to the *cared-for*'s situation and recognizes the need for care, (2) responsibility, in which the *carer* attends to the *cared-for* and determines how the *carer* will respond, and (3) competence, the *carer* fulfills the need, and (4) responsiveness, the phase where the *carer* actively responds to the *cared-for*'s needs. Every phase is crucial to maintain because it will affect the caring act.

In this process of caring relation, listening and trust plays an important role. Noddings has extensively written on care and how care is successfully executed. She describes a *carer* as one that is attentive, watches, and listens (2012). Micheal Fielding and Peter Moss believe that listening is the heart of teaching (Noddings, 2012). Through listening we are able to understand one's situation or concern in which allows a relationship to develop. As the relationship grows, trust is built between one another which is central to connected teaching (Belenky et al, 1986, as cited in Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). Caring is deeply rooted in forming a relationship which would also apply in a relationship between teachers and students. Noddings also noted that care encourages competence because when we care about someone or something we try to give them the best (1995). Thus, having or developing care is essential because it can influence the teaching and learning practice.

Importance of presence in care

In the process of caring, there are also other features that contribute to determine how successful the act will be executed. Noddings (2003) suggested that presence plays crucial role in care (as cited in Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). When a teacher cares about their pupils, they will try to present themselves wholly by being alert and ready to respond. Presence is defined as an act of being mindfulness, awareness and investment in the present moment (Tremmel, 1993), wide-awakeness (Greene, 1973), and openness for compassionate interaction (Waks, 1995, as cited in Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). Presence is not a qualification that teachers are trained to master and it is also not a factor that educators consider when recruited as a teacher (Garrison & Rud; Liston, 1995, as cited in Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). Yet, it is a feature that is significant to care which also applies in teaching. Having presence allows teachers to be connected with their student, being attentive and listening intently. By doing so, students will feel that extra attention given to them which can make a difference in how students view the lesson and learning process. For example, during a group work, a student is suddenly praised for sharing their opinion, in that instance, it can change the way the pupil engages in the classroom. Giving positive feedback will justify their belonging and acceptance as students and individuals. This is congruent with Waks's theory of presence as openness by accepting others through close interaction (as cited in Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006).

As teachers present themselves with their whole-hearted intention to understand the pupils' concern or situation it shows an emotional feeling of being seen. This refers to what Janet Surrey describes as empathy or mutual empathy (1991, as cited in Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). Mutual empathy refers to the connection with one another and

to recognize and understand them through vision, as being seen (as cited in Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). As simple an act as making eye contact can indicate that the other person sees them and is aware of their presence. Morse (1992) suggests that there are four components of empathy: emotive, moral, cognitive, and behavioral (as cited in Mercer & Reynolds, 2002). The capacity of identifying, understanding, and responding to what other people are genuinely feeling can produce a strong connection with each other. For example, when a student struggles with writing their essay and a teacher meets him, takes the time to be there, and assures him that the teacher is there to help, this is a huge sense of relief for the student. For teachers to place themselves in the students' position or their perspectives enables them to connect with their students and have a meaningful relationship.

Importance of emotion in care

According to Palmer (1997), emotions are one of the determining factors of good teaching. It influences the way teachers teach and pupils learn. Emotions are also a significant part of care. Without emotion, care cannot be generated. Emotions have the power to control our actions although we are not aware of this. They are present in all activities in our daily lives including teaching and learning. Emotions are strongly linked to affecting the relationship between teachers and students (Nias, 1989, as cited in Oplatka, 2011). In such state, emotion can change what relationship the teacher and student has based on the emotion they convey, it will either bring them closer together or create distance between them. For example, if a teacher cares about their pupils but the pupil shows disrespect, this can trigger the teacher to lose control of their emotion and display an act of frustration. This type of stance can significantly impact the relationship of teacher and student. Furthermore, emotion management becomes part of the teacher's teaching practice because it is used a natural aspect of teaching and learning (Zembylas, 2005, as cited in Oplatka, 2009). Although this might be the case, it is not compulsory for teachers to display emotions as part of their task in teaching, thus, if they fail to show emotions they will not receive any sanctions (Oplatka, 1997a, as cited in Oplatka, 2007). Emotion and caring are two intertwined features that impacts teaching practice. It is important to note that care becomes central in emotional labor (Oplatka, 2009). Oplatka's extensive work on emotion suggested that care can also be regulated and managed similar to emotions in classroom context (2009). Therefore, care can be adjusted through emotion management in shaping how we want to express care.

When developing a curriculum, or recruiting applicants for a teaching position, administrators, educational policy makers, and educators do not take emotions into consideration (Hargreaves, 2000). Based on relevant studies on emotion in the education context, it was found that teachers' emotion was linked to a number of aspects such as teacher and student relations, teaching quality, emotion management, identity, and teacher and student attitude (Day & Lee, 2011; Meyer, 2009, as cited in Oplatka, 2011). When teachers express a certain type of emotion, pupils can sense what the teacher is feeling. For instance, when a teacher takes a deep sigh while explaining a lesson or their voice tone is flat or they start raising their voice when a student is having trouble, it demonstrates that the teacher is apathetic, tired, or angry. These emotions are clearly felt by pupils and this can impact their learning environment. One finding from Sutton's (2002) study revealed that avoiding negative emotions such as frustration can result in effective classroom (as cited in Oplatka,

2009). This is due to the effort of not distracting students' learning and not causing a potentially toxic learning atmosphere. Classroom environment can be determined by the teachers' emotions, whether it be a dull, innovative, or interactive classroom.

Care in the education context

Nowadays, teachers are expected to fulfill the teaching and learning goals based on some standardized curriculum. This causes teachers to focus their teaching on the subject material to achieve high scores rather than to shape caring and competent individuals (Noddings, 1995). The implications of this has affected teachers to neglect factors that contribute to good teaching. It is believed that a good teacher is one who has a clear purpose, able to manage their class wisely, and encourage good behavior (Economist, 2016). Typically, pupils are not approached through meaningful teaching styles. This negatively impacts their learning as well as self-development. Thus, it should be acknowledged that one of the effective ways of developing expertise in teaching is through care. It is through care that a relationship will be built that will enhance pedagogical development.

Care enhances student learning and teacher effectiveness through teacher efficacy

As stated previously, teacher effectiveness can be achieved through enhancing teacher efficacy. To successfully reach this goal, care plays an essential role. The act of caring of teachers is key in developing relationship with between student and teacher. When teachers demonstrate care towards students it will generate a sense of presence, value, and respect to the students. Lumpkin (2007) suggested that a student feels cared-for when a teacher acknowledges and respects their individual abilities and interests. Moreover, according to Berliner in his concept of nature of expertise in teaching, he one of the factors that distinct experts to novices is that expert teachers have self-efficacy and positive expectation on their students. (Berliner, 1992)

Teacher efficacy is the ability to make an impact in student learning, including the unmotivated students (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Guskey & Passaro, 1994, as cited in Tschannen-Moran, A. Hoy, & W. Hoy, 1998). Being a teacher that is committed in influencing student learning has a greater chance of creating an effective classroom because teachers are familiar of what strategies are best applicable for their students. According to a number of education experts, it is found that when teacher efficacy is highly exhibited they perform more effectively in classrooms (Ashton and Webb, 1986; Sparks, 1988; Fritz, Miller-Heyl, and MacPhee, 1995, as cited in Collier, 2005). In relation to this, care contributes in influencing the teachers' behavior of efficacy because it generates a sense of lovingness, compassion, and motivation towards students. Motivated teachers will encourage students to motivate themselves because of the relationship they share with their teachers. As a result, when students feel they have support from teacher and they are valued they become more active in class prompting their learning aptitude in a positive way (Wentzel, 1997).

There are several assumptions that is drawn from what caring teachers can influence, particularly on student learning (Noblit et al., 1995, as cited in Collier, 2005). First, when teachers care about their students they tend to have a stronger commitment and responsibility for their learning performance. They want to be able to provide the

necessary support for students to help them in their learning. For example, if a student is having difficulties with their task, a committed teacher would offer her or his help in assisting the student outside of school period. This also illustrates how teachers feel responsible for their students' learning progress. Expert teachers compared to novice teachers take responsibility of their students' success or failure in student learning (Ashton, 1984; Berliner, 1992). Second, being a caring teacher motivates them to give the best for their students including improving their teaching skills so that they will be able to effectively fulfill the students' learning needs. This notion is aligned with Noddings's (1995) idea on how caring can boost competence, that is to give the best towards something we care about. An example of this situation is when a teacher continues to create innovative ideas that are suitable for certain activities so that it will be easier and become meaningful for students to understand. Thus, teachers' support through motivation will not only improve teaching skills but also increase student achievement. Studies have revealed that teachers' support have positive impact on students' engagement as well as their academic performance (Klem & Connell, 2004). As discussed earlier, the relationship between teachers and students is crucial. Caring teachers are able to share their emotions and thoughts in order to connect with the student and to understand them. This type of act can be demonstrated in cases where a teacher consoles a student having difficulties with a subject. The teachers' attention will be felt by the student and a sense of comfort will develop. Through that, trust will also grow. By building this connection, it will stimulate respect, trust, and motivation that influences the students' engagement in classroom tasks (Collier, 2005).

Caring brings the teaching and learning to a deeper level. As teachers increase their years of teaching they gain familiarity with the instructional strategies, how to manage a classroom, and deal with students with different needs. To successfully meet these aspects of care is the heart that guides teachers to these aspects of expertise in teaching, in which some educators or teachers ignore or are not aware of. The link between care and relationship is intertwined. Based on a study conducted by Mary Poplin and Joseph Weeres (1993) in California schools, the most prevailing and important issues in schools is the human relations, including teacher and student relationship and moral values such as respect, care, and understanding (as cited in Coleman, 1993). This illustrates what parents, staff, and students evaluate and expect from schools. They do not prioritize the school rank in the region or the percentage of graduates who enroll in top schools or universities. Rather, it is the human connection that is the foundation. Thus, caring teachers do not merely affect the student learning but also the students as a whole.

As teachers know better of their students' potential and progress in learning they are able to conduct lessons according to their capacities. Knowing what is best for them can become a routine. This is one approach that can put caring into practice. According to Berliner (1992), expert teachers were able to achieve this through automaticity or routinization. Automaticity and routinization demonstrates the capability of teachers' efficacy because teachers know what and how things should be done in classrooms, able to manage and implement consistent instructional plans, and how to efficiently complete tasks. For example, when caring teachers know what instructional approach best supports their students' learning needs the students will feel more comfortable and create less stress and concerns about the lesson. Thus, this will be easier for students to follow and be more active in class (Wentzel, 1997).

Berliner also noted that students' involvement in learning can increase students' curiosity and learning performance (1992). Furthermore, understanding what instructional methods works best can also improve classroom management. Emmer and Stough (2001) suggested that based on research studies effective classroom management is reflected through the time they have invested in, as well as care in initiating and teaching classroom routines to students. Thus, showing care in teaching can lead to teacher efficacy, which in turn increases teachers' effectiveness as well as improved classroom management. These outcomes are considered factors that contribute to expertise in teaching (Berliner, 1992; Emmer & Stough, 2001; Wolff et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The act of care in teaching plays an influential role in education. The relationship between teachers and students acts as foundation that holds both ends to produce a meaningful pedagogical experience. Here, care plays a central aspect of relationship. Care is supported by presence and emotions that prompts the act of caring. These aspects are interrelated and vital for the existence of the relationship. Care facilitates student learning through teachers understanding their students' learning need by developing and enhancing teaching skills. It is important that teachers are authentic in this state so that they are able to build strong learning connections with students. Thus, student learning is achievable. Implementing an appropriate instructional approach will also enhance teacher effectiveness. Developing a teaching a relationship through care will not only touch the surface of learning but more importantly impacts the pupils as an individual, bringing valuable interpersonal connections in to their lives.

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