

**HUMAN CONNECTIONS:
ADAPTING AN ETHIC OF CARE FOR FOSTERING THE GROWTH OF STUDENT
TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS**

Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

Through this Record of Study I examined the problems teachers face in overcoming the challenges and barriers in building caring relationships with students. I have aimed to bring practitioner insight into the problem. The objective of this study were to close teacher knowledge gaps by offering a series of three professional developments to build teachers skill and knowledge around building authentic caring relationships using an application of Ethics of Care (Noddings, 1984). Through this Record of Study I looked at teachers perceptions around relationship building and the meaning of their interpretation of what it means to care for their students. Additionally, I attempted to gain insight into the impact professional development has on improving teacher efficacy in relationship building. Through this qualitative study I looked at participant perceptions prior to the professional development and then post professional development. Through participant interviews, discussions, and reflections the change in participants level of consciousness, awareness, and understanding around building relationships was analyzed.

The findings from the study concluded a stronger understanding of the importance of care and a deeper insight into the practitioner experience with care. The academic discourse and practitioner experience paralleled of a strong argument for an authentic care-based approach to teaching students to achieve positive academic outcomes. The first major findings concluded from insights gathered from the participants show how their educational experiences impacted their own interpretations of care. Secondly, that care is a foundational piece in educational settings and it must be authentic to have an impact. Thirdly, the importance of taking the time to build relationships is essential. Next, the importance of the element of reciprocity in building strong connections in teacher student relationships should be emphasized. Additionally, building

connections takes intentionality and a time commitment must be made for a relationship to manifest. Subsequently, those high expectations can be enhanced through a personal bond ultimately leading to higher academic achievement outcomes. Lastly, when building one's agency in relationship building overtime a level of awareness and consciousness is raised to better understand students' personal challenges, struggles, as well as their hopes and dreams.

Through my Record of Study I have developed a stronger understanding of what it means to care from a practitioner's perspective. The participants in my study overwhelmingly agreed in their advocacy for an application of ethics of care in every classroom to be the rule and not the exception.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family. First my parents, their example of hard work, sacrifice, and love has served as an inspiration throughout my life and a catalyst to never waiver in pursuit of accomplishing your goals. To my brothers and sister, I could not be where I am today without the path you have blazed for me. Thank you for always showing me your unwavering support and love. To my children Adam, Nathaniel, and Alana, your beauty, grace, kindness, and heart have taught me the true meaning of unconditional love. I could not have done this without you. Lastly, to my wife Laura thank you for being my partner on this journey we embarked on together. You are my rock of patience, persistence, and perspective.

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Contributors

This work was supervised by a committee consisting of Chair, Dr. Mary M. Capraro, and Co-Chair Dr. Robert M. Capraro and committee members Dr. Radhika Viruru of the Department of Teaching Learning and Culture and Dr. Mónica Vásquez Neshyba of the Department of Education Psychology.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Opening Context

It has been well over four decades since Nel Nodding (1984) introduced the ethic of care as a recommended practice in schools. As academics and practitioners grapple with the complex problems in education they strive to seek insight into relevant breakthroughs in education. What has lain at the heart of these issues resides in the practitioner's realm. Teachers struggle daily with nuanced expectations of delivering high quality education with the aim of producing high test scores. What that reality creates for teachers is stressors and disappointing results for students. Research has supported stronger student teacher relationships resulting in higher student success rates for students. To that end, an ethic of care-based relationship provides the possibility for optimal meaningful relationships where teachers and students can perform at their best. This notion highlights the importance of meaningful professional development focused on informing and guiding practitioners with essential knowledge and skills to best serve students. A supportive professional development that addresses these ethic of care issues in a practical way can support bridging this knowledge gap in teachers.

National Context

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." -Maya Angelou

A common question that is asked of educators is to reflect on "who inspired you to become a teacher?" To which many educators often recollect fond memories of a beloved parent, teacher, coach, or a mentor that inspired them on their path. So it should come as no surprise that

they often describe that influential person as “caring.” This leads to ask the question “how are educators doing at caring for their students”?

A national 2013 Gallup Student Poll surveyed over 500,000 students 5th-12th grade and discovered that engagement in school begins to sharply decline after 5th grade (Busteed, 2014; Calderon 2017). A direct correlation to student engagement is a student's sense of feeling cared for. A 2016 Gallup poll student survey revealed that only 39% of students feel “that an adult at this school cares about me” (Calderon, 2017, news.gallup.com). Consequently, the survey revealed the number of students that feel cared for in schools is steadily decreasing.

To go a bit deeper, Gallup polls have also revealed that the biggest predictor and contributor to student engagement is a student's sense of being cared for. Hence, a national interest around strategies to build levels of student engagement include caring as a key strategy in developing stronger student-teacher relationships. The Gallup Student Poll recommended that schools adopt care as an expectation (Busteed, 2014). Gallup researchers further suggested the most important tenant for students to succeed is “having someone who cares about your development” (Calderon, 2017, news.gallup.com). Gallup researchers suggested the most important tenant for students to succeed are “having someone who cares about your development” (Calderon, 2017, news.gallup.com).

Additional support for designing caring schools is cited as being a key performance element that is critical in working with at risk students. Research across education has emerged to support the understanding and importance of caring relationships for students.

Research in the application of care in building student teacher relationships and engagement is vast. This revelation of a steady widening gap of students feeling a sense of being cared for and about in their schools is problematic. This demonstrates a cause for urgency and

attention in supporting an application of care. This truth is further compounded by the harsh reality of the relationship building landscape that is constantly being buzzed and pinged by social media, cell phones, and most recently the fall out of the global pandemic starting in 2020. An article published by Gallup provides perspectives on its findings concludes with this sentiment of hope; “what students need at their core is caring. If we can create a system that allows caring to flourish and become a common experience that all students receive, America will once again have the best school system in the world” (Busteed, 2014, p. 26).

Personal Context

As an educator of 20 years working in a diverse urban community in San Bernardino, California I have always been curious why there are some teachers that struggle teaching a particular group of students and other teachers will report little to no challenges while teaching the same group of students. I have taken a position that connections and relationships may hold the answer.

The City of San Bernardino was once hailed as the “All-American” City in 1977 by the National Civic League. A hub city for rail, transit, and commerce it boomed after WWII as being a transition point for military industrialism (Norton Air Force Base) and agriculture commerce. Some of its major historical highlights include the location of the first McDonalds (by the McDonalds brothers), the Rolling Stones first US appearance in 1964, and a mountain playground for Hollywood elites such as Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz in the 1950’s. San Bernardino was once the cradle for citrus barons in the early 20’s as well as laying claim to a long stretch of the historic Route 66 that winds through much of the city.

The tough times started when the largest employer Norton Air Force Base was closed in the early 90’s in response to the Department of Defense action to downsize. This decision almost

overnight began to transform the community. A large portion of the middle class left town to other communities following their defense work. Because there were large civilian defense contracts tied up with the Air Force base there were yet thousands of jobs that were also lost as a direct result of the closure. It has been nearly 30 years since the closure and there has been no bounce back or semblance of a return to the economic upturns of the late 70's-80's. A Los Angeles Times front-page exposé in 2015 labeled San Bernardino a "Broken City". This has been a stigma among the greater community and among educators ever since.

What has plagued the city since has been mismanagement, crime, poverty, and recently a major spike in homelessness. Interestingly enough, the largest employer is the San Bernardino City Unified School District. The district has over 5,000 employees across 48 campuses.

My personal belief centers around a basic human-interest approach to teaching and learning. I believe deeply that every student is unique and worth knowing their passions, their dreams, and most importantly their story. This conviction has resonated over my twenty years in education.

My journey begins in San Bernardino, CA, a hard-scrappy town of some of the most diverse, historic, and culturally rich cities in Southern California. Like many educators this story starts with my first teachers; my parents and my family. Growing up the youngest in a Mexican-American family in a rural area, my parents instilled in me from a very young age the importance of hard work, doing your best, and never settling for mediocrity. My siblings served in a secondary parenting role both teaching me and encouraging me through their examples to do my absolute best. Their path in education would serve as a greater foundation for my own path. My oldest brother was the first person in my very large extended family to graduate from a University (Cal Poly Pomona) as a Business major. My sister who has always been a second

mother to me graduated from UCLA (Political Science). My other brother who is closest to me in age graduated from UC Berkeley (Political Science). As the youngest, their examples would leave a heavy impression on me and later would drive me towards a career in education. I would be the first in the family to leave the state to attend The Citadel where I would graduate as an Education Major. At that time, it was very rare to hear of 4 university graduates from one family. When I returned to teach in the community I grew up in I would hear many similar stories of family ethics of hard work and family values. I found I could relate my understanding of their family dynamics with my own. That would resonate with me as a teacher in my community.

Many in my community can trace family work to the Santa Fe railroad, Norton Air Force Base, or Kaiser steel which was still an apex employer in the region during my youth. Growing up in an “All-American” city, there was a deep sense of community and much to love. With deep sadness among the community in the early 90’s due to military downsizing, the city’s largest employer, Norton Air force base closed. This single economic event spelled total doom for the city’s future. As history would reveal it began a downward economic spiral that has yet to recover from some 30 years later. Today, San Bernardino City where I work is now mired in political corruption scandal, economic mismanagement, and a near stagnant economy. Crime, poverty and homelessness is second only to Los Angeles (30 miles to the west). And yet educators meet the moment daily for the students in the 7th largest school district in California.

As a brand-new young history teacher at Arroyo Valley High School in San Bernardino I started to realize very early a phenomenon that some of my students would struggle in other classes and come to me for help or guidance. These students would come to me and say “my teacher doesn’t really explain things like you do”, “my teacher never takes the time”, and “I don't think my teacher likes me so I’m afraid to ask”. Flattered and glad to help I would always enjoy

helping these students whenever I could. My principal took notice and called me into her office and asked me one day if I would like to be part of a pilot program. This program was a California Partnership Academy called the Teaching Academy. “What is it?” I asked. To which she smirked and responded “trust me, you’re going to be great”. Naive as I was and a newer teacher, I was smart enough to know to do as you are told. I joined. I would later find out that a Partnership Academy is a cohort of students that travel with their core teachers from year to year 10th -12th grade. Additionally, the teachers were cohorted.

I went from being a social studies teacher of one to joining a team of six teachers whose mutual interest was to teach students to the best of our abilities and prepare them for a possible future career in education (hence the name Teaching Academy). It was a bit of a bumpy start, and as I recall the teachers (English, Science, Career Technical Education, Social Studies) had very strong personalities and many ideas about how to get the work done. Through those strong personalities, I would later find out that all had a unique drive of putting students needs first, just like my own practice. We quickly found common ground and in turn a common direction.

Later, I would come to find out that the same Principal that said “trust me” would place some of her most “difficult” students that could not get along with other teachers in the Teaching Academy, when we asked “hey why us?” Her comment was always the same “you guys got this”. We had a common prep time and were able to meet twice weekly to discuss our students and what they needed. We planned field trips, guest speakers, college visits, and branded these students with their own t-shirts, polos, and graduation cords.

After the first two years we could sense that we were on to something very special. When the state test scores were released, we discovered we were on par with the schools advanced learners and soon we were surpassing the test scores of not only our own AP and IB students, but

also those of other schools in the district. For seven years we had “lightning in a bottle” winning several awards, state accolades, and much public recognition.

Over time this core group of teachers received recognition and promotions. I went from being a history teacher, department chair, and varsity baseball coach to high school vice principal, where I next endeavored to replicated what we had. I figured if we can create this for 200 students, why cannot others benefit? So, using my new position, I worked tirelessly to add more academies to our campus. Five years later our high school is now fully wall to wall academies, with seven major industry sectors represented. That is every student is in a career academy from freshman to senior year.

I often meet with my old crew of teaching academy teachers and we talk about that lightning in the bottle. What was it? How can we duplicate it? Is it possible? This was always a question we had in the back of our minds but could never quite put our finger on it.

Here in present day and in the summer of 2020 amid a global pandemic I was writing a community inquiry project for a course on urban education. While conducting this research on understanding more about student teacher relationships, I stumbled on an article citing Care Theory. As I continued to read, I was struck with this epiphany that what our small academy of teacher were able to do better than anyone for seven years was to care for students unconditionally.

I can recount every name of every student and tell you each of their stories and I am certain my fellow teachers could as well. As I read more about Nel Noddings (1984) Ethic of Care theory it was like reading an overwhelming sense of validation reading article after article and it was just the tip of the ice berg. I could not believe how deeply personal I felt when I understood that care was at the heart of what we accomplished. There was no student we could

not reach and we dealt with some students that really had very personal challenges. I recalled a motto we would often repeat among ourselves “whatever it takes”.

Learning this was both validating and frustrating. While on the one hand I was happy that the secret ingredient had been revealed to me. I had to grapple with a new reality. I had been in education for almost 20 years and this is the first I am learning of this. Why?! (I thought to myself). Then I started to understand that about a deep understanding of care, its importance, its impact, and its profound resonance is one that needs to be shared on a grander scale. Thus, putting me on this current path to educate educators.

For myself and the children that learn in this community It is more important than ever for them to know that someone cares and more importantly cares about their future. I no doubt believe that this has the potential to turn the fortunes of this “broken city” into a city that prospers.

Situational Context of the Problem

The school district I work in, San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD), is the seventh largest school district in the state of California. SBCUSD serves students primarily from the City of San Bernardino and a portion of students from the cities of Highland and the Muscoy area. SBCUSD has a student population of over 52,733 students in grades Pre-K-12th across 72 schools. SBCUSD has over 7,400 employees.

The student demographic makeup of SBCUSD is 77% Hispanic/Latino and 11% African American the remaining 12% identify as White/Caucasian. According to the California Department of Education (CDE) 2019-2020 report 12,352 students are identified as English Learners (EL) and 98.6% of those students identify Spanish as their first language. There are

6,790 students identified for the Special Education program. Among the overall student population 45,872 (86.9%) qualify for free/reduced lunch.

According to the California Dashboard 2019, SBCUSD student data have been below grade level standards in Math and English as a result of academic test scores. In addition, SBCUSD averages a chronic absentee rate of 15%. Additionally, SBCUSD has a 93.6% graduation rate.

Arroyo Valley High School (AVHS) where the current study will be situated is the second largest high school in SBCUSD. Opening in 2001, AVHS is situated on the West Side of the city of San Bernardino and is one of seven high schools in SBCUSD. Based on California Dashboard and CDE data AVHS has 2,732 students 91% Hispanic/Latino, 5.3% African American, 1.3% White/Caucasian. AVHS has 470 English Learners of which 98.1% of those students identify Spanish as their first language. Additionally, 2,451 (93%) students of AVHS qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch.

According to the California Dashboard 2019, AVHS student data has been below grade level standards in Math and English based on academic test scores. In addition, AVHS is listed as having 95.1% of its students as socially-economically disadvantaged according to the California Dashboard. AVHS has a 5.9% suspension rate of its students reporting being suspended at least one time. Thus, the reason I have chosen this topic is to examine whether if teachers show an ethic of care with their students AVHS can make a difference in the lives of its teachers and students.

Historical Context: District

SBCUSD has taken a responsive approach to student interventions over the past two decades. The interventions are primarily behavior driven. In the early 2000's as a response to a

very high number of office discipline referrals SBCUSD introduced the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) system. This program was brought to SBCUSD with the intent of building teachers' skills and knowledge around acknowledging and rewarding students for positive behaviors. This program struggled for a few years after its implementation. By the mid 2000's it did gain a strong foot hold in the elementary and middle schools. Unfortunately, it also never was adopted or adapted with fidelity at the high school level. It can be also noted that while overall PBS was successful at reducing office discipline referrals, it created an unintended consequence, an increase in discipline related suspensions.

SBCUSD took the increase in suspensions seriously and aimed to build upon the PBS system. In the late 2000's the district introduced the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) system district wide. The newly added intervention was an added and expanded step to the Positive Behavior and Support system geared toward providing systematic interventions before any referrals were escalated for high levels of discipline. The implementation of PBIS followed a similar pattern as before. It saw much success at the elementary and middle school level, however, there were very little noticeable impacts at the high school level. The suspension rate district wide remained high.

The high suspension rate would have a ripple effect across the district in the early 2010's. Nationwide there was a movement to stop the "Schools to Prison" pipeline. There was a community group that organized and spoke out against SBCUSD's high suspension rate, which at its height was the 5th highest in the state of California. The local press and public pressure resulted in the school board to take action. They initiated a task force to reduce the suspension rate. Much of the task force action resulted in a repeal of zero tolerance policies (weapons, fighting, etc.) that could be intervened without suspension. In addition, there was language that

made suspending student for a “K” violation (causing a disturbance) no longer allowable. As a result, suspension rates did decrease.

In the past five years SBCUSD has created a new division of Students Services called the Office of Student Wellness that provides professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators. SBCUSD has transitioned away from PBiS and has focused more on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies. This newer department also provides services and resources for students. Over the past few years the district has taken a more wholistic approach to student interventions by providing training and resource support. SBCUSD also used Student Gallup poll data and now uses Panorama Survey data to measure student wellness, engagement, and student sense of belonging.

Historical Context: Site

AVHS has followed most of the district guidelines when managing student interventions. As a teacher, admin designee, and vice principal I can attest to the high discipline referral rate. In addition, I can attest to the many years that AVHS had the highest suspension rate in the district. This is due largely because AVHS was never able to fully implement PBS or PBIS with fidelity. The primary cause for this was a lack of professional development to adapt the (PBIS) system philosophy at the high school level. In short, the professional development had shortcomings that led to a mismanaged roll out and adoption by teachers. This was also compounded by the high turnover rate of leadership. There was a stretch of time when there was seven principals in only three years.

AVHS began to take a different approach to interventions around 2016. As the establishment of their wall to wall career academies began to take root, respective leaders began to take proactive measures to student discipline. The most successful academies casted aside

discipline referrals or expectations of suspensions in exchange for building meaningful relationships with students. Those academies that took the relational approach saw a steady decrease in major discipline issues. AVHS has seen a steady decline in suspensions over the past five years.

While AVHS has seen a marked decrease in referrals and suspensions initially and that sounds like good news, there are deeper concerns school wide that need to be addressed based on recent data. As a result of a 2018 Gallup Poll student survey, only 31% of students report engagement in school. As a result of a 2018 Panorama survey only 45% of students report a sense of belonging at school. Thus, there has been an effort in the past two years to target these areas.

Significance of the Problem

The challenge of building caring relationships stems from the rigors and pressures of teachers to perform in their schools. This notion is compounded when there is a belief that all teachers are built the same and should all produce the same outcome with their students. While teachers bring their own academic and life experiences into the classroom daily it is often times not enough for them to be successful. What lies at the heart of the problem is the constraint of time causing teachers to feel overwhelmed.

This problem is significant because caring for students is probably the most important thing a teacher can do for their students. In the void of time that educators make up in the whole experience of students' lives there is no greater significant impact than a caring relationship. At the heart of why teachers do what they do, I believe that educators need to understand some of the most basic inner workings of relational dynamics before they can tackle some of the more arduous tasks that are asked everyday of them as teachers.

My personal experience started quite unexpectedly when I was in my earliest years of teaching. During the school day I was a history teacher and after school I was a junior varsity baseball coach. On the first day of tryouts a young male stood out right away because he was the only player who was not dressed in the required tryout gear. It was clearly posted in the flyer and the announcements that all players had to wear baseball pants, a baseball hat, cleats, and a glove. A very simple and standard request for safety reasons and a minimum requirement for any baseball program. He was wearing tattered sweat pants, used football cleats with a hole in the toe, a beanie cap, and a glove that was so old I was sure it would fetch a nice penny on eBay. There were a few players that were poking a bit of fun at him about it and I decided to call him over and talk to him about it. I asked him his name and he said it was "Maxx". I asked, "have you ever played ball before?" He looked at me with the biggest smile and said "with my friends in middle school." I said to him "have you ever played in a league, you know organized baseball?" Still smiling he said to me, "Coach I don't have the experience that some of these other guys, but I promise you I will work harder than anyone out here." That response was good enough for me. So, I set him up with proper pants, a hat, and a glove the very next day. He was so thankful and told me how much he appreciated it. Little did I know I would later have the joy of teaching this young man in my history class and coaching him for the next four years and getting to know more about him. I found out that he lived with his grandparents, made a very long walk to school every day, and wanted to play every sport he could to keep him on campus, a safe place in contrast to his neighborhood. Over the next four years, Maxx would come to ask me questions about important life decisions, such as work, college, relationships, finances and he always had an incredible smile and outlook on life. He always made sure to keep in touch after he graduated. He would stop by the school to give me an update on how he was doing. I found

out after a time that he had joined the United States Marine Corps (USMC). We had lost a bit of touch for a few years when my phone rang. I can hear the voice now, “Coach! How you doing? It’s Maxx.” He asked me if I could come down to San Diego for a ceremony. I had the time so I said I would but really was not sure what the ceremony was for. I piled my family into the car and made the 2-hour drive to Recruiting Depot USMC. We were ushered into a large auditorium. A very formal military ceremony began. Still not quite sure what type of ceremony this was I heard the master of ceremonies announce “and now your newest class of Marine Corps Drill Instructors.” They called his name aloud and there he stood, tall, lean, uniform pristine, crisp smoky cap, ribbons decorated his chest, his shoes polished mirror like. I looked over at my wife (who got to know him as well over the years) and we looked at each other amazed. Both of us had tears in our eyes. Just an incredible sight. After the ceremony was over when we were finished taking pictures he took me aside and asked to speak with me. He said to me “Coach, I just want to say thank you for always being there for me when I needed you. Going through this process (Drill Instructor School) made me think about the people in my life who cared for me and it gave me strength. Growing up I never had anyone to really go to for advice or listen to my problems but you always listened and helped me find the answers. I could not have done this without you. Thank you, coach.” He gave me a big hug and that million-dollar smile. I’m so glad Maxx had me and I had Maxx.

I continue to wonder how many “Maxx’s” are out there that do not have the same experience that he did. Students like him that need the types of caring relationships that transcend the status quo. How many students are there that instead of being uplifted are turned away? Maybe there are no statistics for measuring those types of individual experiences, however, what I do know is that caring is at the very heart of solving some of the most complex

issues teachers experience in the classroom. Yet, teachers are challenged by factors such as raising test scores and pressures over job security for producing results. These stressors overwhelm and consume the time needed to develop caring relationships. Teachers no doubt know that strong relationships are important tenants of successful classrooms. However, just because they know does not mean they know how to make it happen. Here is where I see an opportunity to develop a greater understanding on how to making caring relationships a reality for teachers.

With the constraints of time being a constant barrier for teachers in, building caring relationships with their students, a comprehensive professional development appears to be a possible solution. Prior researchers strongly support (Noddings, 1984) the application of care theory (Noddings, 1988; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Ransom, 2019; Rogers & Webb, 1991) as a means of developing caring relationships. It should be noted that there are gaps when examining existing professional development designs, planning, and implementation. Through this study I hope to address this gap by way of bridging the academic and scholarly works through the lens of practitioners in the venue of a comprehensive professional development.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study will be to investigate and track the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of teachers as they engage in professional development strategies of an application of an Ethic of Care in order to build student teacher relationship building. To try to fully understand the role the intervention of professional development has on teacher experiences, I hope to answer two central research questions:

- (1) What perceptions do teachers hold (pre-professional) development about developing student-teacher relationships?

- a. What is their understanding of the significance of relationship building?
 - b. What are their perceptions of the greatest barriers in developing meaningful relationships?
 - c. How does one assess their own agency to conduct relationship building?
- (2) To what extent does professional development aid/improve a teachers efficacy to build relationships with students?
- a. What level of consciousness, awareness, and understanding has changed after the professional development?

Important Terms

Caring- “relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility” (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p.393).

Ethic of Care- Conscious approach to establishing caring relationships as a moral construct of the teaching practice in schools (Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999).

Relationship- "A relation is here construed as any pairing or connection of individuals characterized by some affective awareness in each" (Noddings, 1988, p.218). "It is an encounter or series of encounters in which the involved parties feel something toward each other" (Noddings, 1988, p.218).

Relational Pedagogy- “is manifest in teachers who are aware of and explicitly focus on the quality of their interactions with students to develop classroom communities that promote academic, social, and emotional growth” (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017. p.86).

Belonging- “Belonging is defined here as students' sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teachers and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class” (Goodenow, 1993, p.25).

Ethic of Care traits synthesized- Ethic of care is an authentic, reciprocal relationship characterized by dialogue, mutual respect, and a genuine interest in the well-being of the “cared for” by the “one giving care.” Ethic of care can be measured by interactions (of the “one giving care”) that go beyond actions that are merely perceived (by the “cared for”) as transactional encounters.

Significant Stakeholders

The most significant stakeholders will be the group of teachers that share their experiences to inform the research. Their insights will be valuable to understand the complexities and realities of the perceptions of teachers. Their experiences captured in interviews will contribute to the data and inform the professional development artifact. All of the teachers in the study will give of their time freely to contribute to understanding this topic.

Other stakeholders include fellow site teachers, site administrators, and students. As the teachers in the study begin to understand more about this topic they can share with their colleagues. Hopefully, this group of teachers will inform site administrators and they will support the teacher learning and value it as an expectation. As the professional development

expands, an objective is to expand it school wide and to the district level. Hence, district leaders and other educators in San Bernardino City Unified will benefit. Lastly, and most importantly the aim is that students will benefit the most from this action research. As their interactions with teachers who receive the professional development improves so will students sense of belonging and in turn their learning.

Concluding Thoughts

Educators struggle daily to motivate students, inspire their future, and support student dreams. Increasing pressures mount for site leaders and educators to perform and raise test scores. Unfortunately, much has gotten sacrificed during this time this producing a negative impact on meaningful relationships, human connection, and genuine learning experiences. There are also issues that arise daily, while not categorically seen as complex, can overly burden teachers' capacity to perform optimally.

In this action research study, I will explore the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of teachers as they engage in professional development strategies on applying an ethic of care in order to build stronger student teacher relationships. My aim is to use professional development as an intervention to increase teacher knowledge, understanding, and enhance their experiences. In chapter two I will explore the relevant literature concerning ethic of care related to student teacher relationships. In chapter three I will discuss the methods of this study. In chapter four I will analyze the results. In chapter five I will draw conclusions about the studies' findings and make recommendations for my school district.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Unfortunately, this study's current setting places us amid a global pandemic where much of the state of education is currently taking place remotely and online. In-person learning in the classroom has been replaced with computer screens in homes, and distance learning is the new buzz word of the day. In a historic and unprecedented time, teachers grapple with how to adapt from the most traditional setting of the classroom to online learning. Amid this crisis, one thing remains the same: the importance and need of students to feel cared for, loved, respected, and belong. The teacher plays the most critical part in the formation of this relationship. Hence, the need for understanding the importance of student-teacher relationships is more important than ever.

In this chapter, I will review the pertinent literature about student-teacher relationships. This chapter will highlight the implications of Nodding's (1984) ethic of care theory. This chapter will include the factors that influence relationships, what conditions must exist to define the relationship, and the types of caring relationships. I will also look at the impact of caring relationships on engagement and students' sense of belonging and academic achievement. I will also discuss the evolution of the ethic of care theory to include its adaptations, criticisms, and gaps in the literature. Also, I will discuss the large academic agreements around care theory. Lastly, I will review prior research concerning the significant barrier of time which is cited by researchers as the biggest obstacle in creating a caring environment and the implications. The intent is to build out the understanding of this topic with a focus on action research and its application for this study for teacher professional development.

Student Teacher Relationships

Researchers strongly posit that one of the most important factors supporting student success is a caring relationship between students and teachers. Researchers (Gallagher 2016; Noddings, 1988; Valenzuela, 1999) suggest that a teacher's priority should be to foster those relationships. An ethic of care supports the belief that a teacher should be consciously caring for students in their charge (Noddings, 1999). The idea of care in education can be traced to Noddings's early works (1984) and her espoused theory on ethics of care. The care theory was further developed by Valenzuela's (1999) study defining teacher care as *authentic* or *aesthetic*. The work of these two researchers spanning two decades lays foundation for the profound importance of caring for students through relationships.

The dynamics of student teacher relationships start with an essential condition that must be met. That condition is that the relationship must be reciprocal (Owens & Ennis, 2005). These researchers felt that “one-caring teacher and the cared-for student are required to facilitate the ethic of care relationship” (p. 393). The relational condition exists when there is one being cared for and one is in the care giver's role (McBee, 2007). Hence, a relationship cannot exist that is not reciprocated. This caring student-teacher relationship will be further detailed as the review of the literature identifies strands of understanding and how this complex, interwoven and dynamic relational structure exists.

Factors that Influence Relationships

A teacher's influence on the student-teacher relationship hinges heavily on three areas working in harmony. These impact areas are high expectations, teacher agency, and pedagogy (Fairbanks et al., 2009; Gray et al., 2018; Mathews, 2019). Mathews (2019) found “given low-quality relationships, poor teacher expectations, and cultural rifts between teachers and urban

students of color, the meaning and enactment of caring for historically marginalized students requires a more complex view” (p.512). Fairbanks et al. (2009) stated that teachers need to develop of a “sense of agency in addition to developing standard forms of professional knowledge” (p.161) are critical in the development of creating caring and thoughtful teachers. Gray found that “culturally relevant pedagogy functions as an instructional opportunity” (p.100) for teachers to create a caring classroom community. These three areas highlight significant influences that can positively or negatively impact student-teacher relationships.

High Expectations

Prior researchers support the theory that teachers with high expectations have experienced high levels of engagement and positive academic outcomes with their students. If these high expectations are coupled with caring support from the teacher and a strong commitment by the teacher for students’ well-being, students will be more engaged and successful (Baker et al., 1997; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ransom, 2019; Wentzel, 1997). “Students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school” (Klem & Connell, 2004, p.270). "High expectations, when combined with a personal bond between teachers and students, often led students to higher levels of achievement" (Gallagher, 2016, p.10). Having an adult who cares in students' lives and one that takes the time to get to know them, shows an interest in their circumstances, just listens to them and their concerns, and communicate high expectations for them is one factor regularly found in the literature (McBee, 2007). A synthesis of the literature concludes that high expectations with supportive and caring student-teacher relationships leads to increased student engagement levels and academic success.

Teacher Agency

Teacher agency looms large in relationship building. Agency in this context is a term that can be understood as the ability of a teacher to connect with their students because they are from the same community, have a similar background as the student's upbringing, and ability to make common connections (Fairbanks et al., 2009; Maloney & Matthews, 2020; Matthews, 2019). In addition, strong teacher agency can be evidenced by having the ability to manage personal stress, the incorporation of daily reflection on teaching practice, and a commitment to a student's well-being (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Kohn, 1991; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016). Teacher agency as well as their ability to identify with their students (Matthews, 2019) leads to a teacher's ability to quickly adapt and understand their students. The level of teacher agency correlates with their ability to give students meaningful care.

Pedagogy

Implementing relevant teacher pedagogy is emphasized throughout the literature. It is important for preservice teachers and new teachers to learn skills for building meaningful relationships. This includes a strong foundation and understanding of Nodding's (1984) ethic of care and being well versed in relational pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching that provides an understanding of critical race theory (Baker et al., 1997; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Reeves & Le Mare 2017; Roberts, 2010). There is literature suggesting a "warm demander" pedagogy as a suggested strategy for positive outcomes among urban youth (Ransom, 2019). Lastly, many researchers have suggested that teachers feel overwhelmed and have no time to build relationships with students as the pressure for improved scores on standardized tests have consumed the daily classroom routine and the time for relationship building with it (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2019; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999). This would conversely lead to the need for further development and training to develop time management skills. Hence, how can a

teacher plan their day to include an in-class structure to support the development of teacher-student relationships supportive of teacher pedagogy?

Conditions of a Relationship

The pool of shared meaning from prior researchers suggests that conditions exist for fostering a positive relationship through reciprocity and respect. Positive relationships can be further developed by interactions, levels of trust, safety, and respect. The first notion is that positive relationships are reciprocal and thus they are two-way (teacher-student) interactions (Owens & Ennis, 2005). If sentiment by one party is not reciprocated then a relationship does not exist (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2019). Secondly, there is a sense of trust between the two parties (Ransom, 2019; Rogers & Webb, 1991). This trust can be further understood as a condition that both parties believe the other to be inherently good and equal as humans (Noddings, 1984; Owens & Ennis, 2005). Additionally, there is a feeling of environmental safety both emotionally and physically (Owens & Ennis, 2005). The notion of a defining condition of a positive relationship help guide the parameters of understanding for this study.

Mutual respect is identified as being one of the most important ingredients of relationship building. Research in urban education focuses on respect as whole heartedly higher on the value side for students' sentiments as important toward developing strong relationships (Chhuon & Wallace, 2012; Maloney & Matthews, 2020; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016). That is to say, students place the highest value on feeling that they are respected as individuals and that respect is reciprocated by their teachers (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Ransom, 2019; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). The sense of respect among teachers and students in their collective relationship is most important when it is reciprocated.

Types of Caring Relationships

Researchers define two primary types of caring relationships. These terms for types of care are derived from Noddings (1984) and Valenzuela (1999). The first type described is authentic care. Valenzuela (1999) described authentic care as a being genuine care for the well-being of others. Valenzuela (1999) emphasized authentic care as considering the well-being of others over oneself. Authentic care is referenced and exemplified in the literature and is characterized by teachers that take time, show they care, have a high level of patience, show interest, know the student, and have a general understanding of the student and their background (Noddings, 1984; Ransom, 2019; Schindel & Tolbert 2017; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). This relationship among teacher and student is classified as empathetic (Maloney and Matthews, 2020). An authentic caring relationship can be seen as a partnership in the power dynamic and a relationship of mutual benefit.

The second type of care is aesthetic care. This type of care can be considered transactional and is largely void of interpersonal connections between teacher and student (Maloney & Matthews, 2020; Valenzuela, 1999). Aesthetic care is largely defined as the type of care in which individuals desire positive outcomes but lack the time and commitment to generate authentic care (Ransom, 2019; Schindel & Tolbert 2017; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). Also, an aesthetic caring relationship can be characterized as a relationship where the majority of the power dynamic of the relationship is in the hands of the teacher with minimal input from students (Ibrahim & El Zaatari 2019). This type of relationship among teacher and student is classified as transactional (Maloney & Matthews, 2020). An aesthetic caring relationship can have all of the superficial appearances of caring but lacks real genuine conscious caring for others. In short it is superficial.

Lastly, a third type of relationship mentioned in the research literature is no care at all. This can be identified as an experience where there is no reciprocal interaction between two individuals (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2019). It can also be noted that a no care relationship is often one sided where the power dynamic is solely in the control of the teacher (Claessens et al., 2016). Unfortunately, a byproduct of this no care relationship are students feeling little connection to school and having no meaningful relationships at school. This experience can be detrimental as a student can feel, cast out, alienated, and disconnected.

Engagement and Sense of Belonging

There is ample evidence suggesting that the stronger the relationship/connection between teacher and student the more likely the prevalence of student success. This connection hinges mostly on a basic need for students to feel a sense of belonging (Baker et al., 1997; Chhuon & Wallace 2012; Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow & Grady 1993; Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2019; Matthews, 2019; Wentzel, 1997). A student's sense of belonging manifests itself in two distinct ways. One manifestation of a strong teacher/student relationship is the acceptance of the student by the teacher in the classroom. The other is the acceptance of the student by their peers (Goodenow, 1993; Wentzel, 1998). The development of strong relationships in a large part rest on whether or not the teacher welcomes and accepts the student in the classroom community.

Acceptance among peers weighs heavily on a teacher's acceptance of a student into the classroom community. Researchers (Goodenow, 1993; Wentzel, 1998) found that a student can be more successful with acceptance from an adult in a school community than the influence of acceptance by peers. Wentzel (1998) described "teacher characteristics that reflect social as well as curricular and instructional approaches to learning affirms the motivational significance of teacher-student relationships in the lives of young adolescents" (p.207). The human need to feel

accepted and to belong is nurtured in schools and thus presenting research supporting schools to build systems to create an environment that fosters care.

Engagement and Achievement

A caring adult at school can be an anchor point for a student's engagement and sense of belonging. Researchers (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Klem & Connell, 2004; Wentzel, 1998) support the relationship between student engagement and a sense of belonging having a clear connection to achievement. The higher a student's sense of belonging the more engaged the student is in school (Goodenow, 1993) thus leading to higher student achievement (Chhuon & Wallace, 2012; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Klem & Connell, 2004; Wentzel, 1998). Conversely, the lower a student's sense of belonging the more likely they will be less engaged in school; thus, in turn leading to lower student achievement. This sense of belonging supports a strong argument for schools to adopt care theory and relational pedagogy to achieve the type of academic success that other methodologies do not foster (Shevalier & Mc Kenzie, 2012). The commitment of schools to attain students with higher academic achievement can prove beneficial as an investment in caring student-teacher relationships.

Theoretical backdrops, Criticism, Evolvment and Intersections

The educational theories that can be derived around teacher student relationships all provide meaning to and help to construct understanding of the dynamics of teacher student relationships. Initially, we see that Noddings' (1984,1991), ethics of care or care theory assumes a strong position connected to the need of students to be cared for rooted in a feminist perspective. Later comes the attachment theory that is rooted in the idea students come with predisposed conditions to relationships stemming from their prior relationships with adults (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). Thus, these theories highlight the notion of student external

predisposition (need to be cared for) and internal predispositions (prior relationships with adults) that collectively highlight that relational dynamics of wants and needs exist.

Missing from the large majority of theories in this construct are those addressing culture and race. What has been more prevalent in the literature in recent years that addresses this gap is Robert's (2010) concept of culturally relevant critical teacher care that bridges a divide between care theory and critical race theory focusing on adopting a conscious culturally relevant responsiveness. While theories build out there is additionally recent literature that encourages the need for preservice teachers and active teachers to build knowledge and skill in these areas. In many ways there is an effort to acknowledge the barriers that preclude teachers from engaging in the meaningful relationships and to build out the types of class environments where students thrive.

As Nodding's (1991) care theory evolved, researches such as Valenzuela (1999) further added to the understanding of the types of care students receive from their teachers. In studies dealing primarily with Latino students, Valenzuela (1999) noted that it was important for students to receive both "authentic" and "aesthetic" care from teachers. However, in order to be successful students needed genuine "authentic" care (Valenzuela, 1999). As the understanding of care theory continued to evolve there were criticisms that there were omissions of adapting or adopting this theory to students of color (Ransom, 2020; Roberts, 2010). This omission is important to acknowledge and will evolve in future studies as we work toward closing the gap. The need to adapt and adopt the implications of race and care theory into a more comprehensive and meaningful construct will add coherence to this topic.

Much of this research is geared toward providing the knowledge base, acknowledging challenges, and then framing out the skills over time needed to build strong reciprocal

relationships between teacher and students. As a product of this literature review this study hopes to add a conceptual mapping for easier understanding and a wholistic view of all the dynamics at play.

Demand on Time

The review of the literature revealed the greatest barrier that teachers felt hindering their abilities to commit to building authentic relationships was time. Teachers' by in large felt overwhelmed, stressed, and pressured to constantly increase their test scores (Jeffrey et al., 2013; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999). The burden they felt was caused by pressures to maximize their instructional time. Researchers found that teachers felt they did not have the time needed to devote to caring relationships because they perceived the commitment would jeopardize test scores. These findings have implications for pedagogy and site-based leadership practices.

The first implication is developing the skill to overcome the restraints of time. Researchers (Dillion, 1989; Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Sabol & Pianta, 2012) have recommended teachers carve out intentional time every day to build relationships with students. This is a term better noted by Dillon (1989), as a daily "relationship building ritual" (p.239). The second is teaching time management as a skill for educators. Dillon (1989) observed that only five minutes a day is enough time to engage students in the types of conversations that provide them with a sense of security and of belonging that only relational interactions can provide. This idea is also referred to by Sabol and Pianta (2012), as "banking time" (p.223). These researchers found that students especially at-risk youth greatly benefit from intentional time to interact with their teacher one on one. Over time the relational building aspect of teacher to student can have

reciprocal benefits. As noted by Goldstein and Lake (2000), teachers can feel energized, excited, and empowered by the reciprocity of teacher student relationships.

Instructional leaders need to develop a culture of balance and thus nurture what is most important. Test score raising mentality can undermine the type of learning leaders desire because teachers feel overwhelmed by the tasks at hand (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2019). Researchers (Baker et al., 1997; Gallagher 2016; Maloney & Matthews, 2020; McBee, 2007; Noddings, 1984; Ransom, 2019; Valenzuela, 1999) have suggested that through a balanced approach of caring, classroom communities with high expectations for students will reap the benefits that school leaders aim for.

Agreements and Gaps in Literature

While reviewing prior research, it is apparent that there are many agreements among researchers as well as some gaps in the literature. A large number of researchers have focused on the need to adapt pedagogical skills in preservice teacher preparation (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Rogers & Webb, 1991; Roberts, 2010). In addition, there is consensus among researchers that there is a need to infuse a common understanding across educators. The contention is that there is a large enough body of academic work to support the adaptation and application of caring across the field of education and in teacher preparation coursework.

In recent years one of the major gaps that has shed light on the implication and application of care theory is among students of color. While early care theory works expanded on deepening the understanding of care it did not look at the care through the lens of understanding for students of color specifically for African American students and Latino students (Matthews, 2020). This is an important area that needs addressing to ensure that as it is acknowledged and appropriately addressed through future research.

The second major gap in the literature overall is coherence. There is inconsistencies among researchers that make understanding this topic cohesively. There is a need to bridge the gaps of disconnection so that a more coherent position can be taken in the field of education for expectation as well as ethics. Roberts (2010) posited that much of the literature has for decades been well defining the importance of adapting care theory but there is no movement for its application, pedagogy, and omissions in large part to at risk populations. Roberts (2010) further contended that to that end the adaption and application of care in education is a social justice issue. In addition, mixing theories and constructing comprehensive new ones may be needed to update and create a theory that can be adapted and fits the times. It seems as though there is research but no gold standard coherent work that folds all that knowledge into an actionable framework.

Implications of the literature to inform this study

Through my search of the literature I have located deep foundational knowledge of the importance and the impact of teachers consciously applying care to build authentic relationships with students. Through this study I aim to utilize the research findings and use prior research to build out a conceptual framework of understanding to educate teachers through professional development. The hope is that through education, awareness, and action, teachers can invigorate caring while igniting a passion for learning in all students.

The major points to consider are to evolve care theory to include critical race theory as Roberts (2010) development of culturally relevant critical care. The specific emphasis to formally acknowledge historically marginalized student groups to and consider them in a comprehensive approach to care will better equip teachers to adapt to their setting. Next, would be to adopt a pedagogical framework that can utilize the abundant academic literature into a

cohesive and coherent learning experience for educators. This should not just be framed with just teachers in mind. This should also be adapted for school leaders with implications for prioritizing the mission and vision of school leadership.

Teacher agency is mentioned as an important factor that should be noted as an external barrier that can limit teachers. A previous barrier mentioned was time. However, a teacher's own personal background and attachment experience can hinder their development of meaningful relationships (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). This is important because this study will be positioned with a focus on care as a skill that can be taught and learned. Without hindrance of the above stated barriers there are skills and knowledge development that can be modeled.

Conclusion

A review of the literature reveals the overwhelming argument for incorporating an ethic of care across education. Researcher strongly support the development of caring student teacher relationships (Noddings, 1984) as critically important to positive student outcomes (Klem & Connell, 2004; Ransom, 2019; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016). Prior research has shown the significance of caring relationships and benefits these relationships can have on students as well as students from marginalized communities (Schindel & Tolbert, 2017). The impact of caring teacher student relationships on sense of belonging and increased academic achievement is referenced as significant (Baker et al., 1997; Chhuon & Wallace 2012; Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow & Grady 1993; Ibrahim & El Zaatari 2019; Matthews, 2019; Wentzel, 1997). The application of an ethic of care in relationship building creates the supportive environments optimal for student learning.

The weight of the stresses that teachers carry can be greatly reduced by building skill and knowledge to foster caring relationships. This can be greatly enhanced through formal training. Through this study I will rely heavily on the collective literature to assume the position that pedagogical practices through professional development can unlock a skill set not formally or consciously accessed by teachers. A review of the literature suggests, that all students and especially our most historically marginalized students are the ones that need caring relationships to be successful and empower them to navigate the constructs of the educational system. This study will be based on action research and there could not be a more timely need for action for building caring schools. As the saying goes, the time is now.

CHAPTER III

SOLUTION AND METHOD

Outline of the solution

The solution focused on a series of three professional development (PD) modules teaching the theories of ethics of care for practical classroom application. The PD focused on the application of academic research into an action plan for teachers in their classrooms with their students. The presentation included a discussion of the relevant literature in a cohesive and aligned manner. The PD had a workshop-based approach during presentations where teachers engaged in dialogue, discussion, and reflections during each session. The premise is that a vast knowledge gap could be bridged through a structured professional development in a small group setting with rich discussions, self-reflections, and a practical approach to building caring relationships based on prior literature.

Justification of the solution

The justification for the solution is derived from the notion that professional development is a primary source of in-service for teacher education outside of the university setting. The application of a PD on ethics of care bridges the rich academic research with practical application of methods to develop stronger authentic relationships. The solution is practitioner focused and was synthesized from academic research. The solution aimed to focus on solving the problem of a low sense of belonging of students in high schools.

Study context and participants

In this study I aimed to focus on a small cohort of teachers (5 teachers) at Arroyo Valley High School in San Bernardino California. The cohort was made up of teachers/counselor that feel they could benefit from PD that applies an ethic of care to building stronger relationships

with students. Candidates were invited to participate from a general overview session at a staff meeting. Upon receiving a pool of candidates, the final selection of participants were chosen with the support of my chair and committee. This was a small site-based study. Arroyo Valley High School demographics: student population 2,880 students, urban high school, 90% Hispanic, 7% African American, 98% of students are on free and reduced lunch.

Research paradigm

This study is qualitative in nature, exploring the understandings, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of teachers. A qualitative study is the ideal way to capture the experiential perceptions of teachers to investigate their understanding of care. Inherent to the aim of qualitative research, it has the power to bring new insights, bridge knowledge gaps, and bring attention to omitted portions of the field that are swept aside.

Data collection methods

The data collection plan informed by Creswell and Creswell (2018) of this qualitative action research study is as follows: Data was collected in the form of:

One-on-one semi structured interviews of participants (five participants) with open-ended questions (following interview protocols) the text of interviews were transcribed. This took place twice. The first time was before the professional development. The second time was post-professional development interview. In total, two interviews were conducted with five participants. Thus, collecting ten interview transcripts.

Self-reflection activities, Participants answered reflective questions in their own words, reflecting on their takeaways, personal epiphanies, or connections with each PD. This was done after each of the three PD sessions. The five participants provided three reflections. Fifteen reflections documents were collected from participants.

In-person field notes, notes were taken during the professional development of observations, insights, comments, or keywords that might emerge from the participants during the activities. (Field notes accrued daily while conducting the research)

Guided discussion, three guided group discussions took place during each of the three professional developments to learn from one another through a personal story. Text from the discussions were transcribed the same day (a total of three transcribed transcripts). Module sessions were recorded on an audio file.

Reflective Journal, a reflective journal, was kept to reflect on daily activities, capture revelations, new insights, perspectives, and takeaways (One journal transcription).

Justification of use of instruments in context

Interviews were used pre and post-professional development. Some of the questions that were asked are:

1. What is your understanding of the importance of care in teaching?
2. How would you define a student's sense of belonging?
3. When was a time where you felt you genuinely connected with a student?
4. What is your current confidence level concerning relationship building?
5. When you reflect on what has inspired you to the teaching profession can you draw an inference to a time when a teacher connected with you?

Additionally, the use of a Yes/ No checklist was used to measure care. I measured ethic of care through the interview process using participant self-perceptions pre pd compared against the defined terminology post pd. Sample questions used were:

1. Is care Authentic?
2. Is care reciprocated?

3. Is there dialogue?
4. Is there mutual respect?
5. Is there a genuine interest in well-being?
6. Do interactions go beyond transactional encounters?
7. Is time given freely?

A mix of semi-structured one on one interviews with open-ended questions, guided discussions, personal narratives, and reflection activities in module sessions were used to fully understand the perceptions of teachers as they travelled through a comprehensive journey of familiarizing themselves with ethics of care.

Data analysis strategy

Data collected was coded from interviews, personal narratives, guided discussion, personal diagrams, and transcripts. This took place before the professional development, during, and after. Data was collected and coded to determine themes and any relationships within the data sets.

Below are the headings from the data analysis plan, that followed the steps outlined by Creswell and Creswell's (2018, p.193) plan for data analysis (headings in italics):

Step 1: *Organize and prepare data for analysis*, categorize data, ensure transcripts are prepared, and data is sorted by type (interview transcript, participant self-reflection documents, field notes, guided discussion transcripts, reflective journal) at the end of data collection. Module sessions were recorded on audio tape.

Step 2: *Read or look at all data*, review information and begin to discern meaning on the surface by identifying keywords, participant tone, and verbiage.

Step 3: *Start coding all the data*, begin the process of breaking down keywords, phrases into categories and themes, and use participant's own terms.

Step 4: *Generate a description and themes*, identify major themes supported by quotes and keywords from the texts. "Generate descriptions of people, places and events" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.194).

Step 5: *Representing the description and themes*: The description and themes were used to generate a narrative on the experiences of participants to answer the research questions and capture any additional insights or revelations.

After a thorough data analysis, I discerned the meaning of the data, provided opportunities for others to review data, and add a fresh perspective of meaning. Upon conclusions, I wrote about the findings in a narrative format. I also concluded the entirety of the study with my personal reflections, and reported the conclusions specific to the research questions.

Timeline

The timeline took place over one semester which was roughly five months. During that time participants were identified, pre-interviews were conducted, three professional development (intervention) modules with (reflections and discussions) and post interviews were conducted.

Reliability and validity concerns

A method that ensures trustworthiness and meets the credibility criteria outlined by Guba (1981) is triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of many rich data points to source information. Krefting (1991) described triangulation as "a powerful strategy for enhancing the quality of research, particularly credibility" (p.219). Breitmayer et al.,(1993) stated that "the goal of triangulation in any study is to increase confidence in the trustworthiness of the researcher's

data and its interpretation" (p.242). This study collected several sources of data throughout the study such as interview transcripts (five), discussion transcripts (three), personal reflections (fifteen), and exit interview transcripts (five) to ensure triangulation was possible.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introducing the Analysis

Through this study I analyzed qualitative data collected from Pre PD interviews, PD discussions, PD reflections, and Post PD interviews. The qualitative data have been collected, sorted, coded, and themes have been identified. In Chapter 4, I present an analysis of the findings in narrative format. The synthesis of all data collection points follow in the order they were collected. A triangulation of all qualitative data points (interviews, discussions, reflections) were used to answer the research questions.

The qualitative data collected were used to triangulate themes central to answering the two research questions. I share significant themes and findings as they relate to the data collection process. I conclude this chapter with the overall findings that answer the research questions.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to investigate and track the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of teachers as they engage in professional development strategies of an application of an Ethic of Care in order to build stronger student teacher relationships. To try to fully understand the role the intervention professional development had on teacher experiences, I strived to answer two central research questions:

- (1) What perceptions do teachers hold (pre-professional) development about developing student-teacher relationships?
 - a. What is their understanding of the significance of relationship building?
 - b. What are their perceptions of the greatest barriers in developing meaningful relationships?

- c. How does one assess their own agency to conduct relationship building?
- (2) To what extent does engaging in professional development aid/improve a teacher's efficacy to build relationships with students?
- a. What level of consciousness, awareness, and understanding has changed in participants after an ethics of care the professional development?

Participant Criteria

The important criteria for choosing my participants were: They had to be teachers or counselors at Arroyo Valley High School. It was determined that newer teachers or teachers that feel they could benefit from PD that focuses on building stronger relationships with students would be the best participants. I also searched for teachers who demonstrated previous involvement in school culture and were generally dedicated and follow through when previously involved in onsite and district PD.

The five participants that were selected for my purposeful sample were comprised of four teachers and one counselor at Arroyo Valley HS. Three of the five participants are newer teachers and two are veteran educators with 20 years of experience. All selected participants have expressed an interest and felt they could benefit from a professional development on building stronger relationships with students. The five participants have all demonstrated deep involvement in school culture as three are leads, one is a class advisor, and one is a counselor. The five participants selected have demonstrated a dedication and have followed through in site and district professional development throughout their careers.

Results: Presentation of the Data

Pre-PD Interviews

Interviews were conducted with participants prior to the professional development. The following are the questions asked and a synthesis of responses from the participants perceptions.

Question 1: What is your understanding of the importance of care in teaching?

The participants agreed that care in teaching is a central foundational piece to the essences of teaching. As one participant stated that care “is everything in teaching, even above curriculum”. This sentiment was supported by a participant with over 20 years experience sharing her experience that “in order to educate you must care”. A theme emerged largely from the group of participants about the importance of showing care by listening to students. This included taking the time to hear and really listen to students and also being mindful to interpret body language and non-verbal cues such as posture, mood, attitude, and energy. This was also referenced to as synergy related to acknowledging students to show care. Examples of ways to acknowledge students to show care was positive verbal statements (affirmations), eye contact, or appreciative gestures such high fives, “fist bumps”, greetings, or taking a moment to check in with a student if it looks like they might be having a bad day. Lastly, and interestingly one thing that was mentioned was the opportunities for connections of care that can be made outside of the classroom in events such as sporting events and being seen, showing support, and a genuine interest. Also mentioned in this category with great exuberance by one participant is the bonding and caring connections that are made through field trips that take the learning beyond the traditional boundaries of a four walled classroom. A participant acknowledged that he was of the belief that the extended time spent together connecting students not only to the content but also conversations and insights in a field trip setting is a unique opportunity to forge caring meaningful relationships. This participant attributed it to the shared time in a mutual construct. Albeit both teacher and student giving up time to participate is a shared experience.

Question 2: How would you define a student's sense of belonging?

Participants consistently agreed that defining a student's sense of belonging was synonymous with the sentiment that students feel welcomed, feel comfortable, feel a sense of purpose, a sense of connection, and overall safety.

Feeling welcomed, was characterized by social acceptance by the teacher into the classroom setting. A participant explained this as when a student "doesn't feel out of place and there is low anxiety and the feeling that the student can contribute to the class." The sense of feeling welcomed was also described by another participant as when students feel that they belong at school and treat it as if it "is a second home". Lastly, another comment which captured this sentiment was when a participant mentioned that they strive to make students "feel good about where they are".

Feeling comfortable was described by a participant "as when students feel they can express their opinions without being shut down, they feel like they matter, and they feel that they are being heard". A second-participant concurred with another example from their experience that when students feel comfortable they tend to ask questions when they do not understand and are not resistant to point out when the teacher makes a mistake. Conversely, the teacher is receptive to further explanation and responsive to students feedback and corrections.

Feeling a sense of purpose, was characterized by a student feeling that they can contribute in class and a sense of ownership of their space and learning. One participant described this sense of ownership as the confidence that they have in their ability to add value to the learning taking place in the classroom. This notion was explained further by a second participant that shared that students should feel empowered to participate in the learning process.

Feeling connected, was described as a student's connectedness to school, teachers, classmates, academics, and extracurricular activities. Connectedness was explained by one participant as "connection to their life or their culture that you pay attention to and nurture". The participant went on to explain "when you make that important to that child and that thing becomes your connection, over time they will open up to you and you become part of their system, their network, their framework for life". This participant went on to explain that students want that connection but it "takes intent" on the part of the teacher to make that happen. The participant stated that as a teacher one needs to look for "that one thing, being a hat, a shoestring, something that draws them in."

Feeling Safe, was generally described by the participants as maintaining a safe learning environment. This was characterized by a participant as creating an environment "that culturally recognizes you for who you are and this creates a sense of confidence and a path forward to make students feel like what they are doing is important". Another participant described how they felt strongly allowing their students the opportunity to make the classroom environment their own. The participant described how they have projects that allow students to decorate the classroom with their own classwork. The participant described this as also providing them a safe space to create and learn. Lastly, he described the playing of music during class time as helping to set the mood or ambience for a positive classroom environment making the students feel safe.

Question 3: When was a time where you felt you genuinely connected with a student?

The participants answers varied in terms of how they responded. Participants responses to this question were mostly answered in broad terms with only one participant citing a specific example and one participant referencing a specific event. However, the theme that clearly

emerged in their responses was the importance of conversation in establishing genuine connections.

The participants noted the following elements of conversation. The first was how to start a conversation. The second was how to keep and sustain a conversation. The third was continuing that conversation over time. One participant highlighted how a conversation he started with a student happened. He shared that he saw a student in his class wearing a concert pin from a rock band he then struck up a conversation about favorite music bands. He stated that conversation about music over time became a bridge to other conversations in the future. He also shared one more example of when he receives a new student in class he makes a big deal about knowing their name right away and remembers to ask them the very next day how their first day went. Another participant also shared that she tries to find something in common with her students such as sports, activities, or interests that can easily spark a conversation. She further explained that once these are known they can be the basis of new conversations going forward. Lastly, there was a common sentiment among participants that there should be great importance placed on regularly continuing dialogue with students in whole group and individually throughout the year. Hence, a conversation should never be a onetime occurrence.

A participant that shared a personal story about a genuine connection discussed the value of opening up and being vulnerable when connecting on a shared experience. This participant described in her role as a counselor she had a made a deep connection with a student. In her words the student needed life guidance and they had a conversation and from that conversation the student felt like “life has changed, and a door had been opened that would have never been open had it not come from a conversation that was genuine.” She went on to further explain that she “started to talk about her life and tears started to flow and the student was able to open up,

we bonded.” She finished by stating that when these teachable moments or life lessons present themselves it is okay to “be vulnerable and be available” for your students.

A participant shared a personal story about a specific event he was able to take a group of his student to. This story highlighted the importance of showing a genuine interest in students’ future and wellbeing. The participant shared that while taking students on a field trip to a local university he discussed with the students that they all would all be college students that evening and explore and learn together. He stated that there was genuine excitement from students to have conversations around the academic subject (technology) and he could imagine the students seeing their future selves in that college environment. He stated that this was a turning point for his students to see him in a role of more than a teacher but also a mentor. He cited that bonding experience and the importance of having learning experiences outside of the classroom.

Question 4: What is your current confidence level concerning relationship building?

For this question all participants chose to rate themselves. They chose on a scale from 1-10 with one being the lowest to ten being the highest. The following is a summary of each participant and their rating of themselves.

Participant 1, a teacher of five years, rated themselves as a “seven or eight.” He stated that he has a high level of comfort building a relationship with any student. However, he emphasized that building a deep relationship is an area he views he needs to learn more about to grow. Hence, an area of growth. He stated that as a newer teacher he has his limits of knowledge to help every student. He also shared that he understands that he “might not be able to connect with every student” but that he tries his best and “can’t please everybody”. He ended by stating that he likes to focus on the positives of each of his students regardless of the level of connection.

Participant 2, a teacher of over 20 years rated himself an “eight plus.” He stated that he is “pretty confident in relationship building” because he has had “lots of years of practice.” He also shared that he has never shied away from “tough relationships” because he does not mind the challenge. Additionally, he added that “at no other time in my career have I felt it more relevant to talk about his own kids” with his students because they are all around the same age. He states that this helps him relate better and strike up conversations more quickly.

Participant 3, a teacher of three years rated herself an “eight.” She jokingly stated that her first year she “had no clue” what she was doing. She stated that she struggled during her second year during the pandemic doing virtual learning. She shared she found it difficult to connect with students during that time. She stated now in year three she feels more confident being herself.

Participant 4, a counselor of over 20 years rated herself as “strong”. She shared valuable insight as to how in her role as a counselor she sees the barriers that are getting in the way of relationship building. She stated that in her opinion issues from students “not trusting or because they do not see a future” as barriers and challenges. She states that she has to approach students a different way to get them to open up so she can learn and approach their particular problem. She added when it comes to relationship building “you can do it”! She stated that you just need to “be more creative” and put in a “little more work.” Lastly, she emphasized that “the art of conversation has changed” since she first started in her career.

Participant 5, a teacher of four years rated himself an “eight.” He shared that when it comes to confidence in relationship building he thinks of every student as an “opportunity” to learn and connect. He termed what he does to connect with students as “empathetic interpersonal communication.” He further described this as “sitting down with a student, and just listening,

listening to their story and reflect on how that connects with my personal story.” He added that he always treats “them as young adults” because of their “ability to make decisions.” Lastly, he shared his philosophy toward his approach to relationship building. He stated, for students “high school is a place for us to be able to make mistakes and fail, we should have permission to do that at least one time in our life, and this is the best place to do it because they are surrounded by people who really care about them and want to see them being successful adults.”

In aggregate, the average of the five participants’ self-ratings based on the scale provided was an eight and a half out of ten. The first major theme discussed were years of experience and how the more years of experience the more comfort they felt with building relationships. Secondly, was the importance of listening to students and learning their story. Lastly, the barriers that complicated the relationship building such as students’ distrust or feelings of hopelessness were the main themes discussed.

Question 5: When you reflect on what has inspired you to the teaching profession can you draw an inference to a time when a teacher connected with you?

The participants response to this question was deep and profound. They responded with stories from different stages in their lives where in one way or another a teacher connected with them. While each shared their own unique story, significant themes began to clearly emerge consistently throughout their responses. The significant themes were, the teacher in the role of parent, the teacher as the driving demander, the teacher as the life guide, the teacher as the muse for things yet unseen.

The teacher in the role of as parent, was described by participants as the “maternal figure” who was warm, kind, protective, and always showed concern for their well-being. The participants stated that they connected to their teacher because they felt they could discuss issues

both academic or personal and they would be heard and respected. One participant reflected how his art teacher was “like a mother figure” that respected “your independence and creativity.” He stated this was not a normal experience for classes he had been in before and was drawn to the environment that she created. Another participant described her teacher as a “maternal figure” who “always took the time to ask how we were doing” and “giving life advice” that she couldn’t get at home. One participant shared a powerful experience of connecting with her third-grade teacher. She remembered that at a time when race issues were hostile in her community that “they wanted to divide us but she would not let it happen.” She stated that her teacher “built me up” everyday and it made her look forward to going to school everyday, and everyday she would leave with a full mind and full heart. She made a powerful statement about her experience “she developed in me very early, that people are people, and people say it’s a color and she is a white lady and I’m a black child, it did not take a color it took a heart.”

The teacher as the driving demander, was a theme that participants clearly recollected. They described how they had a unrelenting will and were driven to see them succeed by demanding their best efforts. A participant described his teacher he connected with as “strict, but she loves us.” He stated because of that persona many students gravitated toward her because they knew they were going to make them better. Additionally, a participant shared a story about his high school English teacher telling him he was a good writer and storyteller. He often scored 90% on his essays and stories. His teacher told him he “could do better” and challenged him to “work on making it 100%.” He shared that his teacher consistently challenged him, believed in him, and pushed him to become an even better writer. He stated it opened many doors for him in his future that would not have been possible without her acknowledgement and encouragement.

The teacher as the life guide, was described by participants as being a force for helping them in life. Participants shared examples of how connections with their teachers have impacted them in life. A participant shared another story of her third-grade teacher, that at a planned community parade she was scared to march because of the racial tensions in the community. She stated her teacher told her to “hold your head up high and do not let anyone shame you.” She added that her teacher “saw areas where I was weak and built me up to be stronger.” She recalled that, “how my life unfolded I would use all of the skills she taught me and it has carried me.”

Additionally, a participant shared that a teacher’s persistence to teach him how to be independent serves him to this day because he believes that his teacher built that agency in him at a young age. Prior to meeting her he would not have thought it possible because up until that time people had told him he was not going to ever make it to college. He cites that she taught him how to be independent.

The teacher as the muse for things yet unseen, is a resonant theme that was consistent among participants. The participants stated how their teachers showed them a version of themselves they did not see and in doing so shaped their futures in profound ways. Another example from a participant’s third grade teacher, she shared that she remembers her teacher taking her aside and telling her “you are a leader.” She jokingly stated that she was not even sure if she knew what the word “leader” meant in the third grade. However, she remembers her teacher putting her in leadership positions and calling on her to lead. She added that even at that young age she was cultivating leadership in me because she saw my potential.

Additionally, a participant shared that his art teachers in high school were the inspiration for him to pursue a degree in Art Major in and ultimately become an Art teacher himself. This

was because he immediately grew to love the creative independence cultivated by his teacher and that he felt an overwhelming desire to pursue teaching as a profession.

Lastly, a participant shared how his English teacher inspired him to look past his disability and recognized his untapped potential for writing. In turn that taught him to be independent, and not have to rely on anyone else for his future success. He shared that at the time it was something he never entertained or thought it was possible to be a college graduate.

Discussion and Reflection

Participants were given the opportunity to have a discussion at the end of each PD session and to provide a personal reflection after each of the three modules on Ethics of Care. The following is a synthesis of the Discussions and Reflections broken down by each module.

Discussion PD 1: Participants were asked to discuss new insights or items that may have resonated with them throughout the first PD session. The first topic brought up in the discussion was that a participant was shocked that only 39% of students feel cared for at school nationwide. He was surprised and a bit frustrated. He explained his feelings, “you know we are hitting all of these different standards and that is good but we can not really have honest connections with the students in the classroom, which is essentially the heart of our job.” He expressed that this fact is more than concerning. Additional participants shared the same sentiment. This discussion item I termed “awareness” of current context.

The second topic from the discussion involved the realization of the academic research in this area. A participant commented that he had “no idea there was research on this topic.” Yet, he expressed enthusiasm for understanding the “simple connections that take place in the classroom can have an impact.” He further commented that the PD helped him think of the ways he can

connect to his students through relatable conversations in class discussion and in turn make the content he teaches more relatable. This discussion item I termed “reflection of self.”

The last topic that was discussed was the barrier of time. A participant expressed, “I do not feel like I have enough time to make connections, even though I am willing to spend the time I am sacrificing time on the back end.” The discussion continued into how to find the right balance. He stated, “how much time am I going to spend connecting with kids and how much time can I spend on my actual content.” He ended his thought by saying that this would be even more challenging for teachers that find it difficult to strike up a conversation with a student. This discussion item I termed “barriers and challenges.”

Reflection PD 1: Participants agreed that Ethics of Care was a new concept to them which they found fascinating and important. One participant shared that, the “Ethics of Care concept is fascinating to me, it was the first time I have heard that term.” He went on further to state that “it makes so much sense as educators we develop that skill set.” He stated that “care and understanding” along with the “ability to create safe environments is as important as delivering content.” Lastly, he stated that caring “arguably is more important than delivering content since students are less responsive if they feel you do not care.” Another participant felt the PD session was insightful because she reflected that “teaching is about so much more than the content that we share with our students.” A participant concluded that the PD helped to “reinforced the importance of students feeling belonging (sic) in the class.”

A participant shared how the PD resonated with her because it caused her to think about her own learning experiences. She stated, “it allowed me to reflect on the teachers I had who were nurturing and how I learned from them.” She went on to share that she learned from them “not because they were expert teachers who knew everything but because they took the time to

slow down when students were confused, listened to our concerns, and presented content in ways that made it relatable to students.” Lastly, she reflected that her teachers had an “ability to accommodate our needs” “because they know their students” and that “my teachers used their knowledge of us to their advantage” and by connecting it led to “academic achievement.”

A final insight from one participant’s reflection shed light on her insight of the power of caring connections among students. She reflected that classroom conversation has allowed students to connect with one another through realizing similar shared experiences. She stated that “once a topic comes up and a whole group can converse about it, they realize they are more similar and connected than they think.” She continues that “building whole class relationships, as well as student/teacher relationships, allows students to collaborate and share out in class because they build confidence with each other.” Lastly, she reflects that “both of these aspects (student/teacher, students/student) relationships are essential to student learning and student success. The theme she presents here is the importance of building a classroom bond.

Discussion PD 2: Participants were asked to discuss new insights or items that may have resonated with them throughout the second PD session. The first topic that was discussed and mutually agreed upon by participants is that the topic and importance of care is not taught in teacher preparation programs. There was a sentiment that it is important for new teachers to learn about ethics of care because of the potential impact it can have on students. A participant commented is this pedagogy “being taught?” “It should be to newer teachers coming into the profession.” A participant also shared that “I never really thought of it (care) as something that was taught. I always thought it was up to me to nurture.” This theme emerged from the discussion about an early emphasis on learning care in teacher learning.

The next topic that came from the discussion again was the barrier of time. This was interesting because the topic had come up previously. This time a participant shared what he viewed as a conundrum. He stated “The challenge is time, and we are expected to meet a certain test score. Scores are a statistical piece of information. Scores do not say anything about a student’s character or identity.” He further explained that “It is really hard for a teacher to get past” the time it takes to build caring relationships “when that (test scores) is a large part of how they are judged in their performance.” Interestingly, a participant shared a recent example from his classroom where he made the time and it seemed to make all the difference. He shared that while working on a business plan as an assignment he was talking to a student about her business plan and he shared with her how interesting her idea was for her coffee shop. He shared with the student that he thought it was unique. The student’s response was “you remember what I wrote?” He stated “of course I remembered.” This PD session helped him recall a moment when he had taken the time to make a small connection and how much the student appreciated talking about their work. This discussion topic can be summed up as examples of taking the time versus facing the barrier of not taking the time.

The last topic shared came from a participant from her perspective as a counselor. She talked about the natural transactional process of their roles in school is to “provide a service.” She echoed the sentiment that there needs to be more development in pedagogy for counseling surrounding the aspect of care and connecting with students. She added that she notices teachers are at a better advantage to do this because they work with the students on a daily basis. This discussion topic can be summed up as the awareness of wanting to move from a transactional process (aesthetic care) to a more genuine process (authentic care).

Reflection PD 2: In this reflection collection participants seemed to internalize the information being shared. The resonance was around agency and pedagogy. A participant reflected that he better “understands the importance of authentic care”. He also expressed a better realization that “students can identify when a teacher is truly being authentic with them or if they are just trying to act as if they do care.” He also reflected on some of his experiences by noting that “teachers that practice aesthetic care have trouble connecting with their students and can not build meaningful connections.” Lastly, he shared that he acknowledges that if he “wants to build better and meaningful relationships with students” he needs to “continue building agency” with “using authentic care as opposed to aesthetic care”

The second topic that emerged was pedagogy. A participant reflected that after the PD she resonated that “building any type of relationship with students is not something that is explicitly taught in credential programs, but should be.” She went on to express that “as new teachers, it can be extremely challenging to develop rapport with students.” She also expressed a barrier of establishing boundaries, because of her young age not being seen as a professional, or being viewed as cold to students.” She went on to share that she believed that “it is so easy to stay in the aesthetic aspect of care when we follow the basic classroom management skills taught within a credential program.” She went further to state “not being trained properly in building good relationships or good communication with students can hinder the way we approach teaching and can be detrimental to the relationships built within the classroom.”

Discussion PD 3: Participants were asked to discuss new insights or items that may have resonated with them throughout the third PD session. The first topic discussed was a conversation around maintaining high expectations while building caring relationships. A participant described this as validating because she is constantly telling her students that “I know

you can do it” when the work seems difficult. She also shared that this is why she will not lower her expectations for her students. She explains that she is aware that other teachers may simplify lessons, however, she is wary that it lowers expectations which is detrimental to students.

The second topic that was discussed was that the building of meaningful caring relationships starts “little by little”. A participant reflected how his student that are now Seniors have built a bond with him over time and it all started out with asking small questions and then over time it turned into more engaging conversations about difficult concepts taught in his class. He reflected that the conversations started gradually and over time the conversation grew more sophisticated in academic dialogue and inquiry. This resonated with him because of the portion of the PD that discussed building agency starts with one student.

The third topic that resonated with participants was the concept of the power of time. In previous reflections and discussions, the barrier of time was mentioned. In this portion of the PD a solution to “lack of time” was presented that participants understood and appreciated. A participant reflected that in his classes he tells students “the skills necessary, are not going to be accomplished in a week, a month, and maybe not even in a year” but I assure them that they will be better for their involvement. He compared it to the time one spends putting into fostering caring relationships. The more time spend the greater the connection that can manifest.

Lastly, several participants shared that in conclusion of the PD session they felt appreciative and thankful for being part of the process. On participant shared that all of the PD’s were “eye-opening and it has been a learning experience.” She went on to state that “we practice these behaviors every day” and that individually as a counselor, “we have to gain that relationship within the first minute” and echoed the positivity of the learning process. Lastly, she stated that the “techniques you provided from the literature review was very helpful.” She

concluded that she now possesses a deeper understanding of “building relationships” that “you have to be intentional in building relationships and cultivate them along the way.” Her parting thoughts were that she gained an appreciation for “originality, cultivating relationships, being organic, and just being real for kids because they can see through anything that is not real.”

Reflection PD 3: Participants had deep and varying take aways from the final PD session. Each participant reflected in their own way as an appreciation for the techniques and concepts presented. Participants shared similar sentiments about the central themes of the important role of teacher agency, high expectations, power dynamics, and banking time play into building caring relationships. The first topic of teacher agency was best expressed by a participant who shared that during the two previous PD sessions she pondered “is there enough hours in the day to support” her students “with authentic relationships?” She shared the feeling of being overwhelmed but learned in this PD session how to overcome this barrier. She learned “it is not about fostering a lot of relationships; however, you must start with one because quality over quantity is more important” while learning to build ones confidence in their own agency.

The next topic shared among participants was high expectations for all students. As one participant shared “learning about the significance of high expectations helped me realize that if I connect with my students and they see that I have high expectations that engagement and participation will increase.” Another participant shared that he learned “maintaining high expectations, while building relationships, will result in higher and greater success— I could not agree with this more. When you start with high expectations and show that you will be there for students along the journey this builds trust and respect.” The importance of maintaining high expectations was a sentiment shared by participants. High expectations were best summed up in a participants comment of “build the work ethic through a bond that can move them forward.”

The next topic shared in great detail was the power dynamic of reciprocal relationships and mutual respect. A participant shared her perspective, “teachers may approach their role in the classroom as the ‘boss’ or approach things with a ‘because I said so’ mentality. However, those attitudes are not conducive to building a good relationship with students or a healthy learning environment. Respect has to be given from both parties and it can be challenging for people with differing viewpoints or age differences; however, it is detrimental to building relationships conducive to student success.” Another participant reflected “to avoid aesthetic care or the perception of caring through transactional interactions vs. genuine shared power in the relationship between student and teacher. Learning relationships must be develop overtime so that it becomes reciprocal and you can build confidence. He went on to further explain, “I have defined this by asking for mutual respect from my students and demonstrating through actions what that looks like.”

Lastly, the topic from the PD that resonated with participants was the concept of banking time. A participant shared that “banking time is an important concept since lack of time is our biggest enemy in education. Making sure you prioritize and build in structures for connecting with students will pay big dividends in achievement. Finding one thing to do at a time can help create more connections.” Another participant echoed this sentiment by sharing that “when you encounter a student, make that ‘intentional time’ for interacting and one that is fostered in authentic relationship building (banking time).” Lastly a participant stated “take time in the class hour to make the connection”. This concept can also be understood as time management with the emphasis on making the time to connect daily with students to foster caring relationships.

Post PD Interviews

Post interviews were conducted with participants after the three professional development sessions concluded. The following are the questions asked and a synthesis of responses from the participants' perceptions following the completion of the three PD sessions.

Question 1: What is your understanding of the importance of care in teaching?

Participants had several profound responses to this question the second time around. Their responses centered around the following themes: taking time to show you care, showing students that you are invested, reflections on authentic interaction, and keeping care as an important component in the classroom.

Taking the time to show you care was a theme that participants acknowledged is a key component in establishing care. A participant shared that “just taking the time to talk to them” and have conversations with your students can begin to lay a foundation for care. He stated that as these conversations evolve that you get to know them, know their names, and know their interests. Interestingly, he also points out that overcoming the big dilemma of feeling as if there is never enough time is difficult. He posited “allowing yourself that time” to get to know your students is important time that needs to be incorporated into every classroom. This response can be summed up to as giving oneself permission to connect and overcome any angst about sacrificing time dedicated to curriculum because of the importance of care.

Showing students that you are invested in them was also an important theme that resonated with participants. A participant shared that he feels that the importance of care involves establishing a safe learning environment, ensuring students know “you are there for them”, and building a relationship “full of trust”. He further explains this as “investment” that students see you taking in them. He explains that once you can establish this student’s know that “you are wanting to help them build the best product” and are “invested in their success”.

Reflections on authentic interactions was also a major theme that emerged among participants. After participants learned about authentic care there was an awareness and a reflection that occurred. One participant shared “I started looking at my career, what I do my day to day, the human part, the part to be there for someone to truly care for a person to be there.” She shared that as she pondered and reflected, “how do you maintain that? how do you grow it? how do you build it?” She stated that the “power of positive relationships took on a different kind of meaning, and it became more genuine, and more authentic.” She went on to define care as “a person who shows up” and is a “agent for change”. She concluded, “you have opened up my doors” to think “differently, deeper, and how I can make them applicable in my everyday” interactions with students.

Keeping care as an important component in the classroom, was a final and central theme that participants shared. A participant shared that she feels care is “the most important aspect of the classroom.” She reflected on the importance of care and how it “relates to student achievement.” She stated that “if we do not practice care, there is going to be no student achievement, without that component you are not going to reach all of your kids, which should be our goal.” Another participant shared that keeping the ethic of care at the forefront so that it is woven into daily routines and daily expectations can “establish itself organically as a part of your classroom culture” He expressed as did other participants that it should remain an important and necessary component in the classroom.

Question 2: How would you define a student’s sense of belonging?

Participants responded to this question overwhelmingly describing students feelings. Specifically, participants shared that students who feel a sense of belonging feel cared for, feel heard, and feel connected. A participant describes feeling *cared for* as letting students “know that

they matter.” A participant shared that she feels that “sense of belonging comes from us having some type of empathy” for students. Another participant described this as feeling as one of treating students like they are the most important person in the room.

Feeling heard, was widely stated by participants as a tenant of belonging. A participant shared that feeling of “belonging comes from being heard.” She stated “we have to listen to our kids.” She goes on to state we have to “make sure their voices are heard” and that they know they have potential. Positive action and reaction aligns with being listened to and being heard.

Feeling connected, was also widely mentioned by participants as a trait of a student’s sense of belonging. A participant described this as a student has “to feel wanted.” This connection to teachers and peers can create intrinsic motivation to be involved in the classroom community because they sense that bond. A participant describes how this happens in his classes, “as an educator, it is all about facilitating free form discussions, making sure you know there is a certain level of respect that develops so that every student can come into the classroom, feel safe, and feel like they can share their perspectives and contribute to the whole discussion.” In aggregate, participants cited a personal bond of mutual respect as being an important and necessary component for students to feel a sense of caring and belonging.

Question 3: Talk about a time when you felt you genuinely connected with a student?

Participants reflected on this question with a universally similar theme of creating opportunities to connect with students. Several participants shared unique stories of their personal connections with their students. They also shared examples of connection opportunities.

The first story shared by a participant discussed how he took a handful of students to work on an art exhibit at an important gala. He recalled how he had to dress formally in a coat and tie as did the students. He recalls their reaction because he never wore that attire before. The

second notion was that because he had to work the event he was more in a service type role helping to move and stage art. He remembered his students seeing him “outside the classroom” and they “got to see a more human side.” He went on to explain, “when you get a chance to expand that relationship beyond the doors of your classroom” students see you in a different light and it builds a “deeper human connection.” This is an example of a connection opportunity that takes place outside of the classroom.

The second story shared by a participant recalled an example of how she likes to build connection in her classroom using motivational quotes or sayings as a starter activity to generate class discussion. She shared that she listens to students’ interpretation or their own experiences about the meaning of the chosen daily quote. She states that after students have shared their interpretations she will provide her own and if it relates to a story from her life she will share. One day after this discussion a student asked to speak to her after she shared with her students how she overcame a personal struggle. The student shared that she had a similar experience at home where she felt that she was not being supported academically. The participant listened, and then she told her student “sometimes we don’t have the support that we want, or that we need, but that does not mean that we give up on ourselves.” She closed with “try to work on you for you and not for anyone else.” She shared that “she took that to heart and since then her grades improved drastically.” This participant believes that it was through this genuine connection that the improvement occurred. This is an example of a connection opportunity built on conversations around inspirational quotes.

The third story shared by a participant was how her connection with a student was built over her interactions of sharing conversations as his counselor. The participant shared that the conversations he shared about his life were so interesting she began to reflect on her own. She

shared that her student would discuss his upbringing in the farms, with his parents being laborers, the challenges of living in a crowded house. She shared that working with him over his four years and seeing him overcome so many challenges and his ability to enroll in an Ivy league school was life changing for her because it caused her to reflect on herself. She continued keeping in touch with him after graduation and seeing how he would return to his community to teach members of the laborer community to read and how to become residents of the United States. She shared that he was “so gracious and humble” even now he is a great success story working in viticulture on the East Coast. She went on to share that “we are soul tied” because his story had such a positive impact in changing her views and has been such an inspiration to her. This is an example of a connection opportunity created through story sharing.

The last story by a participant reflected on his first years of teaching and how he was able to build connection in his classroom. He shared that at the end of the year a group of seniors came to him to tell him “how challenging the year was, but that they looked forward” to coming into his “class every day and just being able to connect and work with some of their friends in groups.” He continued to reflect on the “constant positivity” he exuded for their progress on challenging projects. He recalled that just before graduation one of his students returned and gave him a hug and thanked him for his encouragement. He stated that a few years later the student came back when he was in town after joining the military to tell him that his is doing really well. The participant stated that they stay “in touch” and he has invited him back as an alumni guest speaker. This is an example of a connection opportunity built through group projects and a positive learning environment.

Question 4: What is your current confidence level concerning relationship building?

For this question all participants chose to rate themselves on a scale from 1-10 with one being the lowest to ten being the highest. The following is a summary of each participant and their rating of themselves Post PD.

Participant 1, rated himself a “seven or eight.” He stated that he feels like he “can always get better” and find different ways to improve. He also stated that the PD helped him reflect on his current abilities. He recalled that he had promised a couple of students in his class that are skateboarders that he would build them a small ramp for their finger skateboards on his 3D printer. He remembered that he promised them this back in the fall. It is now spring and he stated he did not want to break a promise. So, he stated that the PD reminded him that he forgot and so he surprised the students with ramp last week. He shared, that the two students were totally surprised and excited and we had a full conversation about it and how I could improve the ramp if I made it a second time. He stated it was a reminder if “I am going to make a promise I have to make sure I keep it.”

Participant 2, rated himself a “9 or 10.” He shared that given his years of experience he has developed confidence to work with all students. He also mentioned that “sometimes there are students that put the barriers up, so that relationships get tougher to build.” He also shared that from the PD he took away the strategy of time management for purposefully connecting with students. He shared that he believes in “having a process built into you daily routines that is about relationship building”. He also supported the notion of “banking time” across the whole year helps those human connections manifest.

Participant 3, rated herself between a “7 or 8.” She stated that she rated herself there because “as a third-year teacher” she realizes that she has a lot of room to grow. She shared that the PD caused her to reflect on areas where she needed to grow. She stated that she was also

encouraged by the academic research that supports building relationships. She shared that she appreciated what she learned because she has heard from other veteran teachers that discourage taking time to “invest in students”. She continued to reflect that she sees herself continuing to “build that confidence” and find the right “balance” between teaching curriculum and building caring relationships.

Participant 4, rated herself a “six, but before Covid I was a nine.” She went on to explain this in great detail. She shared that coming back post pandemic her role as a counselor has gotten uniquely more challenging. She shared that before she could easily meet students, connect, and “support them in their hope” for their future. She shares that now when she sees students (seniors) that they are coming in with no ideas or context for their future.” She continued to share, that “it is literally like we are having to give them the dream.” She believes that students’ are experiencing a “gap that they are struggling with.” She shared that it has been a struggle to find the “one thing” to connect with students on. However, she says that it is still her main focus to “find something in them to foster that relationship” to support their future.

Participant 5, rated himself an “eight or nine.” He shared the PD “really impressed upon me was that what I was doing was the right thing.” He stated that as educators “we have to walk this sort of fine line, of keeping students a distance and also establishing good relationships with them.” He continued, “seeing the research presented and really being able to talk about how effective it is to be connected in the classroom and to tell your personal stories and really give agency to yourself to be vulnerable sometimes and by doing that you are giving agency to your students to do the same.” He continued to reflect “that one of the things that really came through on all of the three PD session was just how effective authentic interactions can be” and “how important they are for classroom interactions but also the longevity of that relationship with that

student.” Lastly, he shared his personal philosophy of what he tells his students, “you know my relationship with you does not end when you graduate, I have now become a professional contact for you, I have become that person that you can come to talk to about job interviews, I become your colleague in the industry.” He concluded by stating that the PD validated for him the importance of “strong authentic relationships with students” as “extremely valuable.”

In aggregate, the average of the five participants’ self-ratings based on the scale provided was a seven point eight out of ten. The first major theme discussed was how the PD supported notions that they already held but, in many ways, validated their sentiments. Secondly, was the reflection and analysis of self in their own agency as they learned. One participant in particular reflected that they have had to completely rebuild the way they connect because of challenges presented from the pandemic. Lastly, was the resolve and belief of the importance of building authentic caring connections with students in the classroom as a key component to successful classroom communities.

Question 5: When you reflect on what has inspired you to the teaching profession can you draw an inference to a time when a teacher connected with you?

Participants responded to this question with resonate thoughts on the impact of teachers on the current work and how they showed care. These thoughts were grouped into the following themes, taking the time; inspiring and influencing, high competency, and authentic interactions.

Taking time; inspiring and influencing: Participants overwhelmingly shared how they remember the teachers that took the time to establish connections with them and how it inspired them into the profession. The participants shared the impact that had on them. They also shared how it influences them today in how they teach. A participant shared that he was heavily influenced by his high school ceramics teacher. He recalled, “she cared about us.” He

remembered “she made Christmas ornaments for the football players.” He remembers that it made him feel special that she cared and he shared that he still hangs the ornament on his tree every Christmas. He shared that in his syllabus for all of his classes he has a section in it titled “My promise.” He said “that it basically states that I am going to do everything I can to give you the same exact experience that my high school teacher gave to me.” He concluded that it is because of his high school teacher that he is where he is today.

A second participant shared the continuing impact her teacher from high school had on her. She stated that her high school English teacher had a deep impact on her future and still influences the way she teaches currently. She shared that she was such a caring person but in a way that held her accountable but pushed her to think about the subject matter in ways that were relevant. She shared that she inspired her to become a teacher and she models her class through her influence. She added that what she remembers most is how she talked to her students in a “straightforward” and “human way.” She recalled that it was her approach that motivated her to start thinking about her future. She said “it helped me get my mindset together.” She added that “the advice I received from her” helped her chart a direction for her future.

High Competency: Participants recalled that the teachers that inspired them did so with high levels of competency. A participant reflected on her teachers that inspired and influenced her and she recalled “as I got to think deeper I always think of those teachers that were the most competent in their area, they were able to maneuver back and forth between the academic and social emotional pieces that connected me to school.” She added, “they knew their skills, they knew their tasks, they were competent, they were comfortable, and they could still take an opportunity to bank that time” to connect. She reflected on an educator that influenced her that, “she was very confident in her profession, she did not see her job as a job, it was more of a

calling.” She remembered that regardless of the work demands she “managed to capture something in every student in her class.” She also recalled that she “took the time to have real life conversations, going back to authentic care, and incorporate it into her daily routine.” She concluded that “she reminds me that teaching is an art.” The theme that resonated was teachers with high competency showed, high skill, high comfort levels, high confidence, in building connections along with teaching content.

Authentic Interactions: Participants described authentic interactions as the foundation for strong caring relationships when describing their teachers. A participant shared that it was not until high school that he “first really had an authentic interaction” with a teacher. He continued to share that from that interaction a connection developed. He stated that “thanks to that relationship” his teacher “pushed” him to be a better and more productive student. He later realized and recalled that “all of the authentic interactions” he had with his teacher are the “reasons why I am a teacher.” He concluded that he has always felt a pull “to pass that kind of teaching on.” The theme that resonated from participants is that through authentic interactions they have been able to be inspired about their future and continue a cycle of caring based on the influences of their prior teachers who were able to connect with them. They endeavor to carry on these meaningful encounters with their own students.

Interaction between research and the context

How did the context Impact the results: This study took place in a high school setting at a time that was a year removed from a global pandemic. Participants voiced shared experiences of the effects that returning to in person learning has had on them. Participants described in their interviews that they have experienced shifts in making connections that they had experienced prior to the pandemic. Participant shared that there were newer challenges with students that had

not presented themselves before such as disconnectedness, challenges interpreting non-verbal and verbal expression due to masks, and general stress related to the pandemic. The data collection in this context captured their current context (post pandemic) and reflective memories that took place prior to the pandemic.

How did the research impact the context: The study participants shared through discussions and interactions a greater awareness of their interactions with students. Participants showed a level of elevated consciousness when articulating traits and characteristics of relationship building. Additionally, a few participants shared that they had eternalized the information shared and began to become more mindful of the authenticity of their interactions with students. Lastly, there were several comments made by participants that voiced their support of the PD to be shared with the staff. There was a sentiment expressed that there was a great need for this type of PD to be shared with a larger audience in the future.

Summary

The summary of findings in this chapter are profound. There are keen insights of participant perceptions around a solid foundation and knowledge of care. What was learned is how the participants made connections to all prior knowledge they had in pieces and through the PD were able to connect those pieces into a woven construct of understanding. There was significant growth made in embracing a common language around care. Phrases such as “authentic care” and “banking time” were used universally by participants by the end of the PD.

There were also deep insights gained from personal stories that were shared. As participants reflected a second time during the post interviews they articulated from a caring perspective. There were several academic terms that participants infused into their responses and reflections. Participants reflections aligned with much of the academic research (Noddings,

1988; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Ransom, 2019; Rogers & Webb, 1991) that describes a caring teacher.

Interestingly, participants' responses yielded insights that supported the teaching of the ethics of care construct as a part of new teacher pedagogy. To clearly state this notion is the belief that ethics of care should be firmly and deeply embedded into teacher pedagogy. Not added as a new additional construct.

Participants also voiced a genuine concern regarding barriers to care. The most often mentioned was the barrier of time. Once all PD sessions concluded the participants expressed relief learning about strategies to overcome this barrier of time.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings from Chapter 4

How does one measure care? Through my ROS study I attempted to, use terminologies that are characteristics of care. A Yes/No checklist was used to measure care throughout the study. I looked at participants responses Pre PD and Post PD. The responses were compared against the following questions from the defined terminologies of care: 1. Is care authentic? 2. Is care reciprocated? 3. Is there dialogue? 4. Is there mutual respect? 5. Is there genuine interest in well-being? 6. Do interactions go beyond traditional encounters? 7. Is time given freely?

The following is a summary of the findings. Pre PD, participants most strongly demonstrated that care meant showing a genuine interest in a student's well-being. This was an area that seemed to be expressed most often in their responses. This was followed by a solid understanding of the importance of giving time freely. While also not explicitly expressed they also expressed a strong understanding of the interactions that go beyond transactional encounters. Rounding out equal frequency in expressions of care by participants was the importance of dialogue and understanding of care being reciprocated.

Pre-PD findings also showed area that were without mention in the conversation of care. Absent from the participant interviews were acknowledgment of authentic or genuine interactions of care. Additionally, absent from the initial conversations with participants was any mention of mutual respect in expressing care.

Post PD interviews yielded a shift in response and understanding of care. The most widely shared expression of care by participants referenced was authentic care. Equally referenced by participants were expressions of acknowledgment for mutual respect with students.

Participants, also referenced examples of the importance of dialogue more prominently in expressing care Post PD. Showing genuine interest was mentioned less often than prior to the PD. Also giving time freely was consistently expressed from Pre to Post PD. Least mentioned was going beyond transactional encounters. Lastly, absent from the Post PD conversations was the discussion of reciprocity.

The importance of authentic caring interaction was prominently taught during the PD sessions. This may account for a shift in the participant responses. Also featured in the PD was the importance of mutual respect. Hence, this could account for the increased shift. There is curiosity as to why reciprocity faded from the discussion. There is a strong foundational understanding from pre and post PD that participants showed care through expressing genuine interest and giving freely of their time.

Discussion of Artifact (Outline of PD)

The professional development participants attended was divided into three sessions. Each session reviewed prominent aspects from the literature (Dillon, 1989; Fairbanks et al., 2009; Gallagher, 2016; Noddings, 1988, 1999; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Sabol & Pianta, 2012) as it relates to care. The professional development sessions were designed to highlight an overview of the literature in a cohesive manner. The intent was to highlight the academic research that centers from and Ethic of Care approach to teaching.

PD Session One, began with my personal context for choosing Ethic of Care as a topic of study. Next, a brief history on the evolution of the ethic of care was presented. Then, participants were presented an overview of the power of positive student teacher relationships. Lastly, participants engaged in a discussion concerning the impact of caring on a student's sense of

belonging, student engagement, and academic achievement. PD session one concluded with a whole group discussion. We concluded with participants reflecting on the PD session.

PD Session Two, began with a review of PD session one. Following that, was a lengthy presentation on authentic care vs. aesthetic care and the difference between them. Next, participants discussed the parameters that define reciprocal relationships. This was followed by a practical definition of mutual respect and why it is important to understand both reciprocity and mutual respect in relationship building. Lastly, participants were presented with the most recognized challenges and barriers to building caring relationships. PD session two concluded with a whole group discussion, where participants were asked to conduct a reflection on the PD session.

PD Session Three, began with a review of PD session one and two. What followed was a presentation on how to make caring connections. Next, participants learned how to overcome the barrier of time. Participants learned the concept of “banking time” (Sabol & Pianta, 2012, p.223). Then, participants learned a practical approach to building agency. Lastly, participants engaged in discussions about the importance of high expectations as it pertains to achieving the maximum benefits for students when paired with strong caring student teacher relationships. PD session three concluded with a Ted Talk video from Rita Pierson “Every kid needs a champion” followed by a whole group discussion. Lastly, participants were asked to conduct a reflection on the PD session.

Discussions of Personal Lessons Learned

Through this study I have gained some insights learned throughout the research process. The following are insights gleaned from engaging with the participants in this study.

1. As teachers reflected on their own path into education, teachers revealed a legacy of caring individuals along the way that made connections, pushed them beyond their limits, and showed them the possibilities of their unlimited potential.
2. Care is a foundational piece to the essence of teaching. Care has to be authentic. Students will not learn if they feel their teachers do not care. Students have an innate ability to see what is real (authentic) and what is not.
3. In order to educate you must care, this is done by taking the time to listen, taking the time to hear, acknowledging students in a way that is encouraging and supportive to their potential, and showing a genuine interest in their future.
4. When teachers and students give up time to participate in a mutually shared experience outside of the classroom it creates a bond.
5. There is reciprocal power in listening to and learning from students' individual stories as well as their personal interests and connecting with them. This connection is something that a teacher makes important to that student, pays attention to, and nurtures. This becomes a teacher's connection with that student.
6. A student's sense of belonging is synonymous with students feeling welcomed, feeling comfortable, feeling a sense of purpose, feeling a sense of connections, and a feeling of overall safety.
7. Building caring connections takes intentionality. One has to be intentional in building relationships and it takes time to cultivate connections over time.
8. The high expectations of a hard work ethic can be enhanced through a personal bond that can move students forward.

9. When building a connection with students a conversation should never be a one-time occurrence.
10. Overtime, as one builds their own sense of agency in relationship building it raises the level of awareness and consciousness to understanding students' personal challenges, struggles, as well as their personal hopes and dreams. A teacher is in a prime position to uplift, support, and encourage their student's potential future selves.

Recommendations

The recommendations I have made from the conclusions I have gathered through this study are centered around importance of and emphasis of implementing an ethics of care in the classroom. This sentiment was echoed by participants as noted in how their perceptions of care changed from a surface level at the beginning of the study to a deep level at the conclusion of the study. This notion consistently was brought up by participants who expressed with confidence that new teachers should be taught the importance of care and strategies for a caring classroom early in their careers if not during their teacher preparation. Participant comments reflected they would have liked to have been exposed more explicitly to this topic of care in their teacher training course work. Personally, I feel that it is a more meaningful topic when it is situated in a practitioner's realm. An Ethic of care has more relevance when explicitly taught with examples of application in mind and when teachers can reflect on their classroom experiences. It was insightful to see how meaningful the application strategies for overcoming barriers especially connected with time was appreciated as it was derived from the academic discourse surrounding their real-world classroom experiences. It is a recommendation that in future research student's perspectives and voices can be captured in a similar manner. It is student voices that can bring

deeper insights into this important topic as educators sharpen our understanding of what it means to care for students in our classrooms. In addition, I believe that an exploration of the personal bond that grows from experiences outside of the classroom (ex. field trips, sports teams, community service, work studies, etc.) should be explored as it pertains to building authentic relationships. Lastly, I support the notion of measuring care. Enough academic research exists that care has the potential to be measured and tested (such as the correlations of the impact of care on outcomes of academic performance). It is possible.

Closing Thoughts

As I reflect on this Record of Study, I am captivated by the sense of empowerment an adoption of an ethic of care can have for teachers and students in the classroom. The power of teacher and student dialogue in authentic human to human interactions continue to resonate. I am also encouraged that the academic discourse and the participants in this study closely agreed in support for a greater presence of caring intentions in the classroom. Through this study, I have gained a deeper understanding of the mutual benefit of reciprocity and how it can serve the dual purpose of supporting students and motivating teachers to the best outcomes for students.

In reflecting on my own experiences, I believe it is important to honor, recognize, and acknowledge the authentic connections and minute to minute interactions that have made transformational impacts on the lives of students. Through this ROS study, I have brought several of those examples to the forefront. It is examples such as those shared by participants that build a fabric for what real learning and human connection is all about. When we have opportunities to connect with those stories, hear the voices of practitioners, and learn about experiences, they add deep value to our own personal purpose as educators.

A significant takeaway that resonated with me is the sense of ownership that the educators in this study had for their students. There was discussion about barriers yet all participants did not deflect a sense of responsibility for their students elsewhere. Instead, there was an internal sense of ownership for their actions as educators to meet the moments in education head on and with intention. The main intention they reflected on is how care built in their own lives manifested into care for their students. Lastly, it was deeply meaningful to see how they advocated for care to be the rule and not the exception. Hence, a clear and purposeful expectation of an application of ethics of care in every classroom for all students because our students deserve the best education has to offer.

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APPENDIX A
DETERMINATION LETTER

NOT HUMAN RESEARCH DETERMINATION

February 22, 2021

Type of Review:	Initial Review Submission Form
Title:	Human Connections: Adapting an ethic of care for fostering the growth of student teacher relationships
Investigator:	Mary Margaret Capraro
IRB ID:	IRB2021-0193
Reference Number:	121787
Funding:	N/A
Documents Received:	IRB Application (v1.0)

Dear Mary Margaret Capraro:

The Institution determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations.

Further IRB review and approval by this organization is not required because this is not human research. You have indicated that the results of the activities described in the application will not be generalized beyond a single school system and will not be published. This determination applies only to the activities described in this IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made you must immediately contact the IRB about whether these activities are research involving humans in which the organization is engaged. You will also be required to submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Please be aware that receiving a 'Not Human Research Determination' is not the same as IRB review and approval of the activity. IRB consent forms or templates for the activities described in the determination are not to be used and references to TAMU IRB approval must be removed from study documents.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Administrative Office at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636.

Sincerely,
IRB Administration

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, OUTLINE OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, PD SLIDES

PARTICIPANT: _____

PRE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. What is your understanding of the importance of care in teaching?
2. How would you define a student's sense of belonging?
3. When was a time where you felt you genuinely connected with a student?
4. What is your current confidence level concerning relationship building?
5. When you reflect on what has inspired you to the teaching profession can you draw an inference to a time when a teacher connected with you?

PARTICIPANT: _____

POST PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. What is your understanding of the importance of care in teaching?
2. How would you define a student's sense of belonging?
3. When was a time where you felt you genuinely connected with a student?
4. What is your current confidence level concerning relationship building?
5. When you reflect on what has inspired you to the teaching profession can you draw an inference to a time when a teacher connected with you?
6. Do you have any concluding thoughts?

**HUMAN CONNECTIONS: ADAPTING AN ETHIC OF CARE FOR FOSTERING THE
GROWTH OF STUDENTS TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS**

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OUTLINE

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 1

1. Personal Context
2. Brief History of Ethic of Care
3. Overview of the Power of Positive Student Teacher Relationships
4. Impact of Caring, Sense of Belonging, and Student Achievement
5. Discussion
6. Reflection

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2

1. Review of Professional Development 1
2. Authentic Care v. Aesthetic Care
3. Reciprocal Relationships
4. Challenges and Barriers
5. Discussion
6. Reflection

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 3

1. Review of Professional Development 1 and 2
2. Making Caring Connections (*Dialogue, Practice, Confirmation*)
3. Banking Time
4. Building Agency: Start with One
5. High Expectations
6. Discussion
7. Reflection



Human Connections: Adapting an ethic of care for fostering the growth of student-teacher relationships

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ONE

PRESENTED BY

Raynaldo Gallardo



"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." -Maya Angelou

Professional Development Outline

Module 1:

- Introduction: My Story
- A brief history of ethic of care
- An overview of the power of positive student teacher relationships
- Impact of caring on sense of belonging, student engagement, and academic achievement
- Discussion
- Reflection

Introduction

Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

QUOTE BANNER.COM

Introduction

- About me
- 31% of Engagement* (2018) GP
- 45% Sense of Belonging* (2018) GP
- About my experience
- An ethic of care a bridge to connect with students and forge meaningful relationships

History of Ethic of Care

Nel Noddings (1983)

Ethic of Care- Conscious approach to establishing caring relationships as a moral construct of the teaching practice in schools (Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999).



Power of Positive Relationships



Relationship- "A relation is here construed as any pairing or connection of individuals characterized by some affective awareness in each" (Noddings, 1988, p.218). "It is an encounter or series of encounters in which the involved parties feel something toward each other" (Noddings, 1988, p.218).

Connection



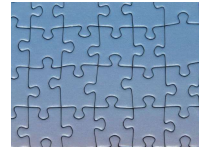
Caring- "relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility" (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p.393).

Sense of Belonging



Belonging- "Belonging is defined here as students' sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teachers and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class" (Goodenow, 1993, p.25).

Engagement



A direct correlation to student engagement is feeling cared for. A 2016 Gallup poll student survey revealed that only 39% of students feel "that an adult at this school cares about me" (Calderon, 2017, news.gallup.com). Consequently, the survey revealed the number of students that feel cared for in schools is steadily decreasing.

Achievement



"High expectations, when combined with a personal bond between teachers and students, often led students to higher levels of achievement" (Gallagher, 2016, p.10).

Researchers (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Klem & Connell, 2004; Wentzel, 1998) support the relationship between student engagement and a sense of belonging having a clear connection to achievement. The higher a student's sense of belonging the more engaged the student is in school (Goodenow, 1993) thus leading to higher student achievement (Chhuon & Wallace, 2012; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Klem & Connell, 2004; Wentzel, 1998)

Power of Positive Relationships

Connection → Sense of Belonging → Engagement → Achievement



Discussion

Reflection

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Human Connections: Adapting an ethic of care for fostering the growth of student-teacher relationships

*PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TWO
PRESENTED BY*

Raynaldo Gallardo

 TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY



How each of your students **feels inside your classroom** will always triumph over everything else.

—
ANDRIANA ZAROVSKA
TEACHER

edutopia

 TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Professional Development Outline

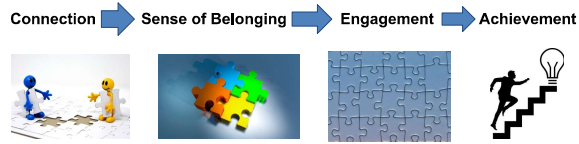
- Module 2
- Review
 - Authentic Care vs. Aesthetic Care
 - Reciprocal Relationships
 - Challenges and Barriers
 - Discussion
 - Reflection

 TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

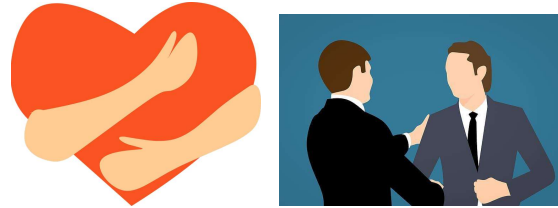
Introduction

EVERY KID IS ONE CARING ADULT AWAY FROM BEING A SUCCESS STORY. — Josh Shipp

Power of Positive Relationships



Authentic Care vs. Aesthetic Care



Authentic Care



Valenzuela (1999) described authentic care as a being genuine care for the well being of others. Valenzuela (1999) emphasized authentic care as considering the well being of others over oneself. Authentic care is referenced and exemplified in the literature and is characterized by teachers that take time, show they care, have a high level of patience, show interest, know the student, and have a general understanding of the student and their background (Noddings, 1984; Ransom, 2019; Schindel & Tolbert 2017; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). This relationship among teacher and student is classified as empathetic (Maloney and Matthews, 2020). An authentic caring relationship can be seen as a partnership in the power dynamic and a relationship of mutual benefit.




Aesthetic Care

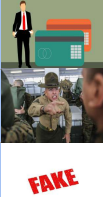


Noddings (1984) terms *aesthetic care* as "caring about" instead of "caring for." Hence, to state care with no action is merely superficial. This idea is termed by Noddings (1984) as *aesthetic care*.

This type of care can be considered transactional and is largely void of interpersonal connections between teacher and student (Maloney & Matthews, 2020; Valenzuela, 1999). Aesthetic care is largely defined as the type of care in which individuals desire positive outcomes but lack the time and commitment to generate authentic care (Ransom, 2019; Schindel & Tolbert 2017; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). Also an aesthetic caring relationship can be characterized as a relationship where the majority of the power dynamic of the relationship is in the hands of the teacher with minimal input from students (Ibrahim & El Zaatari 2019). This type of relationship among teacher and student is classified as transactional (Maloney & Matthews, 2020). An aesthetic caring relationship can have all of the superficial appearances of caring but lacks real genuine conscious caring for others. In short it is superficial.

Authentic Care vs. Aesthetic Care

	Authentic Care	Aesthetic Care
	Genuine	Transactional
	Shared Power	Unequal Power
	Empathetic	Superficial



Reciprocal Relationships and Respect

Show visual example

Reciprocal Relationships and Respect

The pool of shared meaning from prior researchers suggests that conditions exist for fostering a positive relationship through reciprocity and respect. Positive relationships can be further developed by interactions, levels of trust, safety, and respect. The first notion is that positive relationships are reciprocal and thus they are two-way (teacher-student) interactions (Owens & Ennis, 2005). If sentiment by one party is not reciprocated then a relationship does not exist (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2019). Secondly, there is a sense of trust between the two parties (Ransom, 2019; Rogers & Webb, 1991). This trust can be further understood as a condition that both parties believe the other to be inherently good and equal as humans (Noddings, 1984; Owens & Ennis, 2005). Additionally, there is a feeling of environmental safety both emotionally and physically (Owens & Ennis, 2005). The notion of a defining condition of a positive relationship help guide the parameters of understanding for this study.

Reciprocity is explained by Noddings (1984) as the return of a caring individual to another as caring for the other. Hence, a caring relationship is non-existent if the care is not reciprocated. Thus, reciprocity is an essential term that is present in caring relationships. Several researchers (Bondy & Hambacher, 2016; Chhuon & Wallace 2012; Maloney & Matthews, 2020; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen 2016) have explored the importance of reciprocity. Their findings assert a notion that one can not be cared for if one does not experience care. Care can only happen if care is given and received. Recent works (Maloney & Matthews, 2020; Matthews, 2019) center around the notion of students of color and their experience with reciprocal caring relationships.

Mutual respect is identified as being one of the most important ingredients of relationship building. Research in urban education focuses on respect as whole heartedly higher on the value side for students' sentiments as important toward developing strong relationships (Chhuon & Wallace, 2012; Maloney & Matthews, 2020; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016). That is to say students place the highest value on feeling that they are respected as individuals and that respect is reciprocated by their teachers (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Ransom, 2019; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). The sense of respect among teachers and students in their collective relationship is most important when it is reciprocated

Challenges and Barriers

Time



The review of the literature revealed the greatest barrier that teachers felt hindering their abilities to commit to building authentic relationships was time. Teachers' by in large felt overwhelmed, stressed, and pressured to constantly increase their test scores (Jeffrey et. al., 2013; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999). The burden they felt was caused by pressures to maximize their instructional time. Researchers found that teachers felt they did not have the time needed to devote to caring relationships because they perceived the commitment would jeopardize test scores. These findings have implications for pedagogy and site-based leadership practices.

Challenges and Barriers

Agency



Teacher agency looms large in relationship building. Agency in this context is a term that can be understood as the ability of a teacher to connect with their students because they are from the same community, have a similar background as the student's upbringing, and ability to make common connections (Fairbanks et. al., 2009; Maloney & Matthews, 2020; Matthews, 2019). In addition, strong teacher agency can be evidenced by having the ability to manage personal stress, the incorporation of daily reflection on teaching practice, and a commitment to a student's well-being (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Kohn, 1991; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016). Teacher agency as well as their ability to identify with their students (Matthews, 2019) leads to a teacher's ability to quickly adapt and understand their students. The level of teacher agency correlates with their ability to give students meaningful care.

Discussion

Challenges and Barriers

Pedagogy



Implementing relevant teacher pedagogy is emphasized throughout the literature. It is important for preservice teachers and new teachers to learn skills for building meaningful relationships. This includes a strong foundation and understanding of Nodding's (1984) ethic of care and being well versed in relational pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching that provides an understanding of critical race theory (Baker et. al., 1997; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Reeves & Le Mare 2017; Roberts, 2010). There is literature suggesting a "warm demander" pedagogy as a suggested strategy for positive outcomes among urban youth (Ransom, 2019). Lastly, many researchers have suggested that teachers feel overwhelmed and have no time to build relationships with students as the pressure for improved scores on standardized tests have consumed the daily classroom routine and the time for relationship building with it (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2019; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999). This would conversely lead to the need for further development and training to develop time management skills. Hence, how can a teacher plan their day to include an in-class structure to support the development of teacher-student relationships supportive of teacher pedagogy?

Reflection

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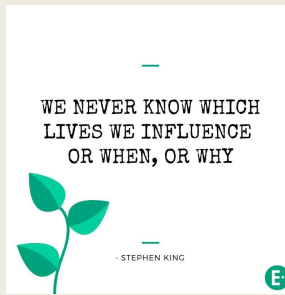
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Human Connections: Adapting an ethic of care for fostering the growth of student-teacher relationships

Proposal by
Raynaldo Gallardo

Chair of Committee: Mary M. Capraro
Co-Chair of Committee: Robert M. Capraro
Committee Member: Radhika Viruru
Committee Member: Mónica Vásquez Neshyba

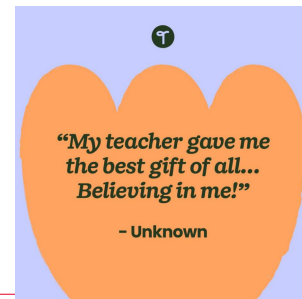


Professional Development Outline (cont)

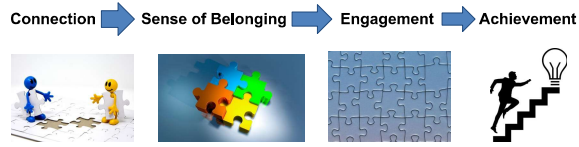
Module 3

- Review
- Making caring connections (dialogue, practice, confirmation)
- Banking time
- Building Agency: Start with one
- High Expectations
- Discussion
- Reflection

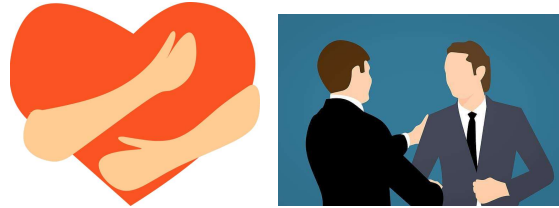
Introduction



Power of Positive Relationships



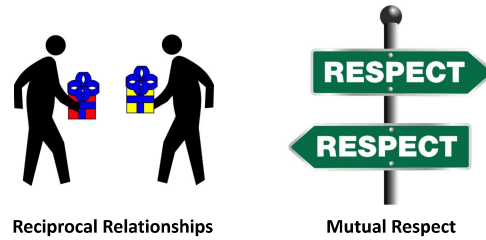
Authentic Care vs. Aesthetic Care



Authentic Care vs. Aesthetic Care

	Authentic Care	Aesthetic Care	
	Genuine	Transactional	
	Shared Power	Unequal Power	
	Empathetic	Superficial	
	Reciprocal	Non-Reciprocal	

Reciprocal Relationships and Respect



Challenges and Barriers



Time



Agency



Pedagogy

Making Caring Connections



Dialogue



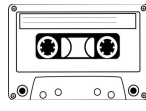
Practice



Confirmation

Moral education is termed as Noddings' (1984) belief that education and educators have a moral obligation to show and demonstrate care for students. This view presented care as an ethical and moral construct of educators to engage in. Noddings (1984) proposes a way to do this through *dialogue*, *practice*, and *confirmation*. Noddings' (1984) examples speak to the conversational interactions between teacher and students as *dialogue*. Noddings' (1984) advises actions of time to *practice* these interactions both teacher and student can get better at interacting with care. Lastly, Noddings (1984) shares that central to *moral education* is the tenet of *confirmation*. In Noddings' (2013) own words, *confirmation* is the opportunity for the teacher to "reveal to him an attainable image of himself that is lovelier than that manifested in his present acts" (p.193).

"Banking Time"

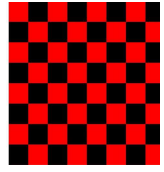


The first implication is developing the skill to overcome the restraints of time. Researchers (Dillon, 1989; Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Sabol & Pianta, 2012) have recommended teachers carve out intentional time every day to build relationships with students. This is a term better noted by Dillon (1989), as a daily "relationship building ritual" (p.239). The second is teaching time management as a skill for educators. Dillon (1989) observed that only five minutes a day is enough time to engage students in the types of conversations that provide them with a sense of security and of belonging that only relational interactions can provide. This idea is also referred to by Sabol and Pianta (2012), as "banking time" (p.223). These researchers found that students especially at-risk youth greatly benefit from intentional time to interact with their teacher one on one. Over time the relational building aspect of teacher to student can have reciprocal benefits. As noted by Goldstein and Lake (2000), teachers can feel energized, excited, and empowered by the reciprocity of teacher student relationships.

Building Agency: Start with one

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

Lao Tzu



High Expectations



Teachers with high expectations have experienced high levels of engagement and positive academic outcomes with their students. If these high expectations are coupled with caring support from the teacher and a strong commitment by the teacher for students' well being, students will be more engaged and successful (Baker, 1997; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ransom, 2019; Wentzel, 1997). "Students who perceive teachers as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment in which expectations are high, clear, and fair are more likely to report engagement in school" (Klem & Connell, 2004, p.270). "High expectations, when combined with a personal bond between teachers and students, often led students to higher levels of achievement" (Gallagher, 2016, p.10). Having an adult who cares in students' lives and one that takes the time to get to know them, shows an interest in their circumstances, just listens to them and their concerns, and communicate high expectations for them is one factor regularly found in the literature (McBee, 2007). A synthesis of the literature concludes that high expectations with supportive and caring student-teacher relationships leads to increased student engagement levels and academic success.



Discussion

Reflection

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