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CHALLENGES ENACTING CARING TEACHER EDUCATION

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To prepare teachers who will be able to draw on caring to build a strong foundation for their professional practices, teacher education programs must be created specifically focused toward this goal. This article discusses the use of dialogue journals in a course designed to enrich preservice elementary teachers' understandings of caring. Quite unexpectedly, the dialogue journals demonstrated some of the preservice teachers developing negative, judgmental, and adversarial attitudes toward the parents of the children in their placement classrooms. A close examination of the dialogue journal activity revealed that the weak link was not the activity itself but the specific details of the teaching-learning interactions occurring within the activity. The findings suggest that the core of caring teacher education lies in the nature of the interactions between the teacher educator and her students.

Keywords: *preservice teachers; caring; dialogue journals*

Caring is widely believed to be a central facet of teaching. Kohl (1984), for example, asserted that "a teacher has an obligation to care about every student" (p. 66). Rogers & Webb (1991) insisted that "good teachers care, and good teaching is inextricably linked to specific acts of caring" (p. 174). This holds true regardless of the age of the learners: Scholars have argued for the importance of caring teaching in work with students in early childhood educational settings (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997), elementary schools (Charney, 1991), secondary schools (Noddings, 1992), and higher education (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996). Caring's power has been documented across all subject areas. In the past decade, journal articles have described the importance of caring in the teaching of mathematics (Robicheaux, 1996), science (Sickle

& Spector, 1996), social studies (Alter, 1995), language arts (Lamme & McKinley, 1992), and educational technology (Damarin, 1994).

Preservice teachers generally enter their professional preparation experiences confident about their ability to care for their students (Weinstein, 1998). However, like all of the skills, attitudes, and dispositions required to teach well, caring is not always as easy as it may look to novices. Researchers have found preservice teachers struggling with issues related to caring teaching during their field experiences. For example, both Weinstein (1998) and McLaughlin (1991) documented preservice teachers wrestling with the tension between caring and control. Bullough and Knowles (1991) and Burgess and Carter (1992) discussed the challenges faced as preservice teachers con-

front the mismatch between their view of teaching as similar to motherly nurturing and the realities of teaching in their field-placement classrooms.

To prepare teachers who will be able to draw on caring to build a strong foundation for their professional practices, we must create teacher education programs specifically focused toward this goal (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). As Arnstine (1990) said, "If teacher educators want to further the aims of caring . . . in schooling, then the means must be the cultivation of appropriate activities in the teacher education program" (p. 244). Teacher educators do not need to teach preservice teachers how to care; however, we do need to help them understand the role of caring in teaching and prepare them to teach in ways that draw on the power of caring relationships in teaching and learning.

Arnstine (1990) suggested two educational experiences that could be incorporated into a teacher education program designed to prepare caring teachers: participation in collaborative learning communities and activities that link theory to practice. Service learning (Swick, 1999) and narrative case studies (Rosiek, 1994) have also been put forth as activities appropriate for care-centered teacher education. In this article, we examine in close detail the use of another potentially appropriate activity, dialogue journals, in a teacher education course taught by the first author of this article, henceforth referred to as Lisa.

The dialogue journal activity that is the focus of this article was selected as a central feature of Lisa's course because it responds to Nel Noddings's (1986) call for dialogue and confirmation as key features of caring teacher education. Because of this apparent alignment, we were surprised to find the intended outcomes of the activity—preservice teachers developing richer understandings of the relationship of caring and teaching and growing in professional capability and confidence—were not broadly achieved. Quite unexpectedly, the dialogue journals revealed some preservice teachers developing negative, judgmental, and adversarial attitudes toward the parents of the children in their placement classrooms.

In this article, we offer a close examination of the dialogue journal activity, which reveals that the weak link was not the activity itself but the specific details of the teaching-learning interactions occurring within the activity. Despite Lisa's best intentions, caring was being communicated to and modeled for the preservice teachers in ways that were sporadic, partial, and difficult to see clearly. This inconsistent application of theoretical ideals may have contributed to the development of the preservice teachers' troubling beliefs.

Providing appropriate activities is not sufficient to support the preparation of caring teachers. Appropriate activities can become inappropriate very easily if proper attention is not paid to what is happening within the teaching-learning interactions facilitated by the activity. Our findings suggest that the core of caring teacher education lies in the nature of the interactions between the teacher educator and her students.

CARING AND DIALOGUE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

In the spring of 1998, Lisa taught a Classroom Organization and Management course to a cohort of preservice teachers enrolled in an elementary teacher education program at a large research university in the southwest United States. The course covered topics such as classroom environments, discipline, lesson and unit planning, and professionalism and provided the preservice teachers with their first long-term fieldwork placement.

Motivated by her belief that caring is a requirement for intellectual growth (Goldstein, 1999) and by her understanding that a goal of teacher education is the preparation of caring teachers, Lisa planned the course in ways deliberately designed to help her preservice teachers develop their abilities to enter into caring relations with the students in their field-placement classrooms. She communicated these values and goals through her choice of reading materials, through the focus of her classroom activities, through her attempts to model caring teaching practices and discuss those practices explicitly, and through the course assignments—most notably, the electronic dialogue

journals (nicknamed *ejournals*) that were a main component of the course.

Lisa intended for the *ejournals* to allow her to engage her preservice teachers in individual, personal, on-going conversations about their field placements. Because each preservice teacher had a unique set of experiences, needs, and goals, the shared space of the dialogue journal could become a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) in which each preservice teacher could be supported and guided in ways custom-tailored to the specifics of his or her professional teaching and learning situation.

The value of reflection in teaching and in teacher education has been well documented and well described (Schon, 1983; van Manen, 1977), and reflective journal writing is a common requirement in teacher preparation courses (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Gore & Zeichner, 1991). Adding a component of dialogue to the reflective journal experience provides additional benefits. Echoing the mentor-apprentice model that has been a primary form of professional preparation for centuries (Rogoff, 1990), dialogue journals engage preservice teachers in regular, focused, one-on-one interaction with their course instructor or fieldwork supervisor. These teaching-learning interactions offer possibilities for guidance, support, and scaffolding sometimes absent in other forms of reflective writing and journaling.

In a study that assessed the relative merits of writing in a personal reflective journal versus engaging in reflective dialogue journaling with the course instructor, Roe & Stallman (1994) found that their preservice teachers preferred the dialogue journals to a “statistically significant” degree (p. 584). Preservice teachers appreciated the mentoring and advice that accompanied the dialogue journals, and they liked the experience of being heard and receiving feedback.

Ejournals—exchanged via e-mail rather than in a notebook—function like traditional paper-based dialogue journals and share the strengths attributed to that activity. In addition, *ejournals* offer unique benefits. The research literature on uses of electronic mail in teacher education (Nicaise & Barnes, 1996; Schlagal, Trathen, &

Blanton, 1996; Thomas, Clift, & Sugimoto, 1996) indicates that *ejournal* exchanges offer student teachers the convenience of quick feedback and relief from the feelings of isolation and disconnection common to the field-placement period. E-mail also offers students a less formal, more spontaneous medium than traditional notebook-style journals thereby eliminating some of the pressure and drudgery often associated with reflective journal writing (Maas, 1991).

Lisa planned to use *ejournals* as a tool that would encourage each preservice teacher to explore and respond to the theme of caring in classrooms in a way that furthered his or her individual growth as a professional and deepened his or her thinking on the role of relationships in teaching. There were rarely any prompts or assigned areas of focus to guide the writings of the class as a whole; instead, each preservice teacher received individualized attention and was provided with thought-provoking questions, supportive feedback, and anecdotes about Lisa’s experiences as a classroom teacher all aimed at fostering the preservice teacher’s growth and development.

The dialogue journals, included in this course to provide a space for caring teaching-learning encounters, were also chosen because they reflect key features of Noddings’s theoretical views on caring and fidelity in teacher education. Noddings (1986) emphasized modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation; these practices became a central organizing feature of Lisa’s course. Modeling demands that we treat our preservice teachers with the same attentive care that we wish them to bring to their interactions with children. Dialogue about the pedagogical techniques and strategies presented to our preservice teachers prepares them to be critical thinkers and thoughtful decision makers throughout their teaching careers. Practice comprises the standard field experience portion of teacher education but adds an emphasis on practice in caring. Confirmation involves making explicit the ethical ideals undergirding teaching and working to bring those ideals forth in our preservice teachers and in ourselves.

Lisa viewed the dialogue journals as a powerful means of providing the preservice

teachers in her cohort with dialogue and confirmation—two essential features of Noddings's (1986) fidelity model. Coupled with the modeling and practice that are standard features of teacher education at her university, the dialogue journals seemed a powerful way to enhance the course's explicit focus on caring's role in teaching and learning.

Ejournal exchanges were an assignment for all members of the cohort. The preservice teachers were invited to submit their ejournals for analysis and interpretation as part of a larger study of caring and teaching. They were assured that their decision regarding submitting their ejournals for study would not affect their workload for the course, their grade, the evaluation of their work, or their future relationships with the university. Seventeen students in their early 20s—16 female and 1 male with a range of ethnicities including Anglo, Asian, and Hispanic—agreed to allow their ejournal responses to be examined. These preservice teachers' ejournals comprise the data examined in this article. The preservice teachers were aware that, in addition to being read by Lisa in the context of the course, their journal entries would be analyzed, interpreted, and made public in journal articles like this one. All participants gave their full written permission.

The ejournal activity was specifically designed to enhance and strengthen the preservice teachers' understanding of the important role played by caring relationships in teaching and learning. However, the preservice teachers' ejournal entries revealed the development of working definitions of caring teaching that were characterized by negative dispositions toward the parents of the students in their placement classrooms. In an attempt to make sense of this unexpected result, Lisa began to question her own role in the creation and perpetuation of the preservice teachers' problematic beliefs about caring. Seeking help in examining her own contributions to the formation and reinforcement of their troubling beliefs about caring teaching, Lisa brought the ejournals to the attention of Debra Freedman, this article's second author, who is a colleague

involved in teacher education but unconnected with these particular preservice teachers.

DATA ANALYSIS

Lisa and Debra employed manual and computer-assisted data analysis strategies to examine and code all of the ejournal exchanges. We worked independently, each approaching the data set using identical procedures. We both read the full set of dialogue journal exchanges; this included 10 entries written by each of the 17 participants and Lisa's responses to those entries. The goals were to develop an overall sense of the progression of the class's experiences, attitudes, and perceptions over the course of their field placement, to reveal general themes common to all the preservice teachers, and to identify general patterns in Lisa's responses. We made efforts to track the development of the preservice teachers' ideas about caring's role in teaching and learning and to pinpoint examples of negative or hostile attitudes toward the parents of their students

In addition, Lisa and Debra both read each preservice teacher's individual correspondence file, which comprised 10 weekly entries and Lisa's responses to each entry. This analysis strategy revealed the development of each preservice teacher's thoughts, concerns, and attitudes over the course of the field-placement period, highlighted the course of Lisa's relationship with each preservice teacher, and enabled us to engage in case and cross-case analysis.

We read several other forms of communication between the preservice teachers and Lisa: informal formative course evaluations, quick writes (in-class writing activities in which students have 5 minutes to respond to a question or prompt), and formal summative course evaluations. Finally, we read Lisa's personal teaching journal in which she reflected on her experiences throughout the course of the Classroom Organization and Management class.

Pamela Moss's (1994) work on the use of the hermeneutic circle in warranting knowledge claims played a central role in shaping our data analysis procedures. Moss described the herme-

neutic circle as a means for arriving at interpretations of data:

that seek to understand the whole in light of its parts, that privilege readers who are most knowledgeable about the context . . . and that ground those interpretations not only in textual and contextual evidence available, but also in a rational debate among the community of interpreters. (1994, p. 7)

This process involves an iterative cycle that begins with an initial interpretation of the data followed by critical dialogue among a group of knowledgeable individuals committed to an “ethic of disciplined, collaborative inquiry that encourages challenges and revisions to initial interpretations” (Moss, 1994, p. 7). This leads to the development of a revised interpretation that is then subjected to careful reading, thoughtful judgment, and repeated testing by the community of interpreters. The process continues until all available evidence has been accounted for and a full and coherent interpretation has been constructed.

We began our analysis of the data set working independently; our intent was to use our personal interpretations of the data as a starting point for the critical dialogue that is central to the hermeneutic process. Although we worked independently, we used identical data analysis strategies as we crafted our initial interpretations. Because we were hoping to come to understand a nebulous and subjective situation—“what went wrong” in Lisa’s work with this group of preservice teachers—we felt comfortable relying on a less-than-precise data analysis procedure. We used our personal practical knowledge base as teachers and teacher educators to guide us as we approached the ejournal entries and other materials. Entries that elicited basic, gut-level responses such as “hmmm,” “yikes!,” “uh-oh,” and “what?” were marked for future reference. This phase of analysis involved engaging in repeated readings and considerations of the marked entries, looking inductively for any patterns in the data, and making notes about what we saw. As we read and reread the data, we used sticky notes to mark any ejournal entries that stood out for some particular reason: entries that were partic-

ularly troubling or particularly pleasing, unusually vehement or unusually detached, typical or atypical.

When we completed these independent analyses of the data, we came together to compare our initial interpretations. Approaching the data as if they were an “empirical puzzle to be solved” (Moss, 1994, p. 8), we shared the findings of our independent analyses. We offered each other explanations and interpretations of the patterns we saw emerging from our analysis warranting them with evidence pulled from the data set. This process was time-consuming and occasionally contentious. Through dialogue and debate, consideration and reconsideration, challenges and concessions, we began to construct a picture of the meanings within the data.

Once we had arrived at fairly stable initial interpretations of the data, we went back to a period of independent analysis. At this point, we read all of the data again searching for evidence confirming and disconfirming our working interpretations. We examined the data attempting to identify (a) instances in which Lisa operationalized Noddings’s (1984, 1986, 1992) theories, (b) instances in which Lisa contradicted Noddings’s theories, and (c) preservice teachers’ ejournal entries reflecting their attitudes about the children’s parents—negative or positive. We also made efforts to categorize the nature of Lisa’s responses to the students in hopes of finding some revealing trends. Going back into the data with this focus, looking specifically for particular issues, allowed us to uncover relevant information that we had overlooked in our earlier readings.

We came together once again to test and retest our interpretations in light of the newly found evidence and make changes as warranted. Once we felt confident that we had constructed a trustworthy and believable account of the situation, we began to write up our findings. The hermeneutic process continued as Lisa and Debra exchanged copies of drafts, offered input, feedback, critiques, and reinterpretations as we prepared a manuscript for publication. At that point, the peer reviewers from this journal entered our community of

interpreters by offering their perspectives and insights, challenging our interpretations of the data, and strengthening our account.

EXAMINING THE EJOURNAL EXCHANGES

At the start of the semester, the preservice teachers' understandings of the relationship of caring and teaching were fairly simple. Lisa used the ejournal exchanges to encourage the preservice teachers to think more deeply about what they were seeing in their placement classrooms. An ejournal exchange with Andi illustrates this well. In her first ejournal entry, Andi wrote,

I think that caring for a student comes naturally. . . . I would never ignore a student just because he or she is terribly annoying and doesn't pay attention in class. Every child needs the same chances to work well to their best abilities. Caring is essential in teaching.

Lisa responded by referring to material discussed in class the previous day:

In light of our discussion about Nel Noddings and the distinctions between natural caring and ethical caring, do you still believe that caring for a student comes naturally? If that is the case, what do you do about the kids you don't like? You say you would never ignore a student just because s/he is terribly annoying and never pays attention in class. What would you do with that student? How would you meet a child like this as one-caring (to use Noddings again) and still allow the rest of the class to learn?

In this case, Lisa attempted to use the power of dialogue to encourage Andi to think more critically about her classroom practices.

Lisa also regularly used the ejournals as a site for confirmation, affirmation, and validation, noticing the preservice teachers' ethical and professional strengths and offering support and encouragement. For example, she told Faith,

I really appreciate your willingness to go deeply into Ms. Marx's teaching practices and "decipher" what you are seeing. That is a wonderful word to describe the task that is before you—you perceive the need to get past what you are seeing on the surface and find the hidden meanings. You are surely ready to take on this challenge.

As the semester progressed, many of the preservice teachers struggled with the chal-

lenges linked to developing caring parent-teacher-child relationships. This was not entirely surprising. Preservice teachers enter their field-placement experiences with a simplistic picture of the stakeholders in a caring classroom community: They focus only on themselves and the children rather than on the teacher-child-parent relationship (de Acosta, 1996). Once placed in classroom contexts, preservice teachers see that their prior notions of teaching— notions centered around images of caring teachers working with children who have no visible families—do not accurately capture the interpersonal complexity of the profession, and they are forced to broaden their understanding of teaching to include parents in some way.

Lisa had hoped that the course's emphasis on caring might help her preservice teachers see the value of establishing respectful, caring relationships with the parents of their students. Unfortunately, this was not the case. The preservice teachers' ejournal entries revealed many of them abandoning their initial conceptions of caring teaching in favor of new beliefs and attitudes that were narrow, judgmental, and adversarial toward their students' parents.

Lisa's preservice teachers' most frequent concern was that their students' parents were underinvolved in the children's lives. For example, Michelle worried about a boy in her class who was having a great deal of difficulty completing his work. Her interpretation of the root cause of the problem was that the child's parents were negligent. In her ejournal, Michelle reported that her cooperating teacher helped the boy as much as possible at school and expressed concern that the teacher "can't do anything to help him at home and no one there seems to care. I feel horrible! I want to do something to help this poor child."

Frustrated by her apparent lack of power, Michelle saw the child's parents as neglectful villains and cast herself and her cooperating teacher as the child's saviors (Ayers, 1994). Sensing a clear boundary line drawn between home and school, Michelle felt that there was nothing she or her cooperating teacher could do to improve the child's situation. Partnership and communication with the boy's parents

appeared to be out of the question: From Michelle's perspective, no one at his home "seems to care."

In responding to Michelle's ejournal entry, Lisa elected to take an indirect approach. Michelle wanted to help the "poor child" who she thought had no support at home. Lisa, hoping to begin a dialogue, responded simply by asking Michelle what she would do about the situation if she were the classroom teacher. Rather than confronting the student and challenging her assumptions, Lisa chose validating the student's feelings of concern and encouraging reflection. In responses such as these, Lisa demonstrates her effort to negotiate the fundamental tensions between caring and controlling (McLaughlin, 1991).

Concerns about parental negligence were expressed most frequently by those preservice teachers, like Michelle, whose placements were in schools enrolling high numbers of children of color living in poverty. This trend was visible in the ejournal entries of Anglo preservice teachers as well as the preservice teachers of color involved in the study. For example, Maria was placed in a first grade classroom at Green Oaks—a public school with a student population comprising entirely African American and Hispanic children, most of whom receive free/reduced-price lunches. In an early ejournal entry, Maria contemplated the challenges she faced regarding classroom management and wrote,

I feel Green Oaks students require a firm hand because they come from dysfunctional homes where there is no element of structured discipline. In many instances, these children are literally on their own and used to doing what they want to do.

Maria asserted that all of the students at her school site need a firm hand apparently because of the "dysfunctional homes" and undisciplined upbringings that she assumed to be an inevitable by-product of life in low socioeconomic status families of color. Maria was not a parent herself and had never met the parents of any of her students. Unconcerned with the families' funds of knowledge or the nuances of cross-cultural communication, Maria simply believed that the children's parents were not doing their job properly.

Lisa attempted to address Maria's assumptions in her ejournal response. She hoped critical dialogue and questioning would help push Maria's thinking about the issue. Lisa wrote,

I have some big, serious questions for you. . . . How do you know so much about the kids' home lives? If you heard this bit of information from Mrs. Ziffle [the cooperating teacher], how does she know? Also, what does "dysfunctional" mean and who gets to decide what is functional and what is not? I want to call some of the assumptions underlying your statements into the open, and I want you to think about what is behind them and underneath them. . . . I want you to think deeply about the kids you are teaching, their families, and the media portrayals of the "typical" Green Oaks population, and then consider the impact these beliefs, ideas, and images have on your teaching practices.

In this case, Lisa took a more direct approach than she took in her response to Michelle discussed earlier. In this case, Lisa asserted what McLaughlin (1991) called her "legitimate authority" (p. 192) by building on her personal relationship with Maria to begin a difficult but important conversation and to offer much-needed guidance.

The preservice teachers repeatedly questioned the motivations, feelings, and intent of their students' parents. This was particularly apparent when children were experiencing difficulties at school. For example, after learning that one of his students would be receiving medication for a behavioral disorder, Mark wondered,

Are [his parents] really providing him the best care he deserves? I believe if they truly care for this child they should have exhausted all other options before placing him on medication.

As a student teaching intern, Mark was not privy to conversations about the range of options these parents had pursued, nor was he aware of the emotional energy the parents had invested in their decision to medicate their child. Mark simply assumed that the parents did not "truly care" for their son.

If caring can be understood as "the ethical use of power" (Noblit, 1993, p. 24), then Lisa's feedback to Mark can be seen as a caring response. In this particular case, Lisa eschewed critical dialogue and questioning and simply offered a blunt directive:

You must work hard to remain non-judgmental about the parents' choices [regarding medication], and to assume that they sweated blood over the decision, finally opting to do what they thought would be best for their kid.

Knowles & Holt-Reynolds (1991) pointed out that "preservice teachers sometimes use alternate and potentially dysfunctional rationales for interpreting classroom events" (p. 88). This appears to be true of the preservice teachers enrolled in Lisa's course. As they struggled to make meaning out of what they were witnessing and experiencing in their field-placement classrooms, many of these preservice teachers developed understandings and explanations that were adversarial and disrespectful toward their students' parents.

Lisa attempted to challenge these emerging beliefs through dialogue in the e-journals and in class but met with little success. At the end of the semester, she was left wondering how a teacher education experience so carefully designed to model caring and to develop caring teachers could lead to the development of these troubling, problematic beliefs.

REINTERPRETING THE E-JOURNAL EXCHANGES

Lisa was explicitly committed to caring and centered her course around e-journals, an activity well aligned with care-centered teaching practice. Despite this, some of her preservice teachers appeared to develop some beliefs and attitudes that were poorly aligned with the goals of caring teaching. Lisa was confronted with a complex problem, one with many intertwined causes. Some insight into her situation can be gleaned from the research literature on preservice teachers' prior knowledge and initial professional socialization experiences.

A large body of research on preservice teachers' incoming beliefs indicates that these preconceptions will be a strong influence on the student teachers' understandings of and experiences in their classroom placements (see Kagan, 1992). The initial e-journal entries written by Lisa's preservice teachers, full of idealistic and optimistic proclamations about being caring teachers, reveal their incoming understandings

and preconceptions about the relationship of teaching and caring. For example, Ariel wrote that "a caring teacher is one who is truly devoted to improving and educating fellow members of the human race." Maria's definition of a caring teacher reflects a similar belief: "A caring teacher is one who is kind, loving, patient and one who never raises his/her voice at the students."

The e-journal data set reveals that most of Lisa's preservice teachers echoed Mary's confidence that they could "care for all children for the special individuals they are and for what they have to share with the world," and they shared Mark's belief that they should "be available for the child in any capacity and should never turn a deaf ear on a child's problem or concern." Perhaps the burden of living up to these impossibly unrealistic expectations for personal devotion was more than Lisa's preservice teachers could bear and contributed to their difficulties in enacting caring teaching.

The research literature supports this supposition. Hargreaves & Tucker (1991) contended that "a narrow or exclusive orientation to care as personal care can actually lead to less care rather than more" (p. 497). Weinstein (1998) pointed out that preservice teachers who see caring "solely in terms of warmth and affection" (p. 155) might not see the connections between caring and academic expectations or might be unwilling to exert the authority necessary to maintain a productive learning environment. It seems probable that the preservice teachers' incoming view of caring made their teaching experiences more challenging.

Similarly, the preservice teachers' incoming beliefs about their own inability to interact successfully with the parents of their students may have contributed to the development of their negative attitudes. Undergraduate preservice teachers have a wide range of fears and concerns about working with their students' parents (Foster & Loven, 1992). Indeed, scholars have found that many preservice teachers feel poorly prepared for this particular aspect of a classroom teacher's professional responsibility (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; McQueen, 2002). It is possible that some of Lisa's

preservice teachers had concerns about their potential skill with parents among their preexisting beliefs about teaching, and this affected their experiences with and perceptions of the parents of their students.

The literature on preservice teacher socialization provides additional insight into the negative attitudes developed by Lisa's students. The literature suggests that, because placement in the field can be challenging and destabilizing, ideas and beliefs embraced during teacher education coursework are often cast aside (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). During the field-placement experience, preservice teachers are subjected to influence from cooperating teachers and from other classroom-based and institutional factors (Zeichner & Grant, 1991) that can lead to increasingly conservative and traditional beliefs (Zeichner, 1980) or to more bureaucratic and impersonal practices (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990). It is also possible that the preservice teachers developed their troubling beliefs about parents in response to conditions, norms, and prevailing attitudes at their field-placement school sites.

Field placement can be a stressful experience for preservice teachers for a number of reasons (Jelinek, 1986; MacDonald, 1993). Given the likelihood that Lisa's preservice teachers were anxious about their ability to interact professionally with the parents of their students, it seems the stress associated with these experiences may have led to poor decision making and lapses in judgment.

Further insight into the problems Lisa encountered—her preservice teachers learning about caring in the context of a course rooted in the work of Noddings (1984, 1996, 1992) and yet somehow developing negative and hostile attitudes toward the children's parents—can be attained by looking closely at the essential, fundamental structure of Noddings's theory of caring. Noddings views caring as an encounter between two people: a one-caring and a cared-for (Noddings, 1984). Lisa's exclusive reliance on a theoretical model of caring that emphasizes a two-person relationship may very well have contributed to the preservice teachers' unwillingness to acknowledge respectfully the role played by their students' parents. A caring rela-

tion that requires a one-caring and a cared-for is whole and complete with just a teacher and a child. This could certainly encourage preservice teachers to conceptualize parents as outsiders with no role to play in caring teaching-learning relationships.

Our close analysis of the ejournal exchanges over the course of the semester suggests another factor contributing to the development of the preservice teachers' worrisome attitudes. It appears that their problematic working understandings of caring may have been shaped, to some degree, by the nature of their ejournal dialogues with Lisa. Despite her explicit beliefs about and commitments to Noddings-informed caring teaching, Lisa enacted caring partially and sporadically in her ejournal exchanges with the preservice teachers. Although inconsistency of this sort is a natural by-product of attempting to put theory into practice, it is possible that the preservice teachers perceived some degree of ambiguity or insincerity in Lisa's stated devotion to caring teaching.

Noddings (1984) described the manner in which a caring teacher interacts with a student. Receptivity and engrossment are the first steps. Noddings said,

If I care about students [who are attempting to solve a problem], I must do two things: I must make the problem my own, receive it intellectually, immerse myself in it; I must also bring the students into proximity, receive such students personally." (1984, p. 113)

This is followed by motivational displacement: After the teacher receives a student and feels with him, she looks at the problem "through his eyes and ears. . . . She accepts *his* motives, reaches toward what *he* intends" (Noddings, 1984, p. 177).

At times, Lisa's interactions with the preservice teachers were well aligned with Noddings's ideas about caring encounters, demonstrating receptivity, engrossment, and motivational displacement and offering opportunities for dialogue and confirmation. For example, Roberta wrote,

During class today we were introduced to [theories developed by] Nel Noddings. I want to read her book *Caring*. I think it will answer a lot of questions I

have. Also, I hope it will clear up some of the issues I have about caring and children. . . . I want to be patient with everyone, even the most difficult child. I also want to learn how not to get frustrated and raise my voice. My mother said that I can only be human, and not to be so hard on myself.

Lisa's response reflects a Noddings-informed approach to interactions with students:

I am so glad that you took so much from our class session on Noddings. . . . You wrote that you were thinking of reading her book because you have a lot of questions and issues about caring and children. I would love to hear more about those questions and issues—perhaps we can explore them together. . . . Your mom is probably right about you being too hard on yourself. That is a common personality trait among teachers. The work we do is so important and the challenges we face are many—it is hard to feel that anything less than perfect is good enough. But I have a lot of confidence in you—trust your good instincts.

However, in other instances, Lisa's responses seemed out of step with Noddings's ideas. Careful thought about these problematic exchanges revealed the complexity of the relationship between Lisa's practices and Noddings's theories.

Rereading the preservice teachers' ejournals frequently revealed ways in which Lisa held her ground and worked to bring the preservice teachers to see situations from her point of view rather than engaging with them in a caring encounter, which would involve receiving them fully, putting aside her own concerns and desires, and taking on those of her preservice teachers. This suggests that motivational displacement—a key feature of Noddings's (1984) understanding of caring—was a difficult challenge for Lisa as she enacted her version of caring teacher education.

A journal exchange between Lisa and one of the preservice teachers about classroom management illustrates this well. Thuy, the student, described her own style of caring teaching in her journal:

I believe the students in Mrs. Saks' class know that I truly care about them. . . . Every morning that I am here, I check their homework for correct completion. When the assignment is properly done, they receive stickers for their work. . . . The reward is to let them

know I care about their work and to encourage them to succeed.

Lisa's response to Thuy challenges her beliefs in what appears to be an appropriate, productive way:

You surely came across as a strong supporter of rewards/stickers, behavior charts, and the like. In light of Thursday's class activities and discussions about Alfie Kohn's work, how are you feeling now? Can you write me a rationale explaining why you want to use these strategies in your classroom? How would you defend your beliefs if Alfie Kohn, or someone like him, challenged you to a debate?

However, in her reflective teaching journal, Lisa was much less generous with Thuy. She wrote,

Hello? What is up with Thuy? She is so very secure and confident in her understandings of how to teach and what good teaching is . . . and she is so off base! It seems that nothing we have said in class is in any way impacting her thinking about her practices. How can we problematize things for her, get her to REALLY think and REALLY reflect?

Thuy clearly wanted to use classroom management practices that Lisa disapproved of. Rather than accepting the motives and goals of her cared-for in this situation, Lisa just kept on trying to change what Thuy believed and talk her out of what she knew and believed about classroom practices (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). Lisa's teaching journal entry reveals that she felt Thuy was neither thinking nor reflecting simply because Thuy's thoughts and reflections were not in line with her own.

A critical examination of the anonymous, formative course evaluations written by the preservice teachers toward the middle of the semester reveals another way in which Lisa fell short of Noddings's ideals for caring teacher education. In response to Lisa's request to discuss the usefulness of the dialogue ejournals, preservice teachers wrote comments along these lines:

Need to have more freedom of choice. Having the topic "caring" already chosen for us limits us from getting other information we may desire.

It's nice to have the opportunity to carry on a one-on-one dialogue with you, but I feel kind of restricted if I have to talk about caring in an overt way.

What a pain! I don't like them because I don't always have something to write about [caring].

Lisa's preservice teachers found the emphasis on caring to be repetitive and even unpleasant. One preservice teacher stated that, rather than being helpful, the ejournal dialogues were "stress-inducing: 'What more can I say about caring?'" Lisa's response to the preservice teachers' concerns was to cut back on the number of ejournal entries required for the course. The preservice teachers appeared happy and satisfied with Lisa's course of action.

This formative feedback and the subsequent response are significant and revealing. On the surface, this loop appears to be a caring encounter. The preservice teachers expressed their frustration with the ejournal dialogues, Lisa took their concerns seriously and responded by making them a less-frequent occurrence, and the preservice teachers were grateful. However, essential features of a caring encounter were absent from this interaction.

Lisa opened herself to her preservice teachers and gave them her attention. And although she offered a response that seemed to satisfy the preservice teachers, Lisa's decision to cut back on the number of ejournals required sidestepped the fundamental problem the preservice teachers described: an oppressive and limiting focus on caring. Not willing or able to perceive the preservice teachers' comments as critical of her emphatic commitment to caring, Lisa heard them as a complaint about a heavy workload. Lisa's preservice teachers were communicating clearly that they did not feel cared for. However, Lisa had envisioned these ejournal exchanges as powerful opportunities for dialogue and confirmation and was unable to perceive them in any other way.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Lisa put her energy into designing and implementing a care-centered learning activity that would keep dialogue and confirmation central in her preservice teachers' experiences. However, when engaging in this activity with them, it seems that she occasionally lost sight

of the essence of caring on its most basic level—the encounter between two people. Though the ejournal activity was appropriate and the course was planned along lines that demonstrated her commitment to caring teaching, the bottom line reveals that Lisa did not consistently meet preservice teachers as one-caring (Noddings, 1984) with receptivity, engrossment, and motivational displacement.

It would be wrong to draw causal connections between Lisa's inconsistency in operationalizing Noddings's (1984, 1986, 1992) theoretical principles in her teacher education practices and her preservice teachers' oppositional and negative views of parents. However, Lisa's inconsistency in modeling caring teaching may have influenced the preservice teachers' working understandings of caring and, in turn, may have shaped the ways in which they practiced caring teaching in their field-placement sites.

Our findings raise many questions about caring, teaching, and learning and about the nuances of putting Noddings's (1984, 1986, 1992) theories into practice in teacher education contexts. We recommend that these questions be considered by care-centered teacher educators as they make decisions about the most effective ways to communicate and model caring in their work with preservice teachers.

First, there are questions about the distinctions between face-to-face encounters and written encounters. Do Noddings's (1994, 1996, 1992) theories about caring apply equally well to interactions that take place in written form as to those that occur verbally? Are there aspects of care that are communicated through nonverbal physical cues, vocal inflections, or facial expressions that are impossible to convey in written encounters? Are there features unique to written caring that enhance or diminish its effectiveness?

Next, there are questions about the distinctions between caring encounters in on-line contexts and in more traditional interactional arenas. Does caring take the same shape in on-line relationships as in more traditional forms of communication? Are on-line teaching-learning

experiences different from face-to-face interactions in ways that are significant for care-centered practices?

Finally, our findings raise questions about Noddings's (1986) notion of dialogue in teacher education. Does dialogue require face-to-face conversation? Would a one-on-one student-professor conference in an office or coffee house be a context more conducive to meaningful dialogue than a cyberspace conference? Does dialogue require real-time interaction? Would an on-line chat room facilitate better dialogue than a notebook passed back and forth over time? These are important questions to explore.

Scholars have documented the complexity of teacherly caring (Noblit, 1993), the challenges preservice teachers face in learning to enact caring practices (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; McLaughlin, 1991; Weinstein, 1998), and the gap between teachers' caring practices and students' perceptions of those practices (Bosworth, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Our close analysis of the ejournal exchanges between Lisa and her preservice teachers also highlights the complexity and challenge inherent in caring teaching. However, the real value of our findings is to focus our attention on the central feature of caring teaching practices: the nature of the interactions between the teacher and the learners.

This reminder is particularly relevant at the present moment. Many teacher educators are contending with new legislative pressure and scrutiny, greater degrees of standardization, and strong attention to bottom lines, outcomes, and accountability. In many teacher education programs, efficiency, the transmission of the most knowledge and skills in the time allotted, and practical application are becoming highly valued. Under these circumstances, it appears to be in our best interests, and in the best interests of our preservice teachers, to shape our courses and programs in direct response to those specific demands. As we are being pressed to perform and conform in new and possibly challenging ways, it would be easy for teacher educators to shift our energies to focus on these stressful external factors and to lose sight of more commonplace, ordinary matters related to our classroom practices and behaviors.

However, the nature of the teaching and learning interactions that take place in teacher education classrooms is profoundly important. The first and perhaps most self-evident reason is that our preservice teachers are paying attention not only to what we say but to what we do. Our students are learning to teach, in part, by watching us teach. As Thayer-Bacon, Arnold, and Stoots (1998) pointed out, the utility and value of attending carefully to the role of caring in our teaching practices "is especially important for professors in teacher education programs to understand, as we are the professors who are modeling good teaching to the next generation of teachers" (p. 5).

Second, teacher educators must be mindful of our day-to-day experiences and relationships with our students to enable them to learn from us. The commonly cited literature on the social construction of knowledge describes the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as a shared intellectual space experienced by the teacher and learner (Wertsch, 1985). However, close examination of recent translations of Vygotsky's work reveals that the ZPD also includes feeling, emotion, and interpersonal relations (Vygotsky & Luria, as cited in van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994). These affective aspects of the ZPD are of primary and fundamental importance: Teachers must establish trusting, caring relationships with learners for those learners to be willing to take the risks required to enter into the ZPD. In other words, interpersonal connection must occur so that learning and growth can occur (Goldstein, 1999). If we lose sight of our relationships with our students, their learning will suffer.

When reforming teacher education practices to center around caring, it is not sufficient to attend only to the activities (Arnstine, 1990) or to the organizational features (Rogers & Webb, 1991) of the program. At the most important and fundamental level, caring teacher education resides in the relation between the professor and the students. We must remember that the nature of the teaching-learning interactions experienced by preservice teachers in their courses at the university level is of paramount importance. Organizational and programmatic

factors, pedagogical and curricular factors, logistical and philosophical factors must be taken seriously. But to have meaningfully care-centered forms of teacher education, instructors in the program need to remain vigilant and committed to approaching each interaction with students as a caring encounter. To paraphrase Noddings (1984, p. 17), this is a caring teacher educator's first and unending obligation.

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