

The Communication of Care and School Success: Exploring the Link between Care Theory and Invitational Theory

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Abstract

Care is one of the five core elements of invitational theory, and plays a central role in invitational education. In this conceptual paper, the author explores the link between care theory and invitational theory, highlights key elements of the care-theory dialogue, and reviews key research findings about the characteristics of caring teachers. Recognizing that care, itself, is far more complex than a simple checklist of caring behaviors might suggest, the author concludes by considering a number of implications for educational practice.

Introduction

William Purkey, one of the pioneers of invitational theory, echoed Theodore Roosevelt when he wrote, “Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care” (Purkey & Novak, 1996). Although they did not name it in their original publications, William Purkey and John Novak (2015) have since identified care as one of the foundational elements of invitational theory). Novak also refers to a “caring core” as a central aspect of invitational education (Novak, Armstrong, and Browne, 2014). Care plays an important role in the theory and practice of invitational education.

In this article, I explore the link between care theory and invitational theory, highlight key care theory insights, and review key research findings about the characteristics of caring teachers. I conclude by considering a number of specific relevant implications for educational practice.

The Relationship between Invitational Theory and Care

In their recently updated introduction to invitational theory, the authors included a visual representation of their theory (Purkey & Novak, 2015) (Figure 1). This graphic provides a number of important entry points for an exploration of the relationship between invitational theory and care theory.

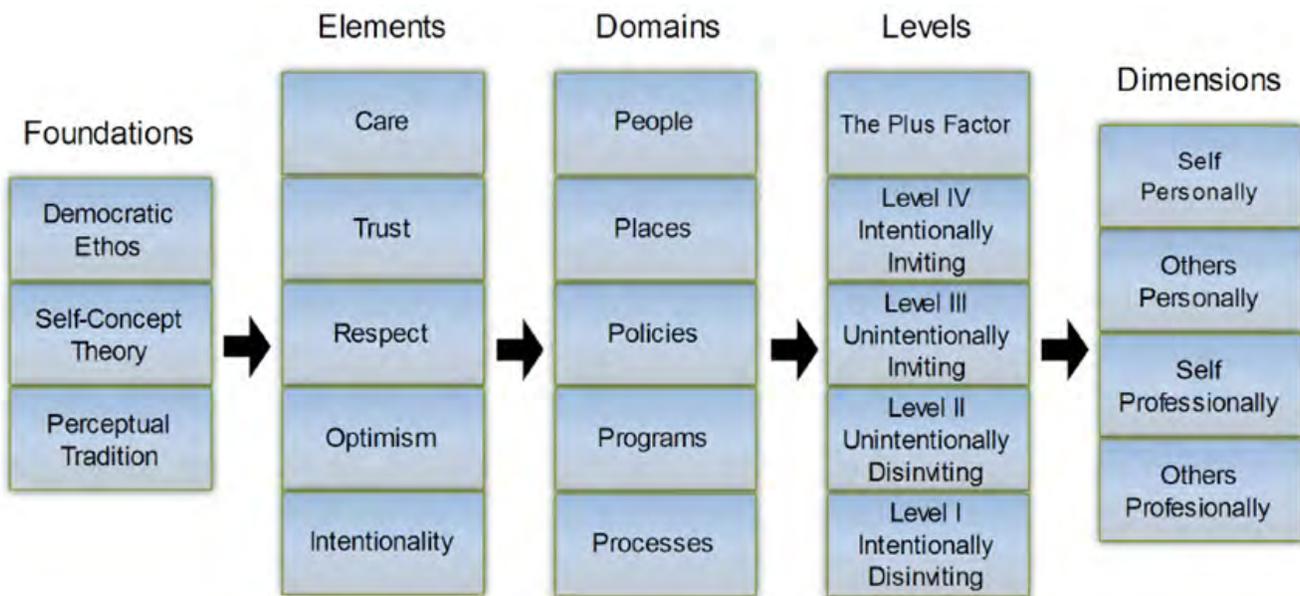


Figure 1. Foundational Invitational Theory concepts (Purkey & Novak, 2015, p.1).

Invitational Theory Foundations

Invitational theory is built upon three important **foundations**: a *democratic ethos*, *self-concept theory*, and *perceptual theory* (Shaw & Siegel, 2010, pp. 107-108). Care theory connects directly to **perceptual theory**. Building on the work of Art Combs and his colleagues (Combs, 1999; Combs, Richards, & Richards, 1976), Purkey and Novak (2015) note that “Human behavior is the product of the unique ways individuals perceive the world. To better understand why people do the things they do it is necessary to explore perceptions within and among individuals” (p. 2). The communication of care is profoundly shaped by perceptions. A teacher’s perception of care and of their students influences the teacher’s *care capacity* and *care communication*. More significantly, a student’s experience of their teacher’s care is completely dependent on the student’s own perceptions. If the student does not perceive their teacher as caring, care has not occurred, regardless of teacher intentions and intention-directed behaviors. As Noddings (1984) suggests, such care has not been *completed*. To a great extent, care is defined by perception.

Invitational Theory Elements

Invitational theory is also shaped by five primary **elements**: *care*, *trust*, *respect*, *optimism*, and *intentionality* (Purkey & Novak, 2015). Since earlier lists of invitational theory elements did not specifically identify **care** as one of the theory’s elements, it is of particular note that care appears as the first element on the 2015 list. As Purkey and Novak (2015) point out, “Care is at the core of the inviting stance. Of all the elements of invitational theory, none is more important than a person’s genuine ability and desire to care about others and oneself” (p. 2). In their review of the basic tenets of invitational theory, Shaw and

Siegel (2010) defined care as “concern expressed warmly in the welfare for others” (p. 109).

Other Foundational Concepts

Care also informs and impacts other foundational invitational theory concepts.

Invitational theory identifies five **domains**: *People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes* (also known as **The 5P’s**). While it could be argued that care should inform all five domains, as suggested in the previous paragraph, care most certainly exercises an important impact on the **People** domain, which is foundational to all the others.

Noddings (1984) emphasizes that care is, first of all, a *relationship* between two people. In their summary of the *People* domain, Purkey and Strahan (1995) explain:

In planning efforts that improve the quality of life for the PEOPLE of the school, we can ask ourselves how we see ourselves and our students, how we envision our relations with each other, and how we can extend and nurture those caring relationships in ways that summon forth human potential. (p. 2)

Care also connects with the four **levels** of invitational theory, also known as the four stances or messages: *intentionally disinverting, unintentionally disinverting, intentionally inviting, and unintentionally inviting*. Care can also be assessed using this same matrix. In their explanation of the *unintentionally disinverting* stance, Smith and Mack (2006) capture the importance of care: “At this level, people behave in careless and thoughtless ways and their actions are seen as being disinverting toward others despite their best intentions.” (p. 38) Toward the end of this paper I explore a number of implications of care theory and educational care research.

One of the challenges facing educational care theory is the fact that there is often a disconnect between care theory and care practice in education. Teachers intend to be caring, but too many students do not perceive, receive, and experience this intended care. Noddings (2005) observes that many students believe that “nobody cares.” Noddings (1988) also describes this situation as a “crisis of care.” Drawing on the language of invitational theory, Noddings notes that one of the challenges in education is that too many teachers are perceived as *unintentionally uncaring*. Yet there are steps that can be taken to more effectively and intentionally communicate care in a way that parallels the intentionally inviting stance. Care theory also connects with the four **dimensions** of invitational theory, informing the way one can be both *personally* and *professionally* inviting with the *self* and *others*.

A Review of Educational Care Theory Basics

Care theory first emerged in 1971 with the publication of Milton Mayeroff’s *On Caring*. Mayeroff defined care as “the act of helping another to grow and self-actualize” (p. 1). The theory garnered critical attention in 1982 when Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* responded to Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, which, Gilligan asserted, had

limited the moral development of women. Gilligan (1982) proposed a more “caring” stance that valued the needs of the individual in making ethical decisions. The pre-eminent voice in the care theory dialogue has been Nel Noddings, who entered the conversation with the publication of *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* in 1984. Her seminal text, re-released as *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* in 2003 and again in 2013, provides much of the foundational vision and language of care theory. The key concepts of care theory will be briefly reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Two Care Needs

Care theory identifies two human care-related needs: the need to care for others and the need to be cared for by others (Groenhout, 2004; Noddings, 1984/2013). Noddings (2013) writes, “To receive and to be received, to care and be cared-for: these are the basic realities of human being and its basic aims” (p. 173).

Care is a Relationship

Noddings emphasizes that care is a direct personal and reciprocal relationship between the *one-caring* and the *cared-for* (Noddings, 1984/2013). A relationship involves two contributing parties, and the participation of both is needed. The relationship need not be equal to be reciprocal.

Three Characteristics of a Caring Relationship

Noddings (1984/2013) identifies three characteristics of a caring relationship: *engrossment* (attention and receptiveness to others), *motivational displacement* (the ability to set aside one’s own motives and intentions in order to recognize and respond to the feelings and desires of the other), and *response* (the cared-for’s completion of the relationship by responding to the one-caring, even if only through their actions).

The Completion of Care

One of the hallmarks of care theory is its insistence on *completion*. Care is not “completed” until the cared-for receives and responds to the actions of the one-caring. If the cared-for does not perceive and receive care, care has **not** occurred (Noddings, 1984/2013).

Caring About vs. Caring For

Noddings (1984/2013) also introduced a helpful distinction between caring about (intentions) and caring for (action). It is far too easy to care about something. Unfortunately, this theoretical care is easier to talk about than to put into practice. Caring for someone or something demands intention-rooted actions.

Natural vs. Ethical Caring

Noddings (1984/2013) also distinguishes between *natural* and *ethical* caring. *Natural caring* refers to caring that comes naturally, like that of a parent for her child. *Ethical caring* involves an ethical decision TO care for another. Noddings notes that teachers may not always “feel” natural care, but they can always make an ethical and professional decision **to** care for their students.

Not Gentle Smiles and Warm Hugs

Educational care theorist Lisa Goldstein (2002) provides an important clarifier, stressing that care is **not** gentle smiles and warm hugs. Such behaviors may appear to be caring, and may be evidence of a caring relationship, but they are not sufficient. Goldstein (2002) describes educational care as an intellectual act that is a “crucial factor in the teaching-learning process” (p. 2).

Soft Care vs. Hard Care

Similarly, Antrop-Gonzalez (2006) describes a continuum of educational care ranging from **soft care** (*gentle, kind*) to **hard care** (which combines both *authentic relationships* and *high expectations*).

Leaping In vs. Leaping Ahead

Sandra Wilde (2013) bemoans the loss of care in education, which she describes as a “sign of deeper social malaise” (p. 1). She suggests that care may be part of the process of healing for people as well as for our world. Wilde also provides a helpful distinction between *leaping in* and *leaping ahead*. With the best of intentions, teachers who *leap in* will step in for their students, taking steps and exercising authority to get their students to do what they are called to do. By contrast, teachers who *leap ahead* take pains to provide their students with the space and opportunity to make their own choices and decisions. Such teachers provide scaffolded, authentic, and caring support and feedback.

The Communication of Care: Characteristics of Caring Teachers

Mayeroff's (1971) landmark text, *On Caring*, introduced one of the first articulations of a definition of care. However, Mayeroff also introduced seven ingredients of care: (1) *knowledge*, (2) *patience*, (3) *honesty*, (4) *truth*, (5) *humility*, (6) *hope*, and (7) *courage*. It will soon become apparent that a “checklist” of care ingredients is insufficient for the communication of care. Nonetheless, Mayeroff's list was the first such articulation, and it contributed significantly to the care theory dialogue. Subsequent research into care in education has generated a number of empirically-grounded characteristics of care.

How Students Perceive Caring Teachers

Kris Bosworth (1995) completed an empirical study of two schools and over 100 students, describing how students perceive caring teachers. Caring teachers (1) help with homework, (2) value individuality, (3) show respect, (4) listen to and recognize students, (5) display tolerance, (6) explain class assignments, (7) check for understanding, (8) encourage and motivate, and (9) plan fun activities. Bosworth's study provides valuable insights into student perceptions of caring teachers.

Eight Caring Themes

Barbara Tarlow (1996) developed a grounded theory of care by interviewing 84 care-givers and care-receivers in schools, families, and care facilities. Tarlow defines care as "a process best understood as a phenomenon with a past, present, and future" (p. 57). Tarlow generated a list of eight themes of care: (1) time, (2) "being there," (3) talking, (4) sensitivity, (5) acting in the best interest of the other, (6) care as feeling, (7) care as doing, and (8) reciprocity. Tarlow's grounded theory contributes a number of important insights into the complexity of the phenomenon of care, drawing attention both to teacher dispositions and to teacher behaviors.

Perceived Teacher Care Dimensions

Jason Teven and James McCroskey (1997) interviewed 235 university students, analyzing data in order to define the students' perceived teacher-care construct. The researchers identified three dimensions of perceived teacher care: (1) empathy, (2) understanding, and (3) responsiveness. Teven and McCroskey (1997) also developed a perceived teacher care scale. Their oft-cited construct and scale serve as important resources for the exploration of educational care.

How Educators Conceptualize Caring

Teacher educator and researcher Robin McBee (2007) completed a research study seeking to understand how teachers conceptualize educational care. She interviewed 144 student teachers, practicing teachers, and teacher educators. Her study identified five characteristics: (1) *offering help to learners*, (2) *making efforts to get to know and show interest in learners*, (3) *showing compassion*, (4) *giving time*, and (5) *listening*. While it is perhaps not as significant to the completion of care as student perceptions, perceptual theory also reminds us of the importance of *teacher* perceptions. McBee's research focused attention on teacher perceptions of the care they communicate to their students.

Student Perceptions of Caring Teachers

Drawing on her review of the educational care literature, Heather Davis (2009) produced an article on teacher care for an encyclopedia focused on the psychology of classroom learning (Anderman & Anderman, 2009). Davis (2009) differentiates between

two key student perceptions of caring teachers: (1) *feeling understood*, and (2) *feeling that their understanding matters*. She further discriminates between each of these, noting that **feeling understood** focuses on (a) *student locus and sense of responsibility*; (b) *class culture, climate, and classroom management orientation*; and (c) what she describes as *cultural synchronization* (which implies that teacher behavior is “in synch” with student behavior), while **feeling that their understanding matters** addresses (a) *academic content*, (b) *the role of student interest*, and (c) *expectations of success*. Davis’s study provides an important foundation for further reflection on the communication of educational care.

Each of these studies contributes to a greater understanding of the perception and communication of care in education. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that these empirically-grounded lists are insufficient. Care cannot be defined by a checklist of characteristics—there is no single recipe for care; it is far too complex, relational, and negotiated. As Noddings (1992) notes, “Caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors” (p. 17). Still, such lists are valuable as touchstones for better assessing and understanding a teacher’s communication of care. This is particularly true for inviting teachers who are willing to draw on self-assessment, peer feedback, and student feedback. Because care is both perceptual and negotiated within the context of specific relationships, this type of ongoing reflection is necessary to truly appreciate the nature of one’s care communication. To do so, however, takes courage and vulnerability.

Implications for Practice: The Communication of Care

Care is an ongoing, negotiated, unique relationship with every single student in the class. And each relationship is always at risk. In some cases, it takes only a single error in judgment (or perceived error in judgment) to lose the banked trust between a teacher and a student, and to set back an emerging caring relationship, sometimes irrevocably. Care is relational. Care is perceptual. Care only exists when it has been completed—perceived, received, recognized, and responded to by the cared-for.

Too often there is a mismatch between a teacher’s caring intentions and the perceptions and experiences of their students. Many good-hearted, well-intended teachers are surprised by their students’ inability to recognize, appreciate, and respond to the teachers’ intended communication of care. In fact, some such teachers may even be perceived by their students as uncaring. Such teachers’ care capacity has not been successfully communicated to their students.

The care theory literature identifies a perpetual gap or disconnect between theory and practice. Noddings (1988) describes this as a “crisis of care in education” (p. 32). More recently, Wilde (2013) has described a “loss of care in education” (p. 1). In *No Education Without Relation*, Bingham and Sidorkin (2010) describe a “fog of forgetfulness” (p. 5), suggesting that too many teachers appear to have forgotten that education is about relationships. Noddings (2005) provides some clarity when she notes that teachers want to care, and students want to be cared for, but that caring relationships between the two

groups often fail to develop. There is a gap between educational care **theory** (a teacher's caring intentions) and educational care **practice** (student experiences and perceptions of teacher care).

Invitational theory's *levels of functioning* can serve as an important clarifier here, providing insight into the nature of this disconnect. Part of the complexity, of course, is the fact that people are imperfect. Their communication of care, therefore, will also be imperfect. And because of the nature of perception and relationality, imperfect care will always be an obstacle to the establishment of a caring relationship. One mis-step can set a relationship back significantly.

A review of the educational care theory literature suggests that care often fails to be communicated because well-intended teachers are often *unintentionally disinventing* (or, perhaps more accurately in this context, *unintentionally uncaring*). Because care must be perceived, received, and completed in the context of a relationship, it is important for caring teachers to be much more reflective about their care communication. They must seek to be *intentionally inviting* (or, perhaps, *intentionally caring*). The other elements of invitational theory (trust, respect, optimism, and intentionality) also come into play here. *Trust* needs to be earned. It also needs to be banked, so that when care fails to be perceived and received, sufficient trust capital has been accumulated in order to sustain the relationship, allowing it to weather the storm of imperfect care. In their summary of *respect*, Purkey and Novak (2015) write “People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly” (p. 3). Authentic respect for the person and the potential of others is essential for the communication of care.

Similarly, caring relationships must be rooted in optimism. Caring teachers must believe in the capacity and potential of their students, confident that each can find her own, best way (particularly when receiving scaffolded support from a caring learning community). Perhaps most importantly, caring teachers need to be characterized by *intentionality*. Because the communication of care is so complex and perceptual, teachers need to be transparent and intentional about their objectives and actions. They need to regularly “use their words” to describe their caring intentions, particularly in moments that are perceptually problematic (e.g., conflict, criticism, emotionally charged). If sufficient trust has been banked, and respect recognized, the fact that the teacher has stated their caring intentions may be enough to transform the situation—or at least to plant seeds of care for the future.

The care theory literature provides a number of important implications for practice. It is worth noting that, like the lists of characteristics of caring teachers, none of these practical implications is sufficient on its own. And all of them require recognition of the complexity, perceptuality, and relationality of care. Each of these implications has significant invitational and perceptual overtones. And each can be easily overlooked or simply assumed to be present. Indeed, each demands reflection, attention, and intentionality.

A Vision for Flourishing and Well-being

Invitational theory is rooted in *humanist psychology*, building on the groundbreaking work of Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Art Combs, and others. Maslow (1943) introduced self-actualization as humanity's highest need. Similarly, Combs (Combs, Richards, & Richards, 1976) emphasized the importance of *adequacy*, which is described as the need to pursue personal fulfillment. Others have emphasized the centrality of *self-realization* and *self-fulfillment*. Each of these concepts points to the importance of pursuing the *flourishing* and *well-being* of self and others. Caring educators are directed and motivated by their desire for the flourishing and well-being of each of their students. It is not about the teacher. It is not about the teacher's agenda, nor the objectives and demands of their curriculum and instruction. Their relationships with their students are, first and foremost, founded on the pursuit of flourishing and well-being for all—each student individually, and the class community as a whole.

Two Dimensions of Educational Care

Heather Davis (2009) distinguishes between a teacher's making their students *feel understood* and making the students *feel that their understanding matters*. Similarly, Lisa Goldstein (2002) draws on the work of Noddings (1984/2013) and Vygotsky (1978) to make an important distinction between the *interpsychological* (intellectual, based on Vygotsky) and *interrelational* (affective, based on Noddings) dimensions of care. It is helpful to distinguish between two essential and interrelated dimensions of educational care: **relational** care and **pedagogical** care. On the one hand, teachers care about their students as people. They care about who their students are and how they are doing, and seek to get to know them “for who they are.” On the other hand, teachers communicate care about their students as learners. Through their interactions and their pedagogical choices and decisions, teachers demonstrate an awareness of and concern for the diverse and particular needs of each of their students. *Relational care* and *pedagogical care* are two important dimensions of educational care. Although they are certainly interrelated, they are also perceptually and experientially distinctive. Educational care is not completed unless both dimensions are communicated successfully.

A Commitment to Relationality

That care is a *relationship* is foundational to care theory. In this context, care is not completed until both participants recognize it as care. This seems to be self-evident. But it is actually quite easy to overlook, or at least superficially to apply. A caring teacher does not simply care for their class, or for “all of their students”; rather, a caring teacher cares for **each** student. And the teacher must be constantly aware of the need to build and maintain a unique caring relationship with every single student, both interdependent with and independent from their relationships with the rest of the class. As invitational theory reminds us, every single interaction is an opportunity to extend a caring invitation.

However, every single interaction is also an obstacle in the way of care. In the day-to-day busyness of a classroom teacher (particularly one who assumes they ARE caring), this reality is far too easy to overlook.

Autonomy Support, Power, and Control

An important part of human flourishing is the individual's ability to retain a clear sense of *self-efficacy* and an appropriate *locus of control*—to own responsibility for one's own choices and behavior. Wilde's (2013) distinction between *leaping in* and *leaping ahead* suggests that a significant element of this is the teacher's ability to support the autonomy of their students, providing them with the time and space to develop their own autonomy in the context of community and relationality. The concept of *autonomy support*, an important element of *self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), provides significant insights in this regard. One of the potential causes for the disconnect between teacher caring intentions and student perceptions of teacher care is likely linked to the fact that some teachers fail to sufficiently value and support the autonomy of their students. Teachers who fail to distinguish between *autonomy support* and *teacher control* threaten the development of *student autonomy*, and likely limit the development of student potential, as well as their students' well-being and flourishing. The autonomy support-related literature (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002; Reeve & Jang, 2006) provides important insights and resources that can assist teachers in their communication of care. It is also important to note that Deci and Ryan's (1985) understanding of autonomy support is firmly rooted in a context of community and interdependence. The pursuit of autonomy, as defined by self-determination theory, includes a healthy awareness of relationships and mutual dependence.

Teacher Perceptions

The work of Art Combs and his colleagues draws attention to the centrality of perceptions for those working in (what he refers to as) the *helping professions*. Combs and Gonzalez (1994) have noted that what separates *effective helpers* from *ineffective helpers* is their perceptions (of self, of others, of their task, of their methods). Methods, themselves, are a *behavior*, which exhibits *symptoms* of the helper's underlying *perceptions*. Combs and Gonzalez (1999) observe that “One cannot tell the difference between good helpers and poor helpers on the basis of what they know...Neither can one find reliable differences between good and poor practitioners on the basis of methods” (p. 17). The difference-maker is the perceptions of the helper. In an earlier study, Combs and a number of his colleagues (Combs et al., 1969) specifically focused on teacher perceptions, identifying four key perceptions of *effective teachers*: perceptions of self, students, their subject, as well as the task of teaching. These perceptions have been affirmed and elaborated on in the work of Mark Wasicsko and his colleagues in their research on *teacher dispositions* (Wasicsko, 2002, 2007; Wasicsko, Wirtz & Resor, 2009). Teachers must be more aware of the nature

and impact of their own perceptions. This is particularly central for the communication of care. A teacher's perception of the nature and impact of their work with students, of their communication of care, of the nature and innate potential of their students (including the students' need for relationality and autonomy), and of their students' perceptions of care are all likely to exercise a formative impact on the teacher's ability to communicate care.

Student Perceptions

In order to support the growth, development, and flourishing of their students, caring teachers must come alongside them, seeking to influence student behavior by recognizing, responding to, and building on student perceptions. As the autonomy support literature reminds us, it is not a question of the teacher drawing on *power* and *control* in order to direct the student's behavior, but rather of positioning the student to shift their own perceptions in order to change their own behavior...and perceptions. As noted above, this process is significantly influenced by the teacher's own perceptions. But an awareness of the nature and impact of student perceptions (of self, of others, of the teaching task, of their relationship with their teacher, of their own personal experience with care and the communication of care from others) is likely to have a foundational influence on the student's behavior and their ability to perceive and receive care from their teachers. A teacher must be aware of, sensitive to, and responsive to the perceptions of their students. This is particularly important given how easy it is to overlook student perceptions and to focus instead on the student's (mis)behavior.

Empathy

Noddings identifies *motivational displacement* as one of the three central elements of a caring relationship. She defines this as "stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference and into the other's" (Noddings, 1984, p. 24). Goldstein (2002) notes that this involves setting aside one's own motives and desires in order to "give primacy, even momentarily, to the goals and needs of the cared-for" (pp. 12-13). For a number of years, Noddings was challenged by Michael Slote (2007) vis-à-vis Noddings' reluctance to use the word *empathy*, which Slote felt was more familiar and accessible than "motivational displacement. Initially, Noddings clearly differentiated between the two terms, rejecting empathy as too *projective* and *analytic* (Goldstein, 2002). Slote (2007), however, suggests that Noddings over-focused on one type of empathy—*projective empathy*—and that *associative empathy* is much more in line with what she refers to as motivational displacement. Shen (2011) defines **associative empathy** as "a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the message from the inside, as if the events in the message were happening to them" (p. 406). In 2012, Noddings recognized that this "newer" understanding of empathy is consistent with her understanding of motivational displacement. One of the most important characteristics of caring teachers

is their ability to authentically empathize with their students; to understand their perceptions and needs and wants. This, too, demands ongoing reflection and sensitivity. It is impossible to care, or to participate in a caring relationship, if the one-caring does not empathize with the cared-for. Busy teachers will find this a challenge they must persevere to overcome. It is far too easy to draw too-quick analytic conclusions or to over-project in assessing and responding to student behavior. This, too, is a significant obstacle to the communication of care.

Attention

Another central element of a caring relationship is receptivity, or what Noddings (1984) refers to as *engrossment*. Noddings defines engrossment as an “open, non-selective receptivity to the cared-for” (Noddings, 1992, p. 15), which she later (2005) simply describes as a passionate interest (p. 172). Both Noddings (2012) and Jane Tronto (2013) specifically mention Simone Weil and her focus on attention as an important part of the communication of care. Weil (1942) notes that attention requires that one empty oneself of anything self-focused, suspending one’s own thoughts and concerns in order to pay complete attention to the other, as they truly are. She writes, “The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth” (Weil, 1942, p. 5). Attention demands that we empty our own minds, waiting without seeking anything other than the true nature of the person or object with which we are interacting. This sense of accepting the other *as they are*, without any preconceptions or prejudgments, is a critical element of authentic care. Students who notice that they are the focus of a caring teacher’s attention will be affirmed by it, and are likely to be invited into a caring relationship. Too often, busy teachers fail to attend to and notice their students, allowing their eyes to look past and beyond their students while focused on task completion and lesson plans. While understandable, this, too, is an obstacle to the communication of care. Weil (1952) reminds us that “Every being cries out silently to be read differently” (p. 188). Caring teachers daily pay attention to and notice every single student in their class, *and their students know it*.

Conclusion

Care is important. It is also complex and perceptual, and can only emerge in the context of an authentic relationship. Care is also potentially transformational. As Wilde (2013) suggested, “by enlivening acts of care we begin to heal ourselves and our collective world” (p. 1). Caring and inviting teachers may have a profound influence on their students. Caring and inviting *students* may become caring and inviting adults, who may then become part of a more caring and inviting society and world. To be sure, care has the potential to change the world.

Educational care requires not only caring and invitational educators; it also demands courage. This, because care is complex and always at risk. It balances the

human need for *love* and the need for *justice* (Wolterstoff, 2015), a fact which also requires teachers to hold students accountable for their behavior and their responsibility to other members of their classroom and school communities. Attempting to do so while pursuing both love and justice can be a precipitous and perilous position. Yet this is what caring teachers, committed to the flourishing and well-being of their students, are called to do.

Educational care is always inviting. It is appropriate to conclude this paper by returning to a variation on the *invitational theory matrix* (see figure 2). Teachers who are *intentionally uncaring*, whose behavior is mean, bigoted, demeaning, manipulative, and destructive should be removed from the profession, lest they exercise profound and lasting harm to their students and, through them, to others. Teachers who are *unintentionally uncaring* do not intend to be uncaring, yet their actions and impact have this same effect on their students, who are subsequently harmed by such teachers—despite the teacher’s potentially good intentions. Care theory, invitational theory, and perceptual theory provide important resources for breaking through the lack of intention and the failure to communicate care. Teachers who are *unintentionally caring* are often fortunate to have a positive impact on their students, who benefit from their caring behaviors and interactions. Such teachers may have caring intentions, but their actions are not as intentionally and consistently caring as they could and should be. Should such teachers be positioned to focus their perceptions and their intentions, their communication of care is likely to increase, potentially exponentially. Teachers who are *intentionally caring* understand their students, understand care, and recognize the nature and impact of perception. They are also committed to an ongoing reflection of their care communication, and, more importantly, to exercising their empathy and attention in order to ensure that every single one of their students perceives, receives, and responds to their care.

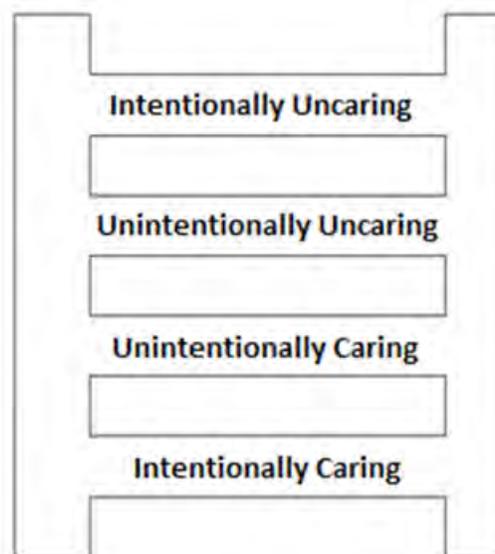


Figure 2. An Educational Care Matrix (adapted from the Invitational Care Matrix).

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