

Introduction

DEBORAH EAKER-RICH AND JANE A. VAN GALEN

A growing body of literature has drawn attention to the relational work performed in schools. In these analyses, the moral, “caring” work that frames the delivery of lessons, rather than the techno-rational facets of schooling, take center stage. This book offers another voice in the dialogue contained within the literature (Beck, 1994; Brabeck, 1989; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 1990, 1993; Larrabee, 1993; Martin, 1992; Noddings, 1984, 1986, 1989, 1992) that is exploring “caring” in schools.

This fairly recent literature has explored the developmental and philosophical perspectives of what it means to *care*, at least in theoretical terms. A developmental notion of caring as an academic discourse, began with Carol Gilligan’s 1982 work, *In a Different Voice*, in which she challenged previously accepted views of moral development by including a “different” perspective, demonstrated in her empirical work as being voiced most often by women. Gilligan’s work brought into question the assumption, grounded in the developmental stage models of Lawrence Kohlberg and others, that the highest moral choices should be based exclusively upon universal principles of justice and detached, objective rationality. Gilligan posited instead the legitimacy of moral and ethical choices that are also based on norms of care, connectedness, and relationship. The *care* examined by Gilligan is far from being sentimental and servile. In Gilligan’s (1993) words: “My critics equate care with feelings, which they oppose to thought, and imagine caring as passive or confined to some separate sphere. I describe care and justice as two moral perspectives that organize both thinking and feelings and empower the self to take different kinds of action in public as well as private life. Thus, in contrast to the paralyzing image of the

'angel in the house', I describe a critical ethical perspective that calls into question the traditional equations of care with self-sacrifice" (p. 209).

Although Gilligan intimated that her work had implications for education and set subsequent studies in schools, she did not choose to pursue those implications in her own work.

The work of Nel Noddings (1984) echoed Gilligan's call for renewed attention to the relational in moral reasoning and in social life. Moving beyond Gilligan's demonstration that relational considerations *do* underlay much moral reasoning (even while concern for connectedness and relationship have long been denigrated relative to moral reasoning grounded in logic principles of justice), Noddings called for education that places caring explicitly at the center of the work of schools. In her words, "I . . . argue that the first job of the schools is to care for our children. We should educate all our children not only for competence but also for caring. Our aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people" (1992, p. xiv). Noddings's visionary work calls upon us to envision schools as they *might* be were they organized as "centers of care" (1992, p. 65).

The sentiment of caring is not something new to schools; as Miller (1990) and others have noted, teachers often speak of their work in relational terms that invoke the importance of teachers and students being and becoming caring persons. Educational researchers (Brabeck, 1989; Prilliman, Eaker, and Kendrick, 1994; Beck 1994; and the contributors to a recent special issue of the *Urban Review*, 25 no. 1, 1993) have begun to look at the relational work already to be found in schools, particularly at how *caring* is defined by teachers as well as how it is practiced. Although the caring relationships between many of the adults and children in schools may not yet resemble the theoretical models envisioned by Noddings, Gilligan, and others who have sought to bring caring to the center of theory and policy making, the most recent research does reveal an intentional caring as pedagogy. The recent work has drawn attention to the importance and complexity of caring and connectedness in current educational thought and practice. These authors have helped us to better understand schools and classrooms that are defined not only in terms of their technical and organizational components, but also in terms of the quality of relationships and the emphasis placed on the development of students as caring, ethical people.

As this emerging work has begun to shed light on the dynamics of care in classrooms and schools, the authors of these works have also begun to

raise questions about what it means to give and to receive care in the heterogeneous settings actually encountered in educational practice. Foundational articulations of the theory of care in education have not yet grappled with the complexities of the *context* of care; namely, the multiple perspectives—the variety and differences—of culture and social positionality. These complications must inform theory. As the notion of caring continues to develop and gain prominence both in educational theory and in practice, it is imperative that theory and practice inform and enrich the other.

We have organized this volume to address the issue of caring across social barriers that emerge in heterogeneous settings as persons from different backgrounds attempt to establish caring relationships in schools. We have asked authors to consider several questions. We have asked them to address the issues of how the terms of relational work in schools are negotiated and defined when relationships within schools and communities are defined by ethnicity, class, and gender. We also asked the authors to consider the limits and possibilities of “caring” in schools that serve and reflect an unjust world.

These are important questions at this stage of the development of the literature in the field, because, as Noddings’s argues, for a caring act to occur, it must be *interpreted* as caring by the one toward whom it is extended (1984, 1989, 1992). As she writes in *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984): “When my caring is directed to living things, I must consider their natures, ways of life, needs, and desires. And, although I can never accomplish it entirely, I try to apprehend the reality of the other” (p. 14).

In her later works (1989, 1992), Noddings acknowledges the difficulties of knowing another’s nature, needs, and desires when one party holds power over the other or is a member of a group that has historically dominated another. Given that many relationships in schools are constrained by such power discrepancies, we felt that these issues of caring across social borders merited further attention.

The authors in this volume address the difficulties and complexities of apprehending the reality of “others” when the caregivers or those receiving care or both are from historically marginalized groups. In casting a sociological lens on the philosophical discourse on caring, the studies and essays collected here consider how caring is defined, enabled, and constrained by social structures.

As such, this book has evolved into two major parts: *Dilemmas of Caregivers* and *Dilemmas of Creating Schools as Centers of Care*.

The first part, *Dilemmas of Caregivers*, confronts issues of caring from the perspective of, as Noddings uses the term, *the one caring*, or the caregiver. In her theoretical work, Noddings emphasizes reciprocity of the caring relationship. As she explains, "A *caring relation* is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for. In order for the relation to be properly called caring, both parties must contribute to it in characteristic ways. A failure on the part of either carer or cared-for blocks completion of caring and, although there may still be a relation—that is, an encounter in which each party feels something toward the other—it is not a *caring relation*" (1992, p. 15).

As with Gilligan, Noddings does not endorse a sentimental or self-sacrificing "care." Instead, she speaks of one acting in the best interests of the other. For Noddings (1984), caring is central to the act of teaching:

As a teacher, I am first, one caring.

The one-caring is engrossed in the cared-for and undergoes a motivational displacement toward the projects of the cared-for. This does not . . . imply romantic love or the sort of pervasive and compulsive "thinking of the other" that characterizes infatuation. It means, rather, that one-caring receives the other, for the interval of caring, completely and non-selectively. She is present to the other and places motive power in his service. Now, of course, she does not abandon her own ethical ideal in doing this, but she starts from a position of respect or regard for the projects of the other. In the language of Martin Buber, the cared-for is encountered as "Thou," a subject, and not as "It," an object of analysis. During the encounter, which may be singular and brief or recurrent and prolonged, the cared-for "is Thou and fills the firmament." (p. 176)

To care in such ways may often be difficult. Caring becomes more difficult, as Noddings acknowledges, when it is attempted "at a distance"—either because of physical separation or because those who would care are "physically near but are still strangers" (1992, p. 115).

The stories conveyed in this part are stories of those who, because of circumstances of history, politics, intolerance, or social and economic domination, are strangers to those for whom they would demonstrate care. In these cases, the caregivers are women confronting the sexism that distances males and females, gay and lesbian teachers who are attempting to

care within a homophobic culture that distances them from the students and peers for whom they care, and educational researchers and their participants within an urban school setting who are attempting to bridge the distances of status, purpose, and perspective that too often impede genuinely collaborative inquiry. Noddings cautions that “caring at a distance is fraught with difficulties” (1992, p. 116), and the chapters in this part both illuminate the nature of these difficulties and suggest avenues for ways that those on the margins may minimize the social and psychic differences between themselves and others.

In the first chapter of the part, “Caring and the Open Moment in Educational Leadership: A Historical Perspective,” Jackie M. Blount profiles historical instances of caring school leaders. She examines the cases of such leaders, all of whom are women, during the evolution of educational administration and before, as Blount terms it, “the reification of school administrative structures and practices” that impose bureaucratic distance between teachers (many of whom are women) and administrators (many of whom are men). In presenting the historical perspective upon caring within school leadership, she effectively argues that current administrative structures and normative practice hinder and may even prevent the possibility of caring school leadership in the present. She leaves us to consider whether schools might not now be closer to models of centers of caring had this alternative, relational, style of leadership prevailed.

Jan Streitmatter, in her chapter dealing with “Justice or Caring,” examines the practices and dilemmas of two female teachers who are attempting to promote gender equity, albeit in differing ways. Drawing from Gilligan’s work, Streitmatter juxtaposes an equality versus equity framework and how these are potentially tied to two primarily distinct moral orientations for these teachers, those of justice and care. In so doing, she raises many conflictual issues regarding the appropriate questions that we as educators need to consider as we attempt, under the rubric of caring for children, to “equalize” past injustices and inequalities. The teachers described in this chapter both care about their students. Both attempt to minimize distance between female students and the more privileged positions of males in the society, and the analyses of the consequences of the approaches taken by each sheds new light on the ways in which *caring* and *justice* approaches may address the moral dilemma of sexism.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the often hidden dilemmas faced by gay and lesbian teachers who attempt to care for their students within a homophobic culture. In “Uncommon Caring: Male Primary Teachers as

Constructed and Constrained,” James R. King points to the multiple layers of complexity inherent in the decision of any man to become a primary school teacher. These complexities are further exacerbated, as King illuminates, when these men happen to also be gay. Similarly, in “Lesbian and Gay Teachers: Forbidden to Care,” Rita M. Kissen tells the turbulent and uncertain stories of homosexual teachers as they struggle to “really be there” and care for students while at the same time experiencing the very real apprehension, fear, and consequences that can, and do, result both from being “in” and “coming out” of the closet. These two chapters leave us with painful questions about the distances maintained between homosexual students and the teachers who would care for them and between the homosexual teacher and the students for whom they would care. As these chapters illustrate, the social inhibition attached to caring between homosexuals and others makes the engrossment of the caregiver in the “cared-for” difficult at best.

In the final chapter of this part by Jaci Webb-Dempsey, Bruce Wilson, Dickson Corbett, and Rhonda Mordecai-Phillips, we see the various actors within one urban school, including the researchers themselves, struggle with what is meant by “in the best interests of children.” The authors, along with Noddings, contend that doing what is in the best interests of children is the basis of caring. We see within this chapter how notions of care are “bound” by race, class, gender, historical circumstance, and age. We also witness the lack of understanding resulting when well-intentioned actors view one another only from the distance of these boundaries. Webb and her colleagues explore the complications of trying to ascertain what borders can appropriately and productively be crossed in attempting to develop a consensus around what it means to care in this one school as the actors join together to create a school in which children do know that they are in a place that is centered on their care.

Part Two, *Dilemmas of Creating Schools as Centers of Care*, explores the complexities of moving beyond the one-on-one relational work on the part of particular teachers to the more complex task of creating and sustaining institutional norms of caring and connection.

The chapters in this section look at five “caring” projects, whether originally or explicitly articulated as such or not. The “projects,” as described in these chapters, demonstrate successful, failed, and ongoing attempts to live out an ethic of care and relational work within schools.

Chapter 6, by Van Dempsey and Noblit, “Caring and Continuity: The Demise of Caring in an African-American Community, One Conse-

quence of School Desegregation,” lays out the historical and present consequences of desegregation efforts within one African-American community. In their analysis, we see those outside the community dispute the sustenance of a caring community that was created through continuity of purpose, place, and people (Noddings, 1992). In this case, the law, not the people within the caring community, determined who had the power to redefine the meaning and structure of what constituted a “good school.” As a result, the community lost the “good school” as they had defined it, and with the loss of the school came the loss of the sense of a caring community that emanated from the school. In this case of “failed” caring, we see how the voices of power prevailed over those of connectedness.

In “Interpersonal Caring in the ‘Good’ Segregated Schooling of African-American Children,” Emily V. Siddle Walker looks at the “good” segregated school from a slightly different perspective than that of Dempsey and Noblit. She asks us to explore issues of interpersonal caring within this school that seemingly provided a more successful schooling experience for some students than for others. As a result of this focus on interpersonal caring, she highlights the power dynamics that enable or restrict success as well as the importance of connectedness for these students. At the same time, she challenges the unitary, traditional focus of school reform that merely explains the lack of success among African-American students as attributable to institutional and cultural practices.

Jane A. Van Galen, in “Caring in Community: The Limits of Compassion in Facilitating Diversity,” examines student life within a traditionally Catholic school undergoing diversification, whose participants explicitly voice an ethic of care as being one of the essential elements that makes their school successful. Upon in-depth analysis, “caring” appears to serve a social reproductionist role within the school as it is received differently along racial and gender lines. The manifestations of caring in this school serve to reinforce class, race, and gender roles among students. Van Galen’s chapter suggests that well-intended teachers who may invest much in their relational work with students may, nonetheless manifest caring in culturally bound ways that limit, rather than support, students’ personal and academic growth. Van Galen contends that disempowering relationships couched in a rhetoric of care may ultimately render the differential treatment of students invisible and unspeakable.

“Caring in One Urban High School: Thoughts on the Interplay Among Race, Class, and Gender” by Lynn G. Beck and Rebecca L. Newman portrays a case of the success of caring within a school in which

many factors work against the success of the students. Beck and Newman look at the various characteristics of caring as it is enacted among women, diverse racial groups, and classes in this urban high school. They provide us with a positive scenario of the possibilities of a school organized around a negotiated and agreed-upon ethic of caring for all participants.

In Chapter 10, "Caring as Empowerment: School Collaboration and Community Agency," the authors, Carmen Mercado and members of the Bronx Middle School Collaborative, describe a school-based, collaborative, integrated research and pedagogical project. The project was undertaken to empower adolescent students from working class and ethnically diverse environments. This project demonstrates how students' opportunities and ability to research matters of essential importance to their own lives can result in academic excellence and learning to care about themselves and others as well. This collaborative project reinforces what Noddings argues should be the foremost goal of education: "living with those whom we teach in a caring community through modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation" (Noddings, 1986, p. 502).

We believe this book to be an important addition to the literature regarding the complexities of caring within the traditional structures and practices of schools. The chapters here confirm that talk of caring and relational work permeates the life of schools and was part of school life long before the emergent and overdue academic interest in the subject. We believe that the chapters demonstrate the rich opportunities for exploring the complexities of relational work in schools. While we join many within the academy who are calling for caring schools, we believe that it is important to learn much more about the caring that is now taking place in settings and situations in which relational work might be expected to be problematic. Yet as we solicited manuscripts for this book and spoke to others about our work, we found that in spite of widespread consensus around the importance of caring in schools on the part of teachers, parents, administrators, and students, the practice of caring, as so much of school life, is not subject to critical reflection. We found few teachers, administrators, or even teacher educators who have studied the caring literature and who ground their relational work in this literature or who even had talked among themselves about what it might mean to care in meaningful ways. The work of caring teachers seems to us to exist in a world that is, as yet, distinct from the work of academics who call upon teachers to reconsider their practice.

Thus, we offer this volume as part of the dialogue between educational theory and practice. We have been reminded in the process of working on this book with others that we will be most effective as we apply theoretical constructs to the analysis of caring when we encourage those engaged in this vital relational work to speak back to us. As Noddings notes, knowledge across cultural groups (such as those in the academy and those in schools) is best acquired in relation (1992, p. 114). Our hope for this book is that a theory of caring will help to shape practice, that closer looks at practice will help to move the theory forward, and that the dialogue between academics and practitioners will continue in the interest of both "cultures" contributing their parts to the creation of schools that are working in the best interests of *all* children.

REFERENCES

- Beck, L. G. (1994). *Reclaiming Educational Administration as a Caring Community*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Brabeck, M. (1989). *Who Cares? Theory, Research, and Educational Implications of Care*. New York: Praeger.
- Brown, L. M. and Gilligan, C. (1992). *Meeting at the Crossroads*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . (1990). *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescents at Emma Willard School*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . (1993). "Reply to Critics." In M. J. Larrabee, ed., *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Larrabee, M. J., ed. (1993). *An Ethic of Care: Feminist and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Martin, J. R. (1992). *The School Home: Rethinking Schools for Changing Families*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Miller, J. (1990). *Creating Spaces and Finding Voices: Teachers Collaborating for Empowerment*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- . (1986). "Fidelity in Teaching, Teacher Education and Research for Teaching." *Harvard Educational Review* 56: 496–510.
- . (1989). *Women and Evil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . (1992). *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. New York: Teachers' College Press.
- Prilliman, R., Eaker, D., and Kendrick, D. M., eds. (1994). *The Tapestry of Caring: Education as Nurturance*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.