

CURRENT "VOICES FROM THE INSIDE":
HEARING THE VOICES OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ABOUT CARING IN
THE CLASSROOM

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to the people who demonstrate care for others to help them succeed and especially those who have cared for me.

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I would like to thank all the people I have witnessed help children be and feel successful, no matter what their abilities. They inspired me to try to understand what “magic” they possessed. In addition I want to thank my children, Leah and Sarah, with whom I try to practice caring, Jay and Fern, who have been great cheerleaders, and my colleagues who have been very patient with me through this process and have added their amazing insights. My travels with Dr. Karrin Lukacs and Nancy Holincheck, especially our journey to Leontine Street in New Orleans provided me with humor, friendship and new “children.” I could only have started this expedition with the support of Sal Catapano, who believed in me as a principal and I have continued a path I never imagined with the constant support and energy from Dr. Kristy Calo, a friendship that has become very dear. My deep appreciation to Rick Castle for introducing me to his sister, Dr. Shari Castle, who generously provided me with this opportunity and the support that enabled me to take a risk. My gratitude to Dr. Joe Maxwell for helping me “hear” better when listening to my participants and to be able to, hopefully, relay their voices for others to hear. However, I will never be able to reciprocate my appreciation for the care that has been demonstrated to me by Dr. Gary Galluzzo; he has been the epitome of what I have tried to describe in this paper. He demonstrated care without thinking about what he was doing, he learned about who I was, had unconditional acceptance me, etc. I was motivated to continue working and be successful because I knew he was there to help when I needed him to be, and when I didn’t know I needed him to be. You are the best! And a last note of appreciation to the ever caring Bailey, who has lain across my feet and been patient, sometimes sighing heavily, wondering when we will play. The time has come!

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ABSTRACT

CURRENT “VOICES FROM THE INSIDE”: HEARING THE VOICES OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ABOUT CARING IN THE CLASSROOM

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George Mason University, 2010

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The voices of teachers and students have identified caring as a primary need from schools (Poplin & Weeres, 1992), however, teacher caring has not been previously defined or its impact on students by teachers and their students in a way that informs educators at all levels. In this study, 12 teachers, three at each level of elementary, middle and high school and 193 of their students, were asked through open ended questions to describe how teachers demonstrated care for students and how they thought caring impacted students. The data from the present study allow for speculating on a theory of teacher caring that appear to include: 1) teachers and students agree that helping and “being there” are forms of caring; 2) teachers perform these acts of caring unconsciously; 3) the students report the caring as motivating them to work for these caring teachers; 4) teachers receive invisible reciprocity of care from students; and 5) there are school level

differences. The descriptions of caring and its impact deserve further scrutiny in different environments and with “non-caring” teachers.

1. Introduction

“Within a decade - by the year 2006 - we will provide every student in America with what should be his or her birthright: access to competent, caring, qualified teaching in schools organized for success” (The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996, p. 10).

Statement of the Problem

As clearly stated in this report from The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF, 1996), it is just as important that a child have a caring teacher as it is to have one who is competent and qualified. This report described a teacher who, within 10 years, would be considered qualified by having met professional standards and was licensed according to state requirements in the areas of knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy and teaching skills. Five years later, the U.S. Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which explicitly defined a highly qualified teacher as a person who holds at least a bachelor's degree, has obtained full State certification, and has demonstrated knowledge in the core academic subjects he or she teaches (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). In contrast to NCTAF’s (2006) statement about the importance of caring teachers in classrooms, the policy makers who enacted NCLB did not seem to believe that caring is important because there is no mention of caring in the document (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). As the mandate that presently sets the

standards for states and school districts on what students should learn, NCLB omits an essential ingredient of how teachers need to care about students in order to facilitate learning.

While NCTAF (1996) called for teachers who are caring in addition to being competent and qualified, the federal and state governments have chosen to define what determines qualified (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) and competent teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). As such, a caring teacher is never defined. This is consistent with the education literature in which there is no consensus on the definition of “care” because it is open to a wide variety of personal interpretations and judgments, and depends on each educational environment (Schussler & Collins, 2006). It is also problematic to clarify what caring by a teacher is because it is like trying to define an elusive notion (Goldstein & Lake, 2000) or that it is something invisible (Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995). Perhaps Rogers and Webb (1991) captured the challenge in the study of teacher caring best: “...our knowledge of caring is tacit; it is implicit in action, no other words, although we have difficulty defining it, we know it when we see it” (p. 177). Although it may be difficult to define what caring is, it makes it no less important to try to do so, at least for a specific group of teachers and students. It is the purpose of this study to define caring from the “Voices from the Inside” (Poplin & Weeres, 1992, p. 2) of teachers and students in elementary, middle and high school contexts that are connected as schools within the same cluster in a school system.

Rationale

The worth of teachers who care about students in the classroom has been demonstrated in empirical studies in both academic and personal domains. In the academic area, Strahan, Cope, Hundley, and Faircloth (2005) found that the teachers who were perceived by students as caring were those who had high expectations for them. Bosworth (1995) interviewed students who believed that caring teachers were ones who assisted all students until everyone understood the concepts. Academic achievement gains were demonstrated through the convergence of academics and personal care in Strahan and Layall's (2006) study. They observed teachers who created caring relationships at the beginning of the school year by learning about their students' interests and strengths which then helped the teachers establish a foundation that fostered learning which engaged students and fit the students' learning styles. These students gained significantly over their peers on standardized tests. Motivation to learn was also influenced by student perception of teacher care; the stronger the perceived relationship was, the stronger the motivation (Murdock & Miller, 2003). As suggested by these studies, caring has been demonstrated to affect students on an academic level through high teacher expectations, teacher support to learn, motivation and engagement in learning and academic achievement.

In the personal domain, students described teachers who care as those who took time to understand them (Schussler & Collins, 2006), who had an overall concern for their lives (Hayes, Ryan, & Zsella, 1994) and who helped them be hopeful about their

futures (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). High school students reported having stayed in school and not dropping out because of their interactions with caring teachers (Knesting & Waldron, 2006). In addition, caring teachers were depicted by students as having control of the classroom and providing a safe atmosphere in which students would take risks in their learning (Alder, 2002). Students have a choice about participating, or not, in school; their perception of the learning environment is crucial to their choice of being engaged in learning. The research suggests there needs to be, among other elements, a caring atmosphere which encourages learning (Schussler & Collins, 2006) and therefore, more research on teacher caring and its effects on students is needed.

From a theoretical perspective, the central importance of caring in education has been more often discussed from moral and ethical points of view. Nel Noddings (1988), a leading scholar in the area of caring, notes that the caring teacher's major concern is for the students' development as completely moral people, as well as achieving in academics. Care should be focused on the growth of students, the recipients of the care and each student must be supported through care to meet his/her potential (Mayerhoff, 1971). Along with underscoring the importance of caring by the teacher to the student, Mayerhoff (1971) and Noddings (1988) described how caring should be demonstrated in education. There should be an ethic of care that is portrayed as a relationship that is built through time into a personal relationship based on valuing another, who is worthy of love, respect and dignity (Mayerhoff, 1971). Caring is not static; it is a relationship that is defined by each encounter when each person decides how to interact with the other (Noddings, 1988).

Added to this theoretical view, when Poplin and Weeres (1992) reported the problems in K-12, schools caring was the number one issue raised by teachers, students and others. As part of this comprehensive study, Poplin and Weeres investigated the definitions of caring as perceived by the teachers and students of one school level and found there were differences in teacher and student views of caring.

The major problem in studying teacher caring is its definition. Different researchers have used different participant groups and different contexts for their research. Various studies defined caring from the viewpoints of different participants such as teachers (e.g. Noblit, 1995), students (e.g. Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001), the teacher and students in the same class (e.g. Rogers, 1994), and/or observers (e.g. Schussler & Collins, 2006). The definitions varied to some extent depending on who the teachers or students were and what the context was. There are few studies which investigated and compared teachers' and students' views of caring, but none that compared the definitions of teachers or students from elementary, middle and high school populations. There was no comprehensive view of how teachers and students in the same classrooms defined caring at all educational levels. With a construct as central to human interaction and to teaching as powerful as caring, it is time to build a much richer description of teacher caring by looking at teachers and students conceptions of what caring is. A more robust description of teacher caring has the potential to enlighten preservice and practicing teachers to the reality to an unspoken dimension of teaching which can have profound effects on students. Teachers need to have an understanding of students' concept of care.

A part of the mandate of NCLB is that teachers are “Highly Qualified” to teach their subject areas, which means they have taken a prescribed number of courses in those subjects. However, a question that arises is: do teachers and/or students believe that a teacher being proficient in a content area is all that is needed to help students learn, or are there other factors? In this case, does caring help students learn?

Significance

National groups such as NCTAF (2003) describe caring as an essential part of learning: “...a caring, competent and qualified teacher for every child is the most important ingredient in education reform” (p. 10). Theorists have created a complex picture of what caring in the classrooms should or could be like and research (e.g., Poplin & Weeres, 1992) has described teachers’ and students’ concern for the need for caring in the schools. However, it is unknown if these concepts match what teachers and students in elementary, middle and high schools believe about caring teachers and their students. Therefore, the significance of this study is that it will contribute the voices of the teachers and students across grade levels to inform teachers and administrators in schools and teacher educators of what behaviors, in the specific contexts studied, are identified as caring and what impact caring teachers have on students.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to build a description of caring and describe how caring impacts students through the voices of elementary, middle and high school teachers and their students. It will also compare how teachers and students described caring. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers at different grade levels describe how teachers care for students?
2. How do teachers at different grade levels describe how a caring teacher impacts students?
3. How do students at different grade levels describe how teachers care about them?
4. How do students at different grade levels describe how a caring teacher impacts them?
5. How do these teachers' and students' descriptions compare and contrast?

Definition of Caring

A definition of what *care* is in this context will be created from the data as it emerges. However, a general definition of *care* stated as “involving a relationship between people that is marked by a desire to understand the other and help the other reach his potential” (Schussler and Collins, 2006, p.1464) will be used for the purpose of describing the types of teacher participants needed.

Caring, care and caring relationships are interchangeable in the literature.

2. Review of Related Literature

The purpose of this study is to describe what teacher caring is through the voices of elementary, middle and high school teachers and their students. It will also compare the descriptions of teachers and students about what caring is and how it may impact learning. Teacher caring for students is written about in reports from various commissions (e.g., NCTAF, 1996, 2003), books (e.g., Ridnour, 2006), issues of professional journals (e.g., Scherer, 2003), and theories (Mayerhoff, 1971; Noddings, 1988). In publications such as these, caring is characterized as an important behavior teachers demonstrate toward their students. The purpose of this review of literature is to provide an understanding of teacher caring towards students from the perspectives of theorists and empirical research.

Studies pertaining to what caring is in the classroom are rather limited in the research literature. At the same time though, studies related to the importance of the quality of relationships between teachers and students are far more available in the databases and journal indexes. However, it must be noted early on that the relationships described in many of these references are not always described as *caring* relationships. The many types of relationships in the literature and the resultant lack of a widely accepted definition of caring are the hurdles one encounters when finding related research specific to caring relationships.

This review of the literature focuses on the definitions of teacher caring for students and the importance of care given by teachers to students from theoretical perspectives and the points of view of teachers, students and classroom observers. The articles are organized first by how caring is theorized and then divided by the three grade divisions of elementary, middle and high schools. In order to preserve the “Voices from the Inside” (Poplin & Weeres, 1992, p. 2), the studies reviewed include teachers, students, and/or observers in the classroom as the data sources.

Theoretical Perspectives of Caring

Probably the most prolific writer about caring has been Nel Noddings, an educational philosopher. Through her writings Noddings (1988, 1998, 2001) provided a broad theoretical framework of how caring occurred in general and specifically between teachers and students in the educational context. In general, Noddings (1988) defined a relationship as any pairing or connection between people who have a feeling toward each other and a caring relationship as one in which the person’s actions were motivated by “love and natural inclination” (p. 219). It was important in this definition that the focus was on the relational sense of caring and that within each relationship; the two people needed to find the appropriate way of caring in the particular situation. Noddings’ (1999) more specific definition of caring included a distinction between caring about and caring for someone. She stated that when a person “cares about” someone, it was in a more detached sense, such as being concerned about distant issues of concern or unknown persons in the public domain, such as worrying about war or poverty. “Caring for”

someone came from a feeling of need to do something for a specific person with whom a relationship had been established.

Caring relationships are portrayed by Noddings (1988) as reciprocal between the the “carer” and the person for whom the care was demonstrated; the carer responded to the needs, wants and initiations of the cared for person, and the recipient responded in some way to the care giver in order to acknowledge the care that has been expressed. This reciprocity was characterized as dialogues and exchanges which represented an unequal relationship, such as that from a teacher who was in more control than is a student.

Noddings (1988) defined a teacher’s (the carer’s) total presence that focused on the student (the cared for) during a specific relationship as engrossment. In engrossment, the care takers were depicted as demonstrating a displacement of motivation of their own feelings and actions on behalf of the other person. They were not concerned for their own self growth in the situation. The person toward whom the care was focused was the center of concern. This was described as natural caring. It developed out of love or a natural inclination to be concerned for the person, a mother-like response. Noddings explained that care was a very subjective interaction where each participant, teacher and student, was influenced by the individual’s own backgrounds, experiences and other relationships. Each relationship was characterized as unique to each occasion which the participants share; at that time, each needed to decide how to respond to the other.

In later writings Noddings (1998) used the terms modeling, dialogue practice and confirmation to support her theory of care in the educational context. She believed that

teachers needed to model care in relationships with their students in order for them to learn how to be caring; the teachers also needed to engage their students in specific dialogues about caring. Caring, according to Noddings, may be expressed in many ways. She emphasized the importance for teachers and students to clarify what they each thought caring was and to get feedback from the recipients to evaluate if they interpreted caring as it was given.

Noddings (1998) also described the concept of confirmation as a demonstration of care. Confirmation is the teacher giving affirmation and encouragement to bring out the best in the student. Trust and continuity were also needed to solidify the relationship. The caring person needed to be believable and available to help the cared for in all situations. Noddings (1988) argued that how teachers supported students influenced how the students could be positive and successful, even if there are mistakes along the way. The caring relationships helped ensure for the students that they could hold a better vision.

Noddings' (1988, 1998, 2001, 2002) writings can be summarized, perhaps in an oversimplified manner, as describing caring as the relationship of two people, in which one of the individuals cares about the other, focusing on the needs and wants of that person and in response, the cared for person replies in some manner. The caring relationships are also portrayed as interactive, checking for interpretations of the caring intentions. Noddings' work serves as a framework for some of the empirical research about teacher caring toward students in kindergarten through twelfth grade where teachers, students and/or observers have interpreted caring in various educational contexts.

Empirical Perspectives of Caring

A seminal study. The purpose of one of the earliest studies reviewed (Poplin & Weeres, 1992) was originally not directly related to care in classrooms but was designed to explore what was not working in schools from the perspectives of all of the people connected to the schools such as teachers, students, parents, administrators, cooks, secretaries, etc. Interestingly, care was the number one need cited for schools in kindergarten through twelfth grades. This was expressed by all groups of participants. In the early 1990's, the faculty of the Claremont Graduate School decided that there was a gap in the perceptions of the university researchers and teacher educators who studied schools and the actual teachers, students, administrators, parents and others who worked in two elementary schools and one middle and one high school. It was determined by the university staff that the best way to understand what happens in schools was to have the people associated with the schools assert their "voices from the inside" (Poplin & Weeres, 1992, p.1). The schools, located in greater Los Angeles with an enrollment of 4400 students, were provided with grant money through the Claremont Graduate School to conduct an 18 month self study. Therefore, the research team in the study included teachers, students, parents, administrators, custodians, cafeteria staff, etc., from within each school. This team questioned other members of the school community through interviews and discussions and analyzed the information gathered about what the problems in the school were. After the first year, the research teams from each school met and cross checked what they had found to be the major concerns and then compared the

concerns of the schools. In the final analysis, seven main concerns surfaced as what everyone thought was wrong with schools.

The first concern, raised initially by students, was about the need for relationships within the school, most notably between teachers and students, and care was cited as one of the major values of all participants of all backgrounds. The desires for caring relationships were also supported by being among the most positive elements noted about the schools; people who “care, listen, understand, respect others and are honest, open and sensitive” (Poplin & Weeres, 1992, p. 12). For teachers, having the time to get to know and support their students was when they felt they were doing their best teaching, and students described their best teachers as those with whom they had relationships. Teacher caring toward students grew more important with the age of the student.

Through this study, Poplin and Weeres (1992) established the importance of understanding the “voices from the inside” (p. 4) of the classroom and that caring by teachers towards students in schools at all levels is needed from both the teachers’ and students’ perspectives. However, most empirical studies that describe care and its importance in the classroom only address one school level per study with the exception of Murdock and Miller (2003) who conducted a study of middle school students’ views of caring and suggested a follow up at different grade levels. Most studies only include the perspective of one group of the voices; teacher, student or observer. Only the Rogers and Webb (1991) study at the elementary level, Pajares and Graham’s (1998) middle school studies, Schussler and Collins’ (2006) and Deiro (1996) at the high school level provided the perspectives of both teachers and students. The research that provided the perspective

of observers is included because although they are not usually participants in the classroom, their somewhat objective views of what happens in the classroom add to the literature. In this review of literature, the empirical research has been grouped by grade level and respondent (teacher, student and or observer) in order to be able to provide comparison and contrast.

Caring in the elementary school. The studies of caring in elementary schools were mostly focused on the perceptions of what teachers said were caring relationships with their students. In only the self titled ‘Caring Study,’ which was described in Dempsey (1994), Noblit (1993), Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden (1995), Rogers (1994), and Rogers and Webb (1991), were students at this level asked for their definitions and beliefs about caring.

Teachers’ perceptions of caring. The primary purpose of McBee’s study (2007) was to determine how caring was manifested in the educational context. A combination of 144 preservice and practicing elementary teachers and the instructors in a university-based teacher education program responded to an open ended anonymous survey describing what they thought caring was in the context of the classroom and how they showed care for their students. Twenty characteristics were described by at least one third of the respondents, and the top seven were disaggregated by respondent type. Two themes emerged.

First, teachers’ intentionally learned about their students and used the information as a basis for personal and instructional interactions. Second, the teachers used numerous approaches and methods to demonstrate care in the classroom, such as offering help when

students seemed stressed, going beyond the expected to help students and showing compassion for students. Further, there were differences between practicing teachers and the preservice teachers. The number one response for practicing teachers was that they thought it was important to get to know and to show interest in their students, whereas preservice teachers generally believed that offering help or showing compassion were of utmost importance. The next most important demonstration of care for the practicing teachers was to listen to students' concerns and stories. Getting to know students was the second most important for preservice teachers. The other highly recorded characteristics of care included concern for individual students and giving students time beyond the normal class to help them. Important caring behaviors were identified and summarized into relatively few characteristics. Each characteristic had several meanings attached to it. For example, listening involved not judging but paying attention, listening without interrupting, giving honest and prompt answers, celebrating the student's joy and consoling and helping with sorrows. In this study, care was expressed from the viewpoints of practicing and pre service teachers which provided a variety of meanings for caring.

Goldstein and Lake (2000) believed that preservice elementary teachers start their professional training with ideas about what caring is. Participating in electronic mail journaling with their instructor, 17 preservice teachers expressed their views of caring based on the ideas they brought into the program with them and what they saw in their first field placements. At the beginning of the term, the preservice teachers' reflections of caring were described in terms categorized by the researchers as essentialism, over

simplification, and idealism. Essentialism described beliefs that caring was rooted in instinct, oversimplification related to the concept that elementary teachers were nice, kind, warm, etc., and idealized perspectives reflected their optimism and hope for their work in their new professions displaying behaviors such as patience, devotion and love. The later journals entries demonstrated some emerging awareness that caring was a deeper, more complex concept. Some of the student teachers realized that caring was related to understanding their students' personal lives and interests, working hard to create engaging lesson plans and perhaps being demanding and/or challenging a student in order to stimulate learning. Other preservice teachers held on to their unreal images of caring and teaching throughout their fieldwork. All of their positions were considered by the researchers to be good starting points for teacher educators to begin conversations about the realities of caring in the classroom.

The influence of teacher gender. Gender and its relationship to caring was also found in the literature. Vogt (2002) studied men and women in England and Switzerland using various approaches. Her research included seven British preservice teachers, 17 primary teachers, and eight practicing Swiss primary teachers for a total of 22 women and 10 men. The purpose of the study was to better understand care within in the educational setting and how these perceptions were impacted by gender. The British teachers were first asked open-ended questions in a semi structured interview and then asked to comment about caring when viewing pictures of themselves in the classrooms. The Swiss teachers made drawings of how they perceived themselves as teachers and interviews followed, building from the drawings. The responses from all of the teachers

resulted in definitions of caring which covered a continuum ranging from mothering which was gender specific to women at one end to caring as commitment and non-gender specific at the other extreme. The British teachers' interviews resulted in the following six categories of what they believed to be a caring teacher:

1. commitment;
2. relatedness;
3. physical care;
4. cuddling;
5. parenting; and
6. mothering.

The image based discussions with the Swiss participants demonstrated that the teachers' professional identities were focused on their relationships with their students. All of the men and women in the study described using an ethic of care in their classrooms, and there were no differences by gender concerning their perceptions of the importance of care in teaching. However, there were varied perceptions of how caring relationships were portrayed by the different respondents, which were framed as a continuum by the author.

At one end of the continuum, there was the perception of the caring teacher as mother (Vogt, 2002). This phrase was perceived as a positive by some teachers because they felt it meant their students were comfortable with them or that they treated the students as if they were their own children. A negative view of care in teaching as mothering was expressed because it was considered gender specific and lacked the

acknowledgement of the professionalism of teaching. The next phase of the spectrum was that caring was characterized as parenting; the teachers who were parents related their teaching to their roles as parents and those who felt they still cared for their students and were responsible for them, but in a different role than a parent. The third level of caring as a teacher was expressed as being a “cuddly teacher” (p 259). The teacher respondents described this as being distinguished by the age of the students. Participants noted that younger students needed a cuddle, whereas those in the 10 and 11 year old range needed support to help them to pass their exams, such as differentiated work. In contrast, for this phase, there were also concerns expressed regarding teachers touching students. In the next step of the continuum, the teacher characterized as caring referenced physical caring. This type of teacher care was also defined by students’ ages; younger students needed more care for basic needs than the older ones, or teachers wanted to focus on teaching, not physical needs. The other extreme of the continuum of teacher caring was described as relatedness. Many teachers highlighted the importance of caring relationships with their students. Teachers in these relationships were described as approachable and concerned about the circumstances of each child; they built trust and respect with their students. One teacher specifically noted that a good relationship between the teacher and the student was vital to learning; without it, students would not be able to learn effectively. Relatedness was the most significantly noted type of caring that these teachers stated would demonstrate care to students. This continuum of caring would be visually portrayed from one end to the other as being committed-developing relationships-maintaining physical well-being-giving a cuddle-parenting-mothering.

The multiple perspectives of the teachers in Vogt's (2002) study demonstrated that the participants believed that caring was a critical part of teaching. It was concluded that a caring teacher was dedicated to teaching and to building professional, non gender-based relationships with students.

Demonstrating care for students from the specific perspective of gender was also explored in two studies of beginning male elementary teachers. In both studies, specific attention was given to the male teacher's understanding of care in relation to being a male primary teacher.

Hansen and Mulholland (2005) borrowed the continuum of teachers' demonstration of care toward students from mother to professional from Vogt (2002). They sought to understand the experiences of 16 final year male elementary preservice teachers. In this study the preservice teachers participated in open ended interviews which gave them the opportunity to give a full narrative of their career choice and the experiences they had in elementary classrooms and university-related courses. Although many of the participants had not considered teaching as a caring profession when they entered their training, they had started to realize how much caring was a part of teaching by the end of their program. This awareness led to tensions for the male teachers, particularly in how they would show affection toward students. They were also aware of society's apprehension about males who choose caring professions and believed their relationships with students would be more scrutinized than those of their female counterparts. This contributed to their feelings that they were limited in their demonstrations of care, kindness, compassion or gentleness toward their students.

Although several of the beginning teachers were willing to abandon the interpersonal elements of their teaching in order to protect their reputations, they found alternative ways of displaying care as they became more experienced. For one teacher it was to view any touching (hand holding) of students as unprofessional, and for others they replaced touching with listening and talking with students or engaging more appropriate people to provide the physical contact. The beginning teachers also demonstrated caring through time spent sharing activities with students before and after school and provided time and privacy for the students to share concerns with them. These adaptations of demonstrated care were examples of Vogt's continuum of caring teachers who were dedicated to teaching and to building professional relationships with students that are not gender based. The Hansen and Mulholland (2005) study demonstrated the need to further address the issues related to how male teachers are able to express care with their elementary school students.

Another study of male preservice teachers focused on how these teachers demonstrated care in the primary classrooms (Smedley & Pepperell, 2000). This study encompassed a continuum of care from the mother figure to care being a matter of enthusiasm. The 17 male preservice teachers in this study expressed through open ended interviews that they desired to care and were capable of caring for primary students. However, as in the Hansen and Mulholland (2005) study, there was a tension in the teachers' perceptions of care which were caught between assumptions about masculinity and the traditional roles of primary teachers. Physical contact with student was at the forefront of the concerns; one participant wondered if he needed to rethink how he

behaved with children and wondered if men were expected to be less demonstrative of how they cared for students. Another participant was more confident in his roles in and out of school; he stated he would act more reserved in the classroom and be more interactive with his scout troop. In this study the preservice male teachers defined care from the perspective of being masculine or feminine. The issues of what care contributes to learning were not discussed in this study.

Teacher's and observer's perceptions of caring. Caring as a basis for curriculum was evident in an in-depth narrative study, framed around the ethic of care, of an ungraded K-2 primary level teacher and her class (Goldstein, 1998). The teacher had taught for 10 years and her 24 mixed-age students were predominantly white and Asian, from middle- to upper-income families. The researcher was involved in the daily activities of the classroom through observation, reflection with the teacher, and on-going dialogue journals between the researcher and the teacher.

Through the observations, teacher reflections, and communications with the teacher, it was evident to the researcher that the teacher incorporated care in her planning and in her interactions with her students (Goldstein, 1998). Although there were routines and rituals established in her classroom, the teacher planned the educational environment around what she knew about each student. In order to facilitate this, she planned activities which engaged the students and stretched their knowledge of the material and of their own abilities. The children were first and foremost in the teacher's mind when she discussed teaching practices. She believed that her reciprocal relationships with her students helped guide her style of classroom management and organization and the

decisions that she made as she taught. Goldstein summarized by stating that the understanding of the feminist ethic of care demonstrated by this teacher put forth a “powerful alternative” (p. 260) understanding of how care can be conceptualized in the classroom from teacher to student. She further theorized that care should be considered as “an action rather than an attribute, a deliberate moral and intellectual stance rather than simply a feeling,” and that care is “more than gentle smiles and warm hugs” (p. 260).

Beyond the smiles and hugs there are “warm demanders,” a term used by Kleinfield (1975) to describe the relationships she observed between minority Alaskan students and their teachers. In more current literature, there was a comparison of the practices and beliefs of the instructional practices of two African-American teachers, both of whom were described as “warm demanders” (Ware, 2006). The teachers represented different ends of the spectrum in their years of teaching; Mrs. Willis who taught upper elementary students had 30 years of service and Mrs. Carter had taught middle school for six years. Both taught African-American students.

In this study (Ware, 2006) the term “warm demander” was operationalized by scrutinizing the instructional practices of two exemplary teachers through observations and teacher interviews. Both of these teachers exemplified being warm demanders in their roles with their African-American students, as were the successful teachers of the Eskimo and Native American students (Kleinfield, 1975), by building relationships with their students that demonstrated their individual care for each one, emotionally and physically, and communicating high expectations that each one would learn. However, how they relayed their high expectations was demonstrated differently than in the

previous study (Kleinfeld, 1975). The African-American teachers (in the Ware study) were authoritarian and explicit in their expectations of students. Through firm discipline and strong language, the teachers communicated that they expected a lot from their students. They were able to do this because they had first established a safe and secure environment in which students could be challenged.

Students' and observers' perceptions of caring. In another study of caring at the elementary level, Baker (1999) focused on students who liked school and those who did not. The study included 61 third through fifth graders, all of whom were considered at risk of eventually dropping out of school because of the community environment and the pervasive high poverty. The students chosen for the study were those whose responses to a questionnaire about school satisfaction were in the highest or lowest quartile of expressed satisfaction with school. Other data collection included classroom observations which tracked whether students or the teachers initiated the interactions between them and whether the interactions were positive or negative. There were also individual student interviews which assessed the satisfaction and stressors of school, including relationships with teachers, and two scales that measured the perceived quality of their relationships with their teacher. The compiled results indicated that students who were highly satisfied with school believed that they had more support from teachers than the students who were less satisfied with school. Caring and being emotionally supportive about personal concerns were cited as predictors of classroom satisfaction. This study demonstrated how students are affected by the relationships formed in the classrooms with teachers early in their educational lives.

Teachers', students' and observers' perceptions of caring. At the beginning of the school year in 1989, a team of six researchers from University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill began the year long "Caring Study" (Rogers & Webb, 1991, p. 173) at a nearby elementary school (Dempsey, 1994; Noblit, 1993; Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995; Rogers, 1994; Rogers & Webb, 1991). The school included children from a middle to upper middle class white neighborhood and a lower class African American neighborhood; 65% of the students were African American and 35% were white. The eight teachers who participated represented both racial backgrounds in a school that had 70% of the teachers who were African-American and 30% white (Noblit et al., 1995). The research model was multifaceted. Each researcher spent one day a week throughout the school year in a designated classroom, first as an observer and later as a participant. Other data were gathered through an open ended questionnaire given to the students in April and was followed up with 20-30 minute individual interviews toward the end of the school year. Each teacher's perspective was gained through five interviews which took place throughout the year. The interviews included the same questions as those on the student questionnaire and other questions related to the teacher's teaching and the students in the classes (Rogers, 1994).

Although some teachers thought caring was difficult to define, overall, teachers believed that it was expressed through their interactions with and how they related to their students and reciprocally, how their students related to them (Dempsey, 1994; Noblit et al., 1995; Rogers, 1994). Caring was a part of all that teachers did with their students. It was a part of their responsibility as a teacher to help learn, develop positive

self-worth and be as skilled in their academics and social abilities as possible. Caring also included the character of the relationships the teachers built with their students. They valued the individuality of each student and treated of each of them as a significant part of the class. This included carefully listening to what a student had to say and perhaps some type of physical contact such as a pat on the back. Caring teachers were also described as unselfish and optimistic. They were the teachers who created a caring learning environment that was interesting and promoted the students to do their best work. The teachers who had good relationships with their students also knew each of their students and the circumstances in which they lived.

The students in the “Caring Study” (Dempsey, 1994; Noblit, 1993; Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995; Rogers & Webb, 1991) described through interviews and questionnaires how their teachers’ cared for them (Rogers, 1994). These students said that their teachers expressed care through how they talked with them and what they talked about. The teachers did not directly say that they cared for them, but would make comments in a simple and positive manner on what the students were doing. Caring teachers were also those who students said listened to their personal concerns regarding in and of out of school issues. They were the teachers who were “open and approachable” (Rogers, 1994, p. 35). The students also believed that teachers who cared tried to understand their individual points of view in situations, which could be sympathetic, empathetic or understanding their varying moods. Caring teachers also allowed their students to make mistakes in learning and to try again. Ultimately, students thought a caring teacher was “willing to take chances and design and implement an interesting

curriculum while providing a safe and secure environment for learning (Rogers, 1994, p 37).

In order to demonstrate that caring was not particularly related to teaching style or racial background, Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden (1995) compared two teachers from the “Caring Study” (Dempsey, 1994; Rogers, 1994; Rogers & Webb, 1991). Pam, a 25 year teaching veteran, was a second grade African-American teacher who used routines and collective rituals around which to organize her teaching. Martha, a 15 year teaching veteran, was a white woman who taught fourth grade. Her teaching style was more discovery based, employing learning centers and more individualized instruction.

Through the data collection of the interviews with teachers and students, student questionnaires and classroom observations, it was apparent to the researchers that the genuine care communicated by both teachers to the students increased many of the students’ social skills and self worth and supported their academic growth as well (Noblit et al., 1995). The importance of instructional strategies and classroom management were not underplayed by the teachers, but were viewed as vehicles for expressing and representing the value of caring. The link between caring and the technical elements of teaching, such as subject matter knowledge and guidelines for teaching and effective strategies, were considered to be central to the connections needed between teacher and student to create opportunities for learning. Students wanted to participate in learning and to be within the patterns of the classroom in order to maintain their relationships with teachers and classmates.

Caring was a concept from which discipline and learning grew or were modified (Noblit et al., 1995). The relationships that Pam and Martha established with students changed as things within the environment changed. The teachers did not perceive caring as an end goal but as a way to work with students; it was embedded in their interactions with students.

It was in the everyday ways that teachers worked with them that students described caring. It was important to students that the teachers supported their learning through positive interactions and that they talked and listened to them. The talking and listening was the “currency” (Noblit et al., 1995, p. 684) by which the teachers helped, learned about and created a history and a future with students. Although the teachers believed that their caring impacted all of the students in their classrooms, the teachers felt that there were students for whom more time than what was available was needed to make connections and to meet their needs.

The students in Pam’s and Martha’s classrooms said that their teachers demonstrated the acts of caring in their understanding and patience (Noblit et al., 1995). This was expressed by the teachers’ encouraging dialogues with students and being sensitive to students’ needs and interests. Through the eyes of the students, the teachers also exhibited care, through the eyes of the students, by making school engaging and meaningful.

Despite their different approaches to teaching, Pam and Martha demonstrated that caring was a part of the learning and discipline in their classrooms. Students participated in learning and social activities to the expectations of the teachers, perhaps, according to

Noblit et. al, (1995), because they wanted to maintain their relationships within the class. The study concluded that caring was a value about how teachers interacted with their students and that these relationships were the focus in the classroom in order to ensure the learning successes of children. Caring was a basis for the teachers' educational and moral decision making; it was the basis from which all else evolved.

Noblit (1993) also considered the data from the "Caring Study" from a different perspective. In what at the time was considered an unconventional connection of caring and the power of the teacher in the typical teacher centered classroom, Noblit made a case for caring as moral authority. This association of caring and power was constructed from Noblit's year long observations of Pam, a 25 year veteran African-American teacher, and her second grade class of African-American children. The idea of caring as moral authority evolved from the teacher's belief that she was in charge of her students and needed to provide an environment where children learned academics and were socialized. Noblit learned from this teacher's relations with her students to distinguish between power used for the sake of it and power used for the moral service to others. In the classroom, he witnessed the use of the teacher's power to help students choose what was good for them. The teacher needed to be tough and spirited in order to maintain the use of what was good and to control what was not good. She established routines and rituals to support the focus toward the good. Her power and authority were demonstrated in her willingness to be responsible for creating a caring classroom environment in which children wanted to participate. Noblit believed it also worth noting that the teacher's connection to students persevered with students from previous years, for they continued

to visit her every morning. He suggested that culture may have an influence on the view of moral authority in schooling, but that teachers can use their power to create care and authority in the classroom.

The “Caring Study” (Dempsey, 1994; Noblit, 1993; Noblit et al, 1995; Rogers, 1994; Rogers & Webb, 1991) demonstrated that the caring from teachers to students in the different classrooms was expressed through varied feelings and actions; caring was similar but different depending on the context and relationships. Care was perhaps best summarized by one teacher who said she worked on “Hunches. You just, you just do it. I mean, I don’t know...you try it, and if it doesn’t work you back off” (Dempsey, 1994, p. 106). The study also gave a very different view of caring that went beyond the reason many people express for going into teaching; they *care*. The descriptions by the teachers, students and observer/participants in this study depicted caring as the “basis for the thoughtful educational and moral decision making” (Rogers & Webb, 1991, p.174) on which teachers acted on to create engaging curriculum and a safe learning environment for children.

The studies that represented caring at the elementary level provided a broad and diverse view of what teachers, male and female, preservice and practicing, stated to be caring in the classrooms. The observers’ descriptions of caring between teachers and students added a different dimension to the definitions of caring, but do not provide the personal voices of those on the inside. Only two studies Baker (1999) and the “Caring Study” (Dempsey, 1994; Noblit, 1993; Noblit et al, 1995; Rogers, 1994; Rogers & Webb, 1991) solicited students’ beliefs about caring and the “Caring Study” was the only one

that gave insight into the beliefs about caring of both teachers and students in the same classrooms. This study had been conducted well before the mandates of NCLB which focus only on meeting standards, not how to meet them. The present body of research related to what teachers and students say is caring and what the influence of caring is on learning at the elementary level is very limited. However, the descriptions of caring that come out of the studies begin to create a profile of what elementary teachers state are demonstrations of their care for students in their classrooms.

There were multiple descriptors in different studies of how teachers demonstrated care for students at the elementary level. A more noted characteristic of caring was that teachers learned about students as individuals in and out of school. Another element of caring was that it was implicit in how a teacher interacted with students and was most evident in the communications with them. A caring teacher listened to students with patience and without judgment. When asked a question from a student, they provided honest and expedient answers. Other data from these studies indicate that teachers who were caring were committed to student learning and provided a physically and emotionally safe environment in which to learn and planned engaging and meaningful curriculum for all students. There was also a continuum that described care as an interaction from mothering behaviors to being objective and removed. It should be noted that many of the practicing teachers in the studies were identified as caring in order to participate in the studies.

The perspectives of inexperienced preservice teachers provided a somewhat different description of how care would be displayed by teachers towards students. In the

early stages of their training they were more instinctual and oversimplified their definition of caring as purely helping. Over time, their views on caring became more complex and were increasingly centered on making similar connections as did the in-service teachers; they wanted to learn about students' lives and plan engaging curriculum.

From the gender based orientation, the profile of a caring male or female teacher which focused on the need for care between teachers and students would not be different for males or females, but how care is demonstrated might be. The question of masculinity versus caring was raised.

The students' perspectives on a caring teacher provided the profile of a person who, through listening to their academic and emotional needs, would provide positive support, understanding, and patience. The caring teacher would provide an open and safe environment that encouraged students to participate in dialogues with the teacher, and the curriculum would be engaging and meaningful.

The perspectives of elementary teachers and students about how care was demonstrated from teacher to student provides evidence that teachers and students have similar beliefs about how caring may be manifested in the classroom and how it may contribute to providing a safe learning environment. A description of caring at this point may include the actions that the teacher does at all times, with or without intention, dependent on the context and the relationships within the class, and which provide an environment that fosters optimum student learning.

Caring in middle school. At the elementary school level two of the seven studies reviewed provided the perspectives of how students perceived teachers as caring. In

contrast, at the middle school level all of the literature reviewed provided the students' perceptions of caring by teachers and only two studies also presented the descriptions provided by teachers.

Students' perceptions of caring. The philosophical perspectives of Noddings (1992) and Mayerhoff (1971) described caring relationships as being the interactions of the people involved, their interpretations of those interactions and the subsequent use of these personal understandings on which to base their behaviors. It was from this point of view that Alder (2002) created a study to determine how urban middle school teachers and students would describe what care is from each of their perspectives and how caring relationships were created. The study included teachers and students from two middle schools in a metropolitan area in a mid-Atlantic state. The students at the first school were from middle and low income families, 95% of whom were African-American. The second school population was 70% African-American, 29% European American and the remaining students were new immigrants to the country. The study was conducted with a teacher from each school whom the principal of the school identified as "being particularly caring" (p. 249). Mrs. Apple had taught science for 8 years and Mrs. Baker had taught language arts over 10 years. Of the 50 students in both classes, only 12 returned the permission slips and participated in the study.

For one semester, the researcher collected data which included informally observing the students in the classroom, conducting two focus groups and individually interviewing the students at least two times (Alder, 2002). Broad questions were asked of the students, such as "Do you have teachers you believe care about you? How do they

show they care? Tell me a story....” (Personal communication Nora Alder, March 5, 2008). Mrs. Apple participated in four formal interviews and Mrs. Baker only two due to illness. Other members of the staff and parents were also interviewed for triangulation of the data. A constant comparative method of analysis was used to understand the participants’ personal meanings of factors that led to the development of caring relationships between student and teacher.

Alder’s findings indicated that 10 of the students felt that their teachers cared and that two were not sure. All students perceived caring to be an important quality of a teacher, believed that caring teachers are helpful and shared that teachers should know their students well to support the creation of caring relationships with students. The students in this study specifically identified teachers who cared as those who:

1. knew their students on an individual basis;
2. had expectations that all students study and complete their assignments;
3. involved parents;
4. took time to talk and listen to student questions and personal concerns, to provide;
5. encouragement and communicate high expectations;
6. were good teachers as demonstrated by grading fairly and honestly, taught to understanding, provide specific feedback, made learning fun; and
7. maintained control of the classroom and provided a safe learning environment.

In summary, the students in this study viewed caring as a valuable quality of a teacher that would be demonstrated by the teacher who was interested in them, expected and

helped them to learn and took time for them. The only reference to the descriptions given by the teachers was that they felt it was important to be in communication with parents.

Alder (2002) concluded that if care was an important characteristic of the relationships of teachers and students, there needed to be honest discussions between teachers and students about the concept of care. This would provide teachers and students in urban schools with a shared meaning of care which may lead to a more supportive and caring community of learners.

Another example of middle school students' descriptions of caring were in a study that focused on suburban and urban sixth, seventh and eighth graders. This study (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001) mainly described caring teachers as those who helped students with and explained their coursework. Of the sample of 101 student participants, two-thirds were European-Americans and one-third was African-American. The participants were individually asked in interviews to describe a caring teacher. The interviews were coded for emerging themes which revealed that these students also identified caring teachers as those who built relationships with them through which they encouraged and guided them in their learning. The focus of caring was from the teacher to the student, not reciprocal and did not extend beyond the context of the classroom.

Another group of middle school students, six eighth graders who were characterized as difficult to teach, were a part of a new program at their school designed around positive discipline to better support their learning (Strahan, Cope, Hundley, & Faircloth, 2005). Positive discipline was described as using classroom management that was based on teachers building positive relationships with their students and helping the

students realize that they could overcome challenges and be successful and act appropriately. The students' perceptions of their classroom successes were the focus of a study by two university professors and the two teachers in the program. Weekly interviews with students about their assignments were used as the ongoing data collection to track their views of how school was progressing. One of the students credited his success to having flexible assignments, clearly defined rewards and teachers who took time to help. Another student appreciated that his teachers gave him things outside of the classroom to do. It was reported that he was then more inclined to do what the teachers asked of him when in class. These types of positive relationships between teachers and students were summarized by Strahan et al. as "the most important lessons we have learned" (p. 29) and described as the need for teachers to react to students as individuals, to create learning experiences that are based on students' needs and to support students being responsible for their decisions and actions. Strahan et al. further described the students' knowledge of their teachers' care as when the teachers had provided them with higher academic expectations, interacted with them in a positive manner and cared about them as individuals. The students had made an essential connection to learning that they had not previously experienced.

Bosworth (1995) studied middle school students who were identified by their teachers as the most or least caring students in their classes. These students, who were interviewed to determine their definitions of what it meant to care, represented rural, suburban and urban areas. The overall views of caring of the 100 students interviewed were connected to continuing relationships that implied the giving of time and of oneself.

When asked what they believed was caring from their teachers the most common descriptions were based on helping with learning and personal concerns. The students provided a vision of a teacher who gave individualized attention to each student, offered encouragement, was respectful, and gave positive feedback. Other characteristics of caring teachers were that they acted with tolerance and equity no matter what the students had done in the past and explained assignments until all students understood the material. The caring teacher was one who went beyond his or her teaching responsibilities to provide support for students and generally went above and beyond their teaching duties by listening and taking time to help with learning after school and attending extracurricular activities in which students participated. Although other characteristics of caring from teachers were important to students, their responses emphasized that the most important characteristic to describe caring teachers would be that of a learning guide or coach.

Bosworth (1995) made a comment toward the end of the study that although the data indicated that students wanted teachers with whom they could have caring relationships, the observations during the study indicated that there were many teachers who did not often smile, addressed students by name other than in a negative situation, or say anything positive to anyone. There did not seem to be congruence between students' conceptions of caring teachers and what they experienced in the classroom.

Hayes, Ryan, and Zsellar (1994) conducted a study of 208 middle school students to determine their perceptions of their teachers' caring behaviors and to determine whether demographic variables, such as race, ethnicity, and school setting, created any

variations in those perceptions. The sixth grade student participants in this study attended one of three schools, either a predominantly white suburban school or a predominantly African-American suburban school or a predominantly African-American urban school. The survey instrument used for data collection had two sections. The first section included demographic information regarding the student's ethnic background, gender, family composition, and parents' occupations, and the essay questions asked the students to recall two caring teachers who were memorable for their caring and to describe what they did that showed that they cared. Caring was not previously discussed with the students. The demographic data were coded and the essays were read by three researchers who recorded each teacher behavior described by a student. The 11 concept groups that emerged from the essays were coded using SPSS and analyzed for frequency of use by the respondents.

Hayes, Ryan, and Zsellar's (1994) eleven concept groups were formed around by the teachers who:

1. responded to individuals, as demonstrated by their attention to the students outside of school, overall accessibility and concern for the student's life in and out of school;
2. gave personal assistance to students with their academic work beyond the in-class time allotted;
3. gave students praise and respect that supported their successes and created confidence in them to succeed;
4. provided fun through a not-too-serious classroom atmosphere and special

- activities;
5. provided them with good subject content, taught well, checked for understanding of learning and made the materials engaging;
 6. helped students with personal issues and troubles, counseled them;
 7. were interested in all students and were fair;
 8. acted in an equitable manner to all students;
 9. did not yell and remained calm;
 10. handled classroom management well, including misbehaving students;
 11. behaved in other ways that were not mentioned to a significant frequency.

Hayes, Ryan, and Zsellar (1994) pointed out that the first six concept groups were important as descriptors of care by most students.

The demographic information in the Hayes, Ryan, and Zsellar (1994) study reflected a variety of outcomes. There were no differences in these groups that could be explained by gender. However, there were differences by ethnicity. Specifically, African-American students valued most that teachers positively encouraged students, helped them with academics, and interacted with individuals. The white students ranked their top three caring teacher behaviors as those who interacted with the individual, supplied fun and humor, and presented good content material. The implications were that teachers need to be cognizant of the differences in cultural orientations to caring and to how learning is best accomplished. It was suggested that the study be replicated at different grade levels to determine if different age groups had varying interpretations of caring teacher behaviors.

The intention of the Wentzel (1997) study of middle school students was to have them describe their conceptions of the characteristics of a caring and supportive teacher and to determine how much their perceptions of a caring teacher influenced their motivation to succeed academically and socially in school. In this study, 248 eighth grade students' subjective understanding of teachers' behaviors were assessed through quantitative and qualitative means. Students responded to eight questions on the Teacher Social and Academic Support subscales of the Classroom Life Measure. Representative questions on the subscales included items pertaining to whether the students' teachers cared about them and if they cared about how much they learned. A larger group of 375 eighth graders from the same school responded to the question "How do you know when a teacher cares about you? List three things teachers do to show that they care about you" (p. 414). Although the responses were open ended, they were coded from six previously established categories related to:

1. the establishment of rules;
2. nurturance;
3. democratic relations;
4. expectations of students;
5. modeling; and
6. other.

The most frequently used descriptor of a caring teacher was the recognition of the need to focus on the each student as a unique learner who had personal strengths, weaknesses, and contributions to make to the class. The second most noted student descriptor was

modeling, as those teachers who cared about teaching made a special effort to teach in ways that made learning interesting. The third most cited behavior was related to the teachers who established democratic relations with students. The teachers paid attention to the students and had reciprocal conversations with them. The next two characteristics noted as caring behaviors of teachers were focusing on the student as an individual learner and concern for the student as a whole person and nurturance, which included the teacher reviewing student work and giving feedback. Student motivation was measured on a separate scale, but combined with the student descriptions of caring, it was tentatively suggested that the study provided strong evidence that students who felt more supported and valued by teachers were more inclined to be engaged in classroom learning activities.

The connection between the students' perceived teacher caring and their motivation to participate in learning was the focus of a study by Murdock and Miller (2003). They surveyed 125 eighth grade students which included 52% girls, 50% white, 45% African-American, and 45% on free or reduced lunch. The students were grouped by teams of teachers for their core subjects. To assess multiple characteristics of the impact that teachers had on student motivation, the students were given a five point scale developed to evaluate the students' perceptions of teacher willingness, preparedness and competence to teach. This instrument was an outgrowth of the findings in Wentzel's (1997) qualitative study in which students described caring teachers without using predetermined terms. A scale to measure student motivation was also developed and used for the Murdock and Miller study. The findings demonstrated that the students' perceived

relationships with their teachers influenced their motivational development and that the higher the quality of the relationship between the teacher and the student, the stronger the student's motivation. It was also believed that teacher influence would be cumulative over the years for a student, which would give support to the concept of teachers needing to continually build caring relationships with students. The stated intention of this study was to center on the teachers' connection to the process of teaching and learning, not their interactions with students. The suggested future research was to determine if students of different ages have different concepts and/or expectations of how teachers care.

Public school students were not the only ones to express a need for teachers to be caring. A study by Laursen and Birmingham (2002) of adolescent-aged students who lived in one of four residential schools explored the students' perceptions of how the adults in the schools demonstrated care. The 23 student participants were individually interviewed using semi-structured interviews and were observed periodically. Interviews were coded and themes emerged. Grounded theories were developed from the seven characteristics that emerged from the students' descriptions of the roles caring adults played as protective factors for them. The caring adults' characteristics that surfaced were attention, trust, empathy, availability, affirmation, virtue, and respect. Each characteristic implied a pattern of behavior and the beliefs that the students identified with a caring adult. For example, attention was described behaviorally as the teacher putting the student at the center of concern and the teacher believing that the students were valuable and worthy. The students also frequently highlighted the importance of having caring

adults who were accepting, helpful, understanding and concerned. Laursen and Birmingham pointed out that the caring relationships were particularly important for this group of students as protective factors and for the influence those adults had on students, specifically those who faced familial or personal difficulties.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of caring. In order to determine what teachers and students thought helped students learn, Strahan and Layell (2006) interviewed teachers, observed their lessons and reviewed student work and letters that the students wrote at the end of the school year. The two-teacher seventh grade team and their students were in a school where most students qualified for free or reduced lunch and performed significantly lower, about 25 %, than the district average on standardized tests. The students on this team gained significantly on year end math and reading scores than did their peers in other classes in the same school. In their letters, the students credited their achievements to the caring relationships they had with teachers and the strategies they learned from them. The teachers had strived at the outset of the school year to establish a supportive learning environment in which they would know their students and create caring relationships with them. In order to achieve this, the teachers established routines, engaged the students in curriculum, fit their learning styles, set high academic expectations and created a sense of team identity for the group. According to Strahan and Layell, the students were better able to take advantage of their teachers' academic expertise because the teachers had provided the framework of a classroom learning community that included "warm supportive relationships with students" (p. 153).

How teachers and students may have different perceptions of perceived caring was exemplified in two studies (Pajares & Graham, 1998). These studies focused on teachers' beliefs in what caring pedagogy was and the students' desire for caring through honesty in their academic instruction and receiving academic help. In these studies, 27 middle school language arts teachers and their 216 eighth grade students were asked to write what they thought would be suitable feedback to a student's poem that each participant had read. Both teachers and students believed that the response to the student should demonstrate care, but there was a difference between groups about how care should be addressed in the critiques. The teachers, who had been identified as caring, relied on what they had been taught from a formalistic perspective. They evaluated the poem in ways that protected the students from feeling as though they did not perform well even though it may not have been honest or academically sound instruction. The students, in contrast, expressed a desire for the teachers to give honest criticism, conveyed in a caring manner in order to promote learning. The recommendation of the researchers was that if caring is important to academic learning from the students' perspectives, then teachers need to find a means to include truth in their teaching.

The themes that emerged from these middle school studies described different perspectives of caring by teachers toward students depending on which were the respondents. The teachers' more professional and detached view of caring for students was displayed through their creation of supportive learning environments, and establishing classroom routines and high academic standards for students. Teachers also made efforts to create a sense of team within their classrooms in order to support a caring

learning environment. It was also reported that sometimes as an act of care, teachers were more concerned about hurting a student's feelings than giving honest, academically constructive feedback. The middle school students' views of caring from teachers was, in contrast, very personal, and yet related to learning. The students' conceptions of caring teachers evolved into three themes: academics, the student as an individual, and a safe learning environment. Caring as demonstrated from the perspective of academics was described as good teachers who made learning interesting, taught to all students' understanding, made learning fun, graded fairly, gave specific, positive feedback; were honest and respectful; knew their students, and had high expectations of them according to their abilities. The theme of caring by teachers as knowing the students as individuals included students' descriptions of teachers who took time to talk and listen to them, knew about their lives in and out of school, involved their parents, and were honest and accepting of them. Finally, students saw caring teachers as those who created safe learning environments by maintaining a calm personal composure and positive classroom management. These studies demonstrate that teachers and students view caring in the classroom from different perspectives.

The middle school level studies also provided insight into the different views of caring by racial background. It was found that African American students primarily recognized caring from teachers as positive encouragement, receiving academic help, and having individual interactions with teachers. In some contrast, the priorities for the demonstration of care for white students were teachers needing to interact with them as individuals, the presentation of curriculum to include fun and humor and the content of

the curriculum should be interesting. The Murdock and Miller (2003) study highlighted that the outcomes of the middle school studies contributed to knowing what creates stronger relationships with students which would influence student motivation to be involved in learning.

Caring in high school. The literature related to the beliefs about caring relationships between high school teachers and their students has been limited to teachers of science, those who taught at risk students or in the lower achieving segment of school populations. This was exemplified by the following studies.

Teachers' perceptions of caring. Van Sickle and Spector's (1996) in depth study of three teachers who taught science to either seventh, ninth or ninth through twelfth graders focused on identifying and describing the characteristics of science teachers who were perceived to demonstrate an ethic of care in their classrooms. Data were gathered through that were time intensive researcher-conducted classroom observations at the beginning of the school year and lessened as the year progressed and through discussions with the three teacher participants after each observation. The themes that emerged from these sources portrayed the caring teachers' behaviors as reaching out to their students by asking for their opinions and insights and giving students the opportunities to comment on curriculum. It was also evident that the teachers used examples within the content that were familiar to the students to create relationships with students and invited them to share personal information about themselves in order to understand them in a more comprehensive manner. The teachers believed that understanding the students was

essential to building relationships with them, which was a process that was attended to all year.

The three science teachers knew their students and their content which created a relationship among these three components (Van Sickle & Spector, 1996). From this knowledge, teachers were able to create lessons that were engaging and relevant to the students. This proved to be effective to learning, as all the students in these classes scored in the top quartile in the county semester exam. Although the teachers each taught different age levels, ability levels and science content areas, they created an ethic of caring in each of their classrooms. A notable similarity in the content was that each teacher incorporated caring for the environment, plants or animals within their curricula. The theory that emerged in this study (Van Sickle & Spector, 1996) provided speculation on the importance of teachers developing relationships with students from the first day and throughout the year, honoring students for their knowledge and who they were as individuals, and integrating the modeling of caring within the content area classroom.

The importance of positive relationships with students and how eight preservice high school teacher tutors connected with unfamiliar students was the focus of a 10 week study by Bondy and Davis (2000). Some of the tutors initially expressed frustration at not being able to make connections with their students because they believed it was an indication that they would not be good teachers; they had automatically correlated good teaching with forming positive relationships with students. The eight tutors did not believe they had successful relationships with their students but maintained their interactions with the students and worked toward a link between them. All the tutors used

some form of caring to try to connect with students, but each tutor used various caring strategies to different degrees, such as learning about their students' home and school lives, their interests, strengths, and skills. This information was gathered from listening to and observing the students and other people, such as their teachers. From the information they learned, the tutors planned activities which included the students' interests or just spent time together talking. One form of caring that was demonstrated included sharing the control of the tutoring sessions, being able to understand the student's perspective and participating in a give and take relationship. Another form of caring was a tutor viewing a student from a different perspective than other adults had; in this particular instance this tutor focused on the student's strengths. All of the tutors practiced a form of caring which demonstrated their determination to form relationships with their students. The experiences of the tutors suggest that although forms of caring in different contexts may not be innate to preservice teachers, they may be learned through perseverance and support from more experienced teachers with whom they had consulted about the students.

Students' perceptions of caring. Another study of caring at the high school level was conducted by Taylor-Dunlop and Norton (1997). The purpose of their study was to understand what students at risk of dropping out of school believed they needed to help them stay in school and succeed. The participants were 11 female students between the ages of 15 and 17, two of whom attended an alternative school by choice and nine of whom were in a regular high school. These students expressed in their interviews that teachers who were caring were those who were attentive, respectful, helpful and good

listeners. Caring teachers were also perceived as being concerned about the students' academic and social well being.

Further details of what keeps at risk students in school were found in a study which involved 17 students enrolled in a comprehensive high school (Knesting & Waldron, 2006). Through interviews with these at-risk students and observations of the teachers mentioned by them as being supportive or not supportive, it was concluded that what kept these students in school, in spite of background and societal influences, were educators who cared, which meant the following: being committed to students teachers, positive support for students' contributions and achievements, which then empowered students to take academic risks, holding students accountable for their actions and having high attainable expectations, talking with students and caring about what they thought as well as actively listening, making eye contact, being polite, and asking for opinions.

In an effort to give voice to the high school students' points of view as to what contributed to their successes and failures in an urban alternative high school, Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) designed a study of four male students. Through individual interviews that lasted a minimum of 60 minutes and 10-20 hours of observing each student in his classes, the researchers identified emerging and recurring themes. The most notable theme that surfaced was that the students believed that teachers, in spite of outside influences on students, were capable of creating classrooms that engaged students and encouraged them to exert the effort needed to become learners. The interviews and observations emphasized that teachers were the biggest influences in the students' intrinsic motivation and the effort students were willing to put forth. The students saw

their education as a partnership with the teachers whom they trusted and who allowed them to be partners in their own learning. The students saw the teachers as allies and advocates in the educational process promoting their successes; there was trust built into the authority. There seemed to be an understanding by the teachers of a balance between advocate and authority figure that was needed by each student. This type of relationship took time to develop and did so most effectively through in and out of school associations.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of caring. The importance of caring by teachers for students with histories of previous involvement in criminal activity or at risk of dropping out or of being expelled was demonstrated in a study of the students' perceptions of care in a school dedicated to providing a culture of care (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). In this small independent school in Canada three administrators, three teachers and 14 students were each asked prepared questions related to their perceptions of caring. The common perception of caring expressed by the participant groups was the importance of building considerate, receptive and supportive relationships by adults with students that allowed each student's needs to be met. Teachers developed curriculum and relationships that specifically supported the success of each student academically, emotionally, and socially. Students looked at caring as being understood, accepted, respected and helped with academics. The caring relationships that functioned in this school created hope and more positive futures for these students who were previously at risk of being "pushed out" or "dropping out" (p. 98). Cassidy and Bates wondered why the students did not feel cared for by the teachers in their previous schools; was caring given by the teachers and

not received by students or was it not given? They summarized that the teachers, students and administrators in this study viewed caring as the “importance of building respectful, responsive, and supportive relationships and, through these relationships, meeting the needs of children in flexible and insightful ways” (p.95).

In a study which used naturalistic inquiry, at-risk high school students and their teachers described what care looked like to them and identified who they believed were the caring people in their school (Schussler & Collins, 2006). The 16 student participants were chosen to represent diversity within the school as related to academic achievement, years at the school, grade, gender, etc. The second of three interviews with each student focused on drawing out rich portrayals of what caring involved. Teacher interviews and observations focused on instructional methods, teacher-student interactions, and the amount of interaction with the students. The concept of care that emerged from both teachers and students resembled the positive interactions related to concepts such as love, respect, family, and supportive relationships. Teacher-student relationships were the most important relationships noted within the school. The students’ characterizations of these relationships were centered on their desire for teachers to understand them and meet their needs as related to their academic, personal and social lives in school. The areas of importance for the students, given in descending order, were that teachers helped them be academically successful, were concerned for their general well being and helped them be appropriate in non academic issues, and guided them to act appropriately with each other. Overall, students felt that caring teachers were ones who gave them opportunities to succeed and were flexible in how they achieved success. This was evident to the students

by how the teachers were persistent and creative in their efforts to engage students in learning and continually checking with them about their understanding of what was taught. The students who had been at the school since its inception two years previous, had a change of feeling about the family atmosphere of the school as other students joined the student body; the mixing of new students with the charter members and the charter students' need to move on was cited as the reason for a change of heart about the feeling of the school.

The Schussler and Collins (2006) study pointed out that as the major stakeholders in the educational process students have the ability to choose whether or not they will be participants in the classroom learning and their perception of the learning environment was found to be crucial. Therefore, as the study suggested, there needs to be a caring atmosphere in order to have an environment which encourages learning.

The intention of the teachers to develop caring relationships with students from the first day was also found to be a part of the charter at a small urban high school serving Latinos/as and other students of color (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006). The school was founded by teachers and students who self-selected to attend 30 years previously and was operated on the concept of "school as sanctuary" (p. 276). The learning environment was meant to provide the feeling of an intimate environment and a sense of community that promoted worthwhile, caring relationships between teachers and students. Through interviews with three current students, three teachers, three graduates, and the observations of the researcher as an active participant, the role of multiple types of caring relationships were described. Students portrayed a family-like environment which

provided physical and psychological safety for students, an atmosphere that supported student display of racial/ethnic pride, and authentic and academic caring. The family type of atmosphere that the teachers supported in which where everyone knew each other well reportedly provided students with a means of working out situations and looking out for each other in a caring manner. Teachers were viewed by students in the dual roles of facilitator and learner. For the students, caring teachers helped them to high academic standards, provided them guidance and friendship in and out-of-school, and were co-constructors and facilitators of learning. The authentic caring by teachers was specifically described by a student as the teachers going beyond participation in out of school activities by providing guidance and protection from the negative street culture which was encountered during the outings. Academic caring was perceived by students as the teachers having a passion for their subject areas and a passion for them to learn. This school was described as successful in the support teachers gave to minority student learning. This success was attributed to adults listening to the students' needs and together creating and sustaining a school that provided sanctuary-type conditions, where everyone knew each other well and supported each other in and out of school.

Teachers', students' and observer's perceptions of caring. In studies conducted in a similar manner to the "Caring Study" (Dempsey, 1994; Noblit et al., 1995; Rogers, 1994; Rogers & Webb, 1991), Deiro (1996; 2003) sought to discover how middle and high teachers nurtured their students. Data were collected from six teachers, two each from two high schools and one middle school through pre designed, open-ended and semi structured interviews and from 12 students using open ended interviews, and three full

days of observations in the classrooms. The teachers were chosen to participate in the study from criteria which included their reputations within their schools as those “who develop healthy, nurturing connections with students” (Diero, 1996, p. 171) and their expertise in their content areas. The students who participated in the study were chosen because of having close relationships with their teachers. Some of the students had been identified as those who had a recent change of behavior in a positive direction. The teachers believed that they communicated caring to students by treating them with dignity and respect and disciplining in a way that helped students learn from the situation and by creating a safe learning environment. Deiro observed and heard from students that the teachers had different personalities and used different teaching styles. However, she summarized from the data that the six teachers had eight common intrapersonal characteristics. The teacher characteristics were:

1. genuineness and authenticity with students;
2. inner locus of control, responsibility for what happens in their lives;
3. tolerance of ambiguity, ability to handle situations that were not in their control;
4. humor, ability to laugh at one’s self, be playful, and enjoy what they do;
5. nonjudgmental, positiveness about students and unconditional acceptance;
6. potency, dynamic in attitude toward students;
7. enthusiastic, full of creative energy towards work; and
8. androgyny, displayed typically female caring and male risk-taking characteristics (1996).

Deiro (1996) not only found how teachers personally acted as important to how they formed caring bonds with students, but she also described interpersonal skills that, from her perspective, may have assisted teachers in forming effective connections with their students. From student comments and her own observations, she categorized the teachers' interpersonal skills into five broad categories which were described as:

1. effective communication skills, listening, paraphrasing, summarizing, reflecting and clarifying when talking to students;
2. empowering skills, providing experiences through curriculum, behavior, and discipline;
3. problem-solving skills, provided opportunities for students to work together in a critical thinking process;
4. conflict resolution skills, providing different modeling of ways to settle differences; and
5. accountability skills, acting as role models of taking ownership of mistakes and making amends for them.

As a conclusion to her study, Deiro (1996) synthesized the factors she found to describe the caring relationships teachers had with students. Although the teachers approached each element of caring from their own perspectives and personalities, the major influences on the caring relationships included: the teachers treated their students with dignity and respect to which students responded similarly and perceived the teachers' actions as caring; discipline was used as moral guidance; when students needed reminding of appropriate behavior, teachers reminded students of correct words or

actions, without being demeaning; and the teachers created safe learning environments where students were able to feel comfortable, be themselves, be accepted, and had clear expectations academically and behaviorally.

In a follow up article related to her study, Deiro (2003) expanded on teacher caring for students. She explained that those relationships were unique and were formed specifically to facilitate student learning and academic growth. Caring in these relationships would be expressed differently than in other personal relationships. The teacher and student relationships would be focused on elements that included: the influence the teacher had to promote student learning through academic planning; the relationship would end when the student left the class or graduated and that the teacher, as the change agent, had the responsibility to use the asymmetrical power ethically and respectfully. Deiro continued that it was how this power was used with students that decided how students perceived caring from the teachers.

Observers' perceptions of caring. Although drawn from a study over 30 years old, Kleinfield (1975) found that the uniqueness of students from different cultures needed to be honored in classrooms and contributed to their perceptions of caring. In order for Native American and Eskimo students to attend high school in the early 1970's, they needed to leave their very remote, intimate villages and live at a residential school or move to an urban based high school where whites were the majority race and culture. The cultural differences within these environments had a great impact on the learning of these students, and many dropped out of school. Through observing approximately 40 teachers in two boarding schools and five urban high schools, the researcher uncovered

interpretations of caring that provided educational support for the students from the villages. When the students started at the new schools, they assumed that their white, conventionally-trained teachers would care about them as whole people, personally, and not particularly about their learning. The students who did perform to an intellectually high level were those who were taught by teachers who provided a warm, demanding style of teaching, hence the term “warm demanders” (p. 334). These teachers spent substantial time getting to know their students, helping them adjust to their new environments, and building community within the classroom. Once caring from the perspective of the students was established, the demand for academic pursuits became coupled with warmth expressed through smiles, social relationships outside of school, and concern for the overall student. The teachers’ demands targeted at academics were then perceived by the students as concern for their general well being. The course work that they did seemed to be, in their minds, a reciprocal obligation in their personal relationships with their teachers. The teachers were highly supportive of all of the students’ attempts by providing constant reassurance with positive encouraging words. A certain type of straight faced humor was also an important method of communicating with the Native American and Eskimo students. The teachers in the all native classrooms conducted their classes this way and those in the integrated classrooms structured their classes around the needs of the minority students without calling attention to them. The teachers needed to learn the culture of the students and understand how to employ it to the benefit of the students’ engagement in learning.

The themes which emerged from the high school studies are similar to those from the middle schools; teachers viewed caring more from the perspective of how they taught and students were not only concerned with how they were taught, but also with how teachers interacted with them on a personal level. More specifically, high school teachers described caring as creating learning environments based on family type atmospheres and on the concept of “school as sanctuary” (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006). Teachers at the high school level were more attentive to describing how they engaged students in learning, perhaps because many of the studies conducted to date have been with students who are outside the mainstream, e.g., students at risk of failing. The teachers reportedly engaged students by: reaching out to them in order to know their interests; asking for their input on curriculum and classroom procedures; and making the curriculum socially applicable and relevant. Care was also described by the teachers as treating students with respect and being receptive to and supportive of all students.

The themes which described the students’ perceptions of teacher caring were similar to the middle school students’ views that the teachers knew them on a personal level and engaged them in learning. However, the high school students emphasized the caring relationships formed around learning more than the middle school students did, suggesting some congruence between teachers’ and students’ conceptions of caring. On the personal level, the high school students said that caring teachers were: genuinely interested in their lives in and out of school; concerned about their personal well being; non judgmental and supportive of their personal racial and/or ethnic pride; dynamic in their interactions with them; and role models of both caring and risk taking behaviors.

The students also believed that caring teachers had effective communication skills as demonstrated by being good listeners, making eye contact and being generally polite to them. The academic theme developed from the students' perceptions was also multifaceted. The characteristics of caring teachers included: being respectful; concern for the students' academic successes; holding students accountable for their actions; having high expectations for students; giving positive feedback and support; being helpful; and adding humor to learning. From the students' perspectives the teachers presented engaging curriculum and worked to empower students to take risks. These teachers were also described by their students as having created an environment which supported the learning of problem solving skills and conflict resolution skills. Additionally, the students saw caring teachers as persistent in their efforts to make the learning engaging and were committed and passionate about their work. Teachers caring toward students at the high school level encompassed relationships based on personal and academic relationships for the purpose of promoting student learning.

Preservice teachers' perceptions of caring. Weinstein (1998) was the only researcher to create a study about caring which encompassed elementary and secondary levels. This study surveyed 141 teacher education students to determine their views of what they would do to indicate they cared about their students. The surveys included open ended questions and fixed-choice answers related to how teachers care for their students. The teachers described caring as separate from establishing order in the classroom. These preservice teachers saw caring as pertaining to interpersonal relationships and order as focusing on rules. The categories which developed from the

coding of the responses indicated that elementary level teachers emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships and management tactics, while secondary preservice teachers focused more on teaching. The preservice teachers' descriptions of teacher caring were portraying teachers' behaviors, such as respecting students, establishing rapport with students, showing interest in their lives, and expressing care, understanding, and empathy.

The importance of teacher caring for students has been established by commissions such as NCTAF (1996), researchers (Poplin & Weeres, 1992), and theorists (Mayerhoff, 1971; Noddings, 1988). This value of caring was even stated to be a part of a student's "birthright" (NCTAF, 1996, p.10). However, even though the literature has provided a wide variety of definitions and a few specific reasons for why teacher caring toward students was important, only a small number of these perspectives came from teachers and students in the same contexts. If each context is different (Goldstein, 1998), then there is a need to investigate more teachers and their students within their contexts of the elementary, middle and high school levels. There remains a gap in the literature of what the perceptions are of the "voices from the inside" (Poplin & Weeres, 1992, p.2) of what caring is from teachers to students.

The combined voices of those on the inside about caring. The review of literature has allowed for the comparison of teachers' and students' beliefs about how teachers care for students at the elementary, middle and high school levels. A major theme that emerged at all levels from both teachers and students was that the purpose of teacher caring was connected to supporting student learning. Elementary, middle, and

high school teachers reported talking and listening to their students about personal and academic concerns in order to better understand their needs to better provide engaging curriculum for all students. Elementary teachers were the only teachers to use terms related to nontraditional educational terms such as physical care, mothering, and parenting. The teachers also believed that caring was demonstrated by presenting a challenging curriculum to all students, while being respectful of their academic abilities. The one study of middle school teachers sounded professional in their descriptions of caring with their students by explaining the structure they provided in the form of creative, supportive, team types of learning environments, classroom routines, and high academic standards for students. Most of the high school studies involved teachers of students at risk of failing, which may have presented a particular perspective of what high school teachers believe to be caring. The teachers described caring as reaching out to their students and learning about them in order to provide curriculum which the students would find engaging. They specifically described being supportive, receptive and respectful as ways of exhibiting care for their students. Family and sanctuary were terms used to illustrate the atmosphere which the teachers tried to create for students. The teachers' descriptions of care seemed to evolve through stages starting from helping to provide some of the fundamental needs of children in the early years to providing supportive learning environments created from knowing the students and being respectful and accepting of who they were as learners and people.

Like the teachers, the students at elementary, middle and high school levels viewed caring as a part of learning. Students at all levels also believed that caring was

expressed by: positive individual communication between themselves and their teachers; the teacher's understanding of them as individuals, academically and personally; and the teachers' efforts to make school engaging and meaningful. The elementary students who were more satisfied with school believed they had more supportive, caring teachers.

These younger students described caring teachers using feeling terms related to emotional support, patience, and sensitivity to students' needs. The older middle and high school students described caring teachers not only in terms of wanting their teachers to know them personally, but expanded on how they viewed caring teachers as providers of learning. Broadly, these teachers were: committed to student learning; persistent and creative in efforts to engage students in learning; knew their subject content well; added humor and fun to learning; and provided safe and controlled learning environments. The students also described caring teachers as those who: were equitable in their treatment of students and in grading provided challenging curriculum; had high expectations of students; held students accountable for their actions; accepted the individual abilities of students; and gave positive feedback. The high school students demonstrated a more sophisticated way of describing teachers who cared than did the elementary or middle school students. For the older students, caring teachers were those who: empowered them to take risks; made them partners in their own learning; and were accepting of their racial and/or ethnic pride.

Caring was described by the teachers and students as an action that a teacher takes with a student which sometimes is reciprocated. The action may be different from person

to person and context to context. On this point theory and empiricism seem to meet.

Noddings (1992) proposed:

Caring cannot be achieved by formula. It requires address and response; it requires different behaviors from situation to situation and person to person. It sometimes calls for toughness, sometime tenderness. With cool, formal people, we respond with deference and respect; with warm informal people, we respond caringly with hugs and overt affection. Some situations require only a few minutes of attentive care; others require continuous effort over long periods of time. (p. i)

Although themes developed through the literature review that described caring and its possible impact on student learning from teachers', students', and observers' perspectives, there were few studies which incorporated both the teachers' and students' views in the same study. There were no studies that covered the breadth of teachers and students in the elementary, middle or high school levels in the same school district. Each study represented different teachers and/or students in various contexts, each added descriptors of care, which were personal to their circumstances, to the evolving themes. The themes seem to be built from a collage of definitions as opposed to having been solidly constructed from connected lives and contexts. The purpose of this study is to create a create an emerging grounded theory from the voices of teachers and their students at the elementary, middle and high school levels from the same school district of what caring teachers do and the impact their caring have on students. This will hopefully provide a more cohesive perspective of what caring is from connected contexts.

Since the advent of NCLB and its focus on teaching to standards that are measured by criterion-referenced standardized tests, caring has been left out of the formula for teaching even though it has been demonstrated in studies to be important to

teachers and students. As stated by Floden (2001), the focus of teaching has changed since standards based learning has been implemented and past research needs to be reevaluated. A part of this update of research should be how caring is described in today's schools from consistent multilevel perspectives. This study will add to the literature the voices of teachers and their students describing teacher caring and its impact on students from a more comprehensive perspective than has been done previously, by asking the following questions:

1. How do teachers at different grade levels describe how teachers care for students?
2. How do teachers at different grade levels describe how a caring teacher impacts students?
3. How do students at different grade levels describe how teachers care about them?
4. How do students at different grade levels describe how a caring teacher impacts?
5. How do these teachers' and students' descriptions compare and contrast?

3. Method

The concept that teachers care for students has been discussed as an important aspect of classrooms by national commissions (NCTAF, 1996, 2003) and theorists (Mayerhoff, 1971; Noddings, 1984, 1988) and as an outcome of empirical studies such as Poplin and Weeres (1992). However there does not seem to be research which asked teachers and their students at elementary, middle and high school grade levels how they believed teachers were caring for students or how teacher caring impacted students. There certainly have been none since the implementation of high stakes teaching dictated by NCLB. In order to move toward the “right of every child” (NCTAF, 1996) to have a caring, competent, certified teacher in the classroom, the purpose of this study was to allow the voices of a group of teachers and their students to be heard in order to better understand what they thought a caring teacher did and how they believed a caring teacher impacted students. The teachers and students represented mainstream elementary, middle and high schools. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers at different grade levels describe how teachers care for students?
2. How do teachers at different grade levels describe how a caring teacher impacts students?
3. How do students at different grade levels describe how teachers care about

them?

4. How do students at different grade levels describe how a caring teacher impacts them?

5. How do these teachers' and students' descriptions compare and contrast?

Methodology

Settings and Participants

The participants for this study were teachers and their students selected from an elementary, middle and a high school in a suburban school district in a Mid Atlantic state. The schools were connected to each other by being in the same “cluster,” i.e., the elementary students “fed into” the middle school and the middle school students “fed into” the high school. At the time of the study, I was a fulltime employee of the school district and although I did not work at any of these schools, I had contacts at the high school which helped to facilitate access to requesting participants in these schools.

This cluster of schools was also chosen because the students were racially and economically diverse. The elementary school served 748 students, kindergarten through fifth grades. The racial backgrounds of the students in the school included 9% Asian, 10% Black, 15% Hispanic, and 66% White and there were 16.2% eligible for the Federal free or reduced lunch programs. At the middle school, grades sixth through eighth, there was a total of 838 students whose racial backgrounds were represented as 9%, Asian, 13% Black, 13% Hispanic and 62% White and 17.6 % eligible for the Federal free or reduced lunch programs. The high school consisted of 1783 ninth through twelfth grade students. The racial composition of this group included 10% Asian, 14% Black, 17%

Hispanic and 53% White and 20% who qualified for the Federal lunch programs. The teacher population of the school district did not represent the same diversity; very few teachers of color were represented throughout the district.

Teachers. At each of the three schools four teachers were nominated by the principal or a designee. This was similar to how teachers were selected for studies about caring including Noblit et al. (1995) at the elementary level and Diero (1996) and Van Sickle and Spector (1996) at the high school level. The selection was made based on whom the principal or designee believed to demonstrate caring toward their students using the guideline that caring was “involving a relationship between people that is marked by a desire to understand the other and help the other reach his potential” (Schussler & Collins, 2006, p. 1464). It was hoped that the teachers would be fairly experienced and that there would be a balance of men and women and of various racial backgrounds. However, to allow the selection to be the most representative of what the principal or designee thought best fit the guideline given, these were not strict requests. After the principal or designee spoke with their candidates for participation, only asking if they were agreeable to being interviewed by a Ph.D. candidate regarding their opinions about caring, they verbally agreed, and then were forwarded by email the teacher cover letter (Appendix A) and the consent form for teachers (Appendix B). The teachers who agreed to be interviewed and to have their students answer the questionnaire gave their consent to the nominator to share their names with me. I emailed the teachers, and we established a time to do an individual interview. When I met with a teacher to do the interview, I gave each one a thank you note and a gift card.

Table 1 provides an overview of the 12 teachers who participated in this study.

Table 1

Demographics of Teacher Participants

Teacher	Grade	Time with students	Gender	Race	Years taught	Student participants
Joan	2 nd	Most	female	white	3	8 (22)
Shawna	3 rd	75%	female	white	5	28 (28)
Sarah	4 th	75%	female	white	6	23 (28)
Winnie	5 th	75%	female	white	12	18 (28)
Sam	6 th	Language Arts 90 min/day	male	white	7	16 (26)
Dottie	7 th	English Lit 90 min every other day	female	white	13	12 (27)
Mattie	7 th	English Lit 90 min every other day	female	white	5	8 (27)
Leah	8 th	Social studies 90 min every other day	female	white	5	18 (28)
Kirsten	11	Social Studies 90 min every other day	female	white	12	12 (28)
Jeannine	11/12	Social Studies 90 min every other day	Female	White	6	14 (28)

Teacher	Grade	Time with students	Gender	Race	Years taught	Student participants
Adam	12	English Lit. 90 min every other day	male	white	6	22 (28)
Michael	12	English Lit 90 min every other day	male	white	6	14 (28)

The four teachers selected at the elementary school were white women whose ages ranged from early 30s to early 40s. Each elementary teacher taught a different grade: second, third, fourth or fifth. The second grade teacher, Joan, was in her third year of full time teaching; she taught most of her students all day. The third grade teacher, Shawna, had been teaching for five years at the lower elementary level; the fourth grade teacher, Sarah, a career switcher from business, was in her sixth year of teaching; and the fifth grade teacher, Winnie, was in her twelfth year of teaching. The third through fifth grade teachers spent about 75% of their days with one group of students, regrouping students from other classes to teach either math or language arts for the other part of the instructional time and for specialties such as art, music, etc.

The middle school teachers' ages ranged from mid thirties to early 40s; all of them were white and one was male. There was one sixth grade teacher, Sam, the male; two seventh grade teachers, Dottie and Mattie; and one eighth grade teacher, Leah. Sam taught Language Arts to each class of sixth graders every day for 90 minutes. He had been a teacher for 17 years; some of those years were as an elementary teacher. The two

seventh grade teachers taught English; Dottie had been an educator for 13 years and Mattie for five years. The eighth grade teacher, Leah, had been teaching social studies classes such as civics and economics for five years. The seventh and eighth grade teachers taught each class of students every other day for 90 minutes.

The four high school teachers taught courses open only to eleventh and twelfth grade students which met for 90 minutes every other day. Kirsten taught students a required eleventh grade social studies subject in mainstream and Advanced Placement formats. She was a white woman in her mid 30s and who had been teaching for 12 years. Jeannine, also a white woman in her mid thirties, taught social science electives at all ability levels. She had started to teach six years previously; her first career was as a television producer. The two other high school teachers were white men. Adam was presently teaching Advanced Placement English to seniors and was the teacher in charge of the yearbook. Although he was in his late 20s and had been only teaching for six years, he had taught every English course the school offered. The last teacher was Michael. He also taught Advanced Placement English to seniors and had previously taught several different levels of English. He was in his mid sixties and had been a lawyer for over 30 years before retiring and entering teaching six years ago.

Students. The students who participated in the study at the elementary level were selected because they were in the participating teachers' classes. The students at the middle and high school level who participated were selected by the participating teacher as to which class they believed would give the most feedback to the questionnaire. Each participating teacher was provided with and asked to hand out to the students in the class

she/he had chosen to participate in the study, a parent and student cover letter (Appendix C), a parent consent form (Appendix D) and a student assent form (Appendix E). At all grade levels, the students represented a range of academic abilities including those who qualified for a variety of special education or English Language Learner services. There were also high school students who were enrolled in Advanced Placement classes.

The number of student participants was determined by those who had returned signed student and parental consent forms. There were a total of 77 student participants in the four elementary classes. There were a total number of 193 student participants. The participants were grouped by grade: eight in the second, 28 in the third, 23 in the fourth and 18 in the fifth. A total of 54 middle school students participated: 16 sixth grade students, 20 seventh graders and 18 eighth grade students. The 62 high school student participants were comprised of 12 eleventh graders, 14 students who were in a mixed class of eleventh and twelfth grade students, and 36 twelfth grade students.

Pilot Study

The purpose of a pilot study is to be sure that the participants understand the questions being asked on the questionnaire (Creswell, 2005). The steps that were taken to pilot the teacher and student questionnaires followed Creswell's model. The process was: to engage a voluntary representative group of two teachers and three students at each level; to ask them to answer the questions posed on the questionnaire; and to have them provide feedback about how well they understood the questions or if there was any confusion about what was asked. For the pilot test, the participant teachers with whom I was familiar who taught at the different levels within the school district; they did not

teach at the target schools. The students in the pilot study lived in a different neighborhood and attended schools within the district other than the target schools. I obtained the permission of both the parents and the students before having them participate. Using the information I gathered from the pilot tests, I revised the questions for both teachers and students so that they flowed better. The questions were similar in content.

Data Collection

This research design was centered on what the participants thought about the topic of study. The sources of data collection were individual interviews with the 12 teachers and a four item questionnaire given to 193 students. Teacher and student participants were asked similar questions (Rogers, 1994) about how teachers cared for students and how caring impacted students. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

The interviews with the teachers took place at each teacher's convenience, i.e. early morning before school, after school or during their planning periods during the school day. The teacher interviews (Appendix F) consisted of four open ended questions asking about their thoughts related to how they and colleagues demonstrated care toward their students and the impact that caring may have on students. These questions were followed up as necessary for clarification and expansion of ideas. There were also four demographic questions to help define the teacher's background and experience. The interviews lasted about 35 to 55 minutes and were recorded with the teacher's permission and later transcribed.

The participating teachers provided me with a block of time in their classes to have students answer the student questionnaire (Appendix G). The protocol for answering questions (Appendix H) was read before handing out the questionnaires to the students. The questionnaires for the students consisted of four open-ended questions related to what teachers did to show they were caring and what impact the students thought caring teachers had on them. There were also three demographic questions for the students to answer. If students needed help reading or understanding the questions or writing their answers, either I or the teacher tried to help by restating the questions or writing their answers as they said them. It took students about 20 minutes to answer the questionnaires. Students who did not participate were offered age appropriate writing prompts (Appendix I) when the teacher did not have other plans for them. After the responses were collected, they were ordered second to twelfth grade.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the teachers and students were analyzed separately. I first transcribed each interview in its entirety assigning a pseudonym to each participant. Then, using Maxwell (2005) as my guide, I listened to and read each interview transcript as a prerequisite to writing a memo. I then used the memo process to write my impressions of the teacher and the interview and to highlight the pertinent information of each teacher's responses to the questions. I also used the connecting strategy of eliminating excess information from the interview which created a more streamlined version of the teacher's responses. These forms of analysis provided me with a clearer perspective of each teacher's description of caring and its impact on students. Following

that, I summarized the themes that emerged from each teacher's responses and then compared the substantive categories which had evolved at each school level.

For the analysis of the data collected from the students, I used Maxwell (2005) as my guide. First, I read the data the same day I collected it to get a first impression that I could attach to that particular class, and then I wrote short memos related to my impressions. The next action I took was to reread the responses by grade level. In these memos, I noted the differences in the language used and the amount of writing of students at different levels. I then transcribed the responses by individual class. Each response sheet had been assigned a number before they were given to the students, each class was assigned a designation; those two indicators and the number of the question being answered were assigned to each response recorded. For example, if a student had response sheet number 10, their class code was 7D, and the response was to question number four, the transcribed response would have 10,7D, 4 assigned to it. Open coding was used to identify emerging categories, at first as general as "nice" or "time." As categories began to emerge, the similar responses from students of all grade levels were grouped in that category tracking them from the lowest grade to the highest. After many reviews and regroupings, the idea that students thought teachers knew their academic and social/emotional needs as they themselves perceived them became a focal point of how students believed teachers demonstrated caring. Using this framework, the students' responses were reexamined and refined and clustered into themes that supported the various perspectives of this concept.

Validity

The teachers were assured that several teachers were nominated and that the principal and/or counselor who nominated them would not know who the actual respondents were. There was total confidentiality for the students as well. A person other than their teachers handed out and collected the pre-coded questionnaires, which their teachers did not see. As an incentive to have students answer the questions with honesty and straightforwardness, they were given edible treats after they had put their “real” thoughts about caring on paper.

Reliability

An issue of reliability could be that there were different interpretations by the principal and/or designee of the definition of caring when nominating participant teachers. In order to provide as much consistency as possible in determining which teachers would be the best candidates for the study, principals were given the same definition of caring: “involving a relationship between people that is marked by a desire to understand the other and help the other reach his potential” (Schussler & Collins, 2006, p.1464).

Limitations

The findings from this study are limited to the teachers and the student participants in a diverse, middle-class, suburban school district in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The extent to which these findings would be uncovered in inner city schools, rural schools, or other regions of the United States is open for question.

A second limitation is the method for identifying these teachers. All 12 teacher participants were nominated by their building principals in accordance with the following definition of a caring teacher “involving a relationship between people that is marked by a desire to understand the other and help the other reach his potential” (Schussler & Collins, 2006, p. 1464). It may be any one of these teachers would not be seen by others as caring teachers. However, the method of identifying these participants avoids the tautological problems associated with self-nominations. It is argued here that the principals of these three school buildings know their teachers well and can identify those known an ethic of care.

A third limitation is the data gathering process itself. Overall, encouraging students to return their signed permission slips was difficult since the number of responses depended on the teachers’ support to return the slips. At the different school levels, the elementary students answered the open ended questions with very basic statements and it was not possible to clarify what they meant by what they wrote or to be sure of their understanding of the questions. In the middle school classrooms, although the timing of the questionnaire was at each teacher’s convenience, it seemed awkward, perhaps because there were not many students in class who were participating. This may have made the students involved feel uncomfortable. The high school students were more descriptive in their responses and having conversations with them would have enhanced their responses. Interviews with students at each level would have added to the richness of the descriptions of teacher caring.

4. Results

Analysis of Teacher Responses

The purpose of this study is to learn through the voices of a specific group of elementary, middle and high school teachers and their students what teacher caring is and how it impacts students. It is also the purpose of this study to compare teachers' and students' beliefs of what caring is and how it may impact students.

This study will add to the literature the voices of teachers and their students across different grade levels what caring is between them and how it may impact learning from a more comprehensive perspective than has been done previously. This chapter will present data found related to these research questions:

1. How do teachers at different grade levels describe caring for students?
2. How do teachers at different grade levels describe how a caring teacher impacts students?

The data gathered from the teachers was analyzed in two ways in order to provide a picture of each teacher as a person and to compare the themes which emerged at each school level. Their responses formed two major themes: 1) teachers' descriptions of characteristics of caring teachers; and 2) how teachers believed caring impacted students. In addition, there was one smaller less prominent theme regarding the characteristics of non caring teachers.

Teachers' Descriptors of Caring Teachers

In the initial part of the interviews, several of the teachers in this study said that they did not really know what they did that was caring. However as the interviews progressed, they described a variety of actions that they or their colleagues did that they thought were caring.

Elementary school teachers. At the elementary level Joan, the 2nd grade teacher, said she learned about each student by looking "... at the whole child." She stated that "you can't treat them all the same...I see the needs that different students have and unless you really know your students I don't think you really do that." Among her ways of knowing students, she said she noticed "if they are eating or falling asleep." She also asked "... a lot about their real life, life outside of school, what's going on...notices if they are looking a little sad..." and asked in general "What's going on?"

Joan said her caring style of teaching second grade students was to use first what she learned about each student's "real life" and to make connections between their lives and what was to be learned. She gave the example of being aware of a student who had gone on a trip and connecting it to a math lesson. She said she did not always plan it out, but would take what she knew about the students and integrate it into lessons "...to make it more personal." Joan described one part of being personal with students as trying to be "very motherly" and related teaching to parenting; it was "...reverting back to motherhood." She said she had three of her own children, and they were all different, "you can't treat them all the same" and she added that she had "a tendency to teach this way." This motivated her individual interactions with students and thinking about "each

kid individually as much as you can...(then) you are able to really see what their needs are and able to adjust your curriculum, you're able to address the needs that are keeping them from learning, helping them feel safe..." and provide structure for them. By creating this safe feeling for students, Joan said she thought the students trusted her and her second grade colleagues. She continued that trust also meant following through "if we say we are... going to bring something in or...they are going to get a consequence..." it happens. If it does not happen she is honest with them about why it did not occur. Joan also described her caring behaviors to include pushing students to perform well by being "real hard and then care for them when they don't do well."

Joan described the second grade teachers as a "rough team" which she explained as "we're not overly fluffy...very loving, but very strict." She added that she was flexible and took advantage of "learning moments that have taken up a good part of the day." Her care through her commitment to her students extended beyond the school day as demonstrated by her stating "I like being available, we (she and her colleagues) are very available before and after school."

Joan's description of a caring teacher included focusing on treating students as individuals, on how to help each student learn by trying to understand each child's needs in order to facilitate learning. How she taught was also a part of her caring for her students; she shared that she connected learning to what she knew about her students, although she didn't intentionally always plan it. She also pushed them to work hard and had high expectations of them; she did this by not being "...fluffy... but by being "very loving..." Her care also extended to being available to help students before and after

school. By interacting with students from this viewpoint Joan said she created a safe and trusting environment. She described her caring as “motherly” because she tried to know each student as an individual and not treat them all the same.

Shawna, who taught third grade, initially responded that she demonstrated care by helping students learn. She helped them learn by “...getting to know the individual child, their needs...” by “paying attention to what happens and picking up all the little cues ...to know who that child is,” such as whose parent comes to Back to School Night, if the child comes to school clean; with their hair is brushed, whether they are dirty or hungry or how often they are ill without going to the doctor. She expanded on her thought by stating “... teachers show they care in all sorts of different ways... one to one conversations, getting to know the individual student, their needs, some children need extra hugs...some children need the structure...making them be held accountable...you’re not just going to let them fail, showing interest in what they are interested in and letting them be creative when they have an opportunity to excel whether at art or music, giving them open ended activities to excel with all different learning styles.” She encouraged her students’ learning by trying “...to make it funny, you can entertain them, make it meaningful to this student.”

She used the information she had learned about each student so that she “...can take care of the whole child...” so that they are “....more capable of learning.” In order to alleviate student’s personal issues she gave the example of using her cell phone to call a student’s parent because of a forgotten lunch or because the student felt really sick. She said she used her “mom... instinct” to help a child who was not attending school and was

unable to his best work because of a personal concern. She also provided what caring might not be; “it’s easier to let them fail, it really is, it’s not as much work on the teacher, just say, well you didn’t do it, that’s not caring, that’s the opposite.” Her response to that mindset was “You try to make everyone successful.” Shawna also presented herself to her students as a real person; she said “I joke around with them all the time.” An example was that she shared with her students that she was a huge Dallas Cowboys’ fan and that she and the students would go back and forth about who is better, her team or the hometown team. The students also knew her as a neighbor. She lived in the school’s attendance area, her daughter attended this school and her students knew her daughter and would see Shawna around the neighborhood, including the pool.

Shawna also provided her perspective that when she started out teaching she thought she may have “...cared a little too much to the point of taking it home and being really worried...” and admitted “... I still do that.” She described being torn about wanting to “fix” a student’s home life, but “you can’t, you just can’t. You do what you can do...there comes a point you’ve got to accept you can’t change the whole world. It’s sad, it bothers me.”

The behaviors Shawna described of a teacher’s caring toward students focused on the many different ways that care was demonstrated. Her care was grounded in wanting to meet the needs of the whole child in order to help individual students learn. She interacted with her students in different ways in order to know their interests and to be able to make learning meaningful. The motivation behind how she taught was on making learning interesting and fun, to meet students’ different learning styles and to connect

learning to what she knew about them. She also held students accountable. When her “mom instinct” sensed that a student had a personal issue which was interfering with learning, she said she attended to the issue to help so the student was able to refocus on learning.

The first thing Sarah, the fourth grade teacher, said that she thought was caring “...is getting to know a student as an individual...you need to know what they are like and where they come from or you cannot teach them.” She explained further “...I build a really strong connection with my children. I do go out of my way to make sure I know them.” She added that connections with students would vary depending on each student’s needs. Sarah said she would get a good start knowing her students by talking to their parents in early September as opposed to waiting until the district sponsored November conferences. She reported she told parents “...you know your child better than I do ...it would really help if you could tell me anything special that I need to hear.” Sarah also believed she learned about her students by observing and interacting with them. She said, “... (I) watch them a lot...then I join in often and talk to them about what they are doing.” Sarah’s students also had the opportunity to learn about her because she would connect stories about herself as a child to what the class was reading or to help put history in perspective. An example she gave was when they were studying about credit and debit, she told the class that her parents didn’t have credit cards. She had to explain to the students how they paid for things. She also allowed students to get to know her out of school life by letting them ask her questions. She said she believed this nonacademic interpersonal interaction “...lets them know I care about them.”

Sarah continued that she demonstrated caring by being a “nurturing authority figure.” One way she described this was by “not rewarding mediocrity, but instead coaching them towards a better outcome...if it isn’t great, don’t say it’s great...” She might say “how could you do that better, what could you say here that makes me understand more clearly.” Sarah also said she provided her students with “constant” feedback such as when they don’t quite make an A or B, she offered to “... talk about different strategies” with each student. Other caring behaviors Sarah included in the interview were to give students compliments, not only about their work but also about them. She would tell them that they looked nice or “I like that shirt, that’s my favorite super hero.” She said “I will find something about them to make them know I notice them.” She did this about once a month on a random basis. Because she was familiar with her students, Sarah reported she knew whom to acknowledge with a pat and whom to recognize in other ways.

Sarah also described her caring as not accepting vague answers when students did not understand something. She would constantly question them to scaffold their thinking to a more specific response of what they did not understand. Another way Sarah said she showed care for her students was by contacting their parents “...not just for bad things...,” but also when students who had been struggling then earn an A. In some instances Sarah said she called home before when the student would have taken the paper in order for the parent to enjoy the success with the student. Sarah shared that her caring focused on respect, what she knew about her students, expectations, scaffolding them to higher outcomes, and communicating with parents. She said she thought the “biggest

thing she believed in was that teacher and student respect each other.” For her, she said this meant to remain positive, which on some days was difficult. She reported there were times “the fight is to remain positive...in a noisy classroom, kids calling your name out, a kid tipping his chair back and balancing his pencil on his nose...” She said that as a caring teacher, you have to “...sit there and regroup yourself and try hard to point something positive out...that’s what I always try to do.”

The fifth grade teacher, Winnie, started the interview by saying “it’s my job to mother these kids...if you establish caring relationships with them; you get more out of them.” Once the relationships were established, she said the students knew she would be confidential about concerns they brought to her. An example of this was when Winnie made “the extra effort” for a student by leaving a hat and gloves on the desk of a girl whom she noticed had neither. No words were exchanged, but the girl later drew a picture for her in return. She described the relationships with her students as “trusting” and going beyond academics. It was a part of her caring “...to be the same teacher every day, same rules, same routine that I’m not going to change.” In Winnie’s mind it was “huge...” to be consistent “because if you don’t back up what you say, they’re not going to trust you.”

Winnie was another teacher who met with parents in September to learn about her students. She added to her information about the students by “...sitting down and taking the time to talk with them... at recess we joke...(or) just listening.”

Another caring behavior that she discussed was that she “...sent postcards to some kids’ houses, just to encourage them, kids that have been really trying.” She wanted

them to know that she appreciated them and that she was glad they were in her class. Winnie also felt it was caring that she kept in contact with parents. She reported she would email them to let them know how their students were doing, particularly students "...who were doing better in class" and also when she was not happy with students. She was responsive to parental concerns by returning emails and said "if you can work with (parents) and see what their concerns are...most want their kids to be happy, so then you work with them and then everything is better, with the parents, with the kids, everything."

Winnie also described caring as having high expectations of her students. In order to support this, she said she was very structured and told the students "we'll work with you to get you there." Caring was also taking personal responsibility for her students. Reciprocally, she expected students to take responsibility and to be honest about what they had done and to be persons of character. Towards the end of the interview, Winnie returned to her initial thought and shared that because she was a mother, she saw things differently by trying to understand why a student would act in a certain way. She described a boy in her class about whom she had been "...trying to figure out what's wrong with that kid, what's happened to him that made him that way." She continued that "it's just caring what happens to the kids. It takes more effort and more energy to go above, than to just say he didn't do his homework, again." She took personal responsibility for noticing when "something is not right or when a kid could be doing more and isn't and (I take) the extra effort, because it is an effort to put together a child study (multidisciplinary team evaluation of student's learning needs)."

Winnie summarized her thoughts about being a caring teacher as “I feel like if you are really caring about your kids and how they perform and how they feel and whether they’re happy and whether they’re learning, you do what you need to do which means you’re going to have to differentiate for those kids...it becomes your natural way of teaching...” She added, “...going the extra step...it’s your job!” Her way of doing this was by taking responsibility for knowing and helping individual students which included being a mother to them, having high expectations of each of them, and using her knowledge of each student to meet her/his unique learning and personal needs.

Winnie’s views on caring came from having her own standards for teaching students. She said she was personally driven as a student and was determined to have all of her students pass. She said she would become upset “...if one of them doesn’t (pass)...it’s not their fault, you do what you can...”

Descriptors of caring by teachers at the elementary level were centered on first getting to know their students and helping each child learn and not letting anyone fail. They learned about their students as individuals which helped them notice changes in health or personal demeanor. The major way they learned about their students was interacting with them, by listening to them, observing them and/or meeting with parents or noticing when a parent attended activities.

They gave multiple descriptions of ways they engaged students in learning that included making learning fun and interesting, relating to the students’ interests and lives or allowing students to be creative. Three of the teachers specifically said that they were “not overly fluffy, very loving, but very strict,” held their students accountable or saw

themselves as a “nurturing authoritarian.” Each teacher had expectations of her students and tried to support their achievement through using her knowledge of the individual students, spending extra time with those they thought needed it, being available to them, providing a safe environment and being a mom to them. Shawna, Sarah and Winnie also described caring as when they allowed students to know them by sharing stories about themselves about how they grew up or about their own children, and the students in turn shared their stories.

These teachers also depicted caring as fostering learning through helping students with personal needs and communicating with their parents. Each gave students extra time and effort in some form to help with academic or personal needs. They learned of these needs mostly from their observations of and listening to their students. There also was a “mom” theme for the second, third and fifth grade teachers. They said that being mothers influenced their interactions with students. The second and fifth teachers also described caring as providing a safe or consistent environment where trust was built between teacher and student; they felt students could count on them. Shawna, the third grade teacher, also included joking around with the students as caring. These teachers were focused on their individual students’ learning which they supported by having expectations of them, providing them with the help they needed, being concerned for students as people and being genuine. Shawna seemed to sum up all of the descriptors of care given by the elementary teachers when she said “...teachers show they care in all sorts of different ways... that you have to take care of the whole child...” so they were “...more capable of learning.”

Middle school teachers. At the middle school level Sam, the sixth grade teacher, stated he liked to get to know about what his students did in their spare time, if they were involved in sports, music or other activities. He said "...sometimes the mildest kids will tell me they play lacrosse, something that I totally wouldn't think that they would be involved in." Sam gained the information about his students by eating lunch with them and asking them questions during recess and homeroom. He also found their writings in journals or letters to themselves revealing about who they were.

Sam further described caring as being concerned about students having a good experience at school. He said he wanted each of them be to be successful, but realized they had many things that stress them out. He thought they should "... just come here and it could just be like an oasis, that they can learn and feel safe but at the same time have a good experience." In order to support providing a positive environment for students, he liked "to be out in the hallway and greet them as they come (by) ...". In caring about students having a good school experience, he shared he also took responsibility when he "grouched" at a student in front of the class. He continued that he later apologized to the student in private. Another way he said he demonstrated care was by taking note of students who did "something stupid" and also spoke with them privately...and "(did) not bark" at them in front of their peers which might cause them "...to shut down on you..." His caring for students incorporated trying to support and/or to preserve their personal self esteem.

Sam reported that his teaching methods developed from his beliefs about what caring for his students' needs was at their developmental level. He thought it was

“ludicrous” for middle school students to sit for 90 minute blocks and said he would “mix it up” to get them out of their seats. He said he brought more art into the curriculum and did more projects, but was conflicted that it took time from teaching the material for the state assessment tests. He also offered that he believed it was caring to have students do things where they felt they were in charge, which included making choices about different aspects of the classroom and allowing his students opportunities to do activities out of the classroom such as tutoring first grade students.

This teacher described a colleague whom he felt was very caring because she knew each student’s needs in different classes and would help the student get caught up with homework, organize notebooks, etc. He thought she was very intuitive and that the students were very comfortable with her because she had a calming presence. He elaborated that she was not a “pushover”; she never raised her voice, but the students did what she requested. He added that she had very clear expectations and that “...it was obvious she cares, above and beyond...” Sam reported that he personally made efforts to meet the needs of his students “as best you can and they just have horrific backgrounds, some of them...But you try, you’re here.”

On the whole, Sam stated he thought that the sixth grade team of teachers was caring by doing a good job of transitioning students into middle school. In order to do this, he said they gave students what they needed to help them be organized and get settled in. Sam thought that being caring was a way to help students learn as opposed to coercing students into learning. He described caring in his class as immersing students

“...in the English language in all kinds of ways” and at the end of the year, students said “I really didn’t really like to read until (this class)...and now I can’t get enough books!”

Outside of his classroom Sam offered that he believed he demonstrated care for the students by taking the time to create a newscast for the school. This gave all students the opportunity to take on responsibility and to perhaps discover untapped talent.

Overall, Sam’s care focused on providing students as individuals with a positive experience at school where they would feel noticed. He felt this was provided, at least in part, through his and other teachers’ teaching methods; there was flexibility in the classroom, and there were expectations of students and support to help them achieve. Sam also spent extra time connecting with students in the hallway and creating an outlet for budding television personalities and technicians. He revealed that his personal approach to students was somewhat motivated by how he “...went through middle school feeling invisible.” He also divulged his passion for what he does “...it’s a crazy job, but I love it!”

Initially, Dottie, one of the seventh grade teachers, said she wondered what it was that she did that was caring and said that “sometimes it happens in spite of me.” She said she made good connections with her students perhaps in some way because she called them “Honey and Sweetheart and things like that...,” which she thought might have stemmed from her very southern upbringing. As she spoke, she seemed to realize that she demonstrated care “without really knowing, I somehow let them know...that I do care about them, that they are important to me and that their happiness is and this is what we are going to do to help them feel like they can achieve what they need to achieve.” She

continued "...if I'm on their case about some missing homework...I guess it's how I say it. I guess they understand that I'm not being this evil person...I want them to succeed and I'm going to help them as much as I can...and then I'm going to walk away and help them do it and I will be there to catch them for a while, but eventually they will be able to do it without me." She gave an example of a student who had some issues which she told "If I didn't care about you I wouldn't be talking to you like this...I want you to succeed, I think you can be in honors next year but we have some steps we have to take to get you there...this is what I'd like you to do but you tell me what you want to do and how much you're committed to this..."

Dottie made every effort to learn at least the first names of her approximately 125 students by Back to School Night in early September. Although time with students was limited, Dottie said she made time for students in the mornings and for a few minutes during resource class, she allowed them talk to her about "...what was on their minds." She further detailed how she learned about students and showed she was interested in who they were outside of class by spending a lot of time with them. She "...would ask them about how they are, they tell me about things that are going on at home...that they have a boyfriend..." She was also able to get to know students by living in the school's attendance area. She told of one student who would ride his bike by her house when she was outside and they would talk, he started to do her homework, but no other teacher's.

Dottie continued that she spent a lot individual time with all of her students and would "ask how about how they are, they tell me about things going on at home..." and about other personal issues. She made time to talk with students in the morning and for a

few minutes during resource class. Time spent with students beyond the workday was also a way Dottie said that she and her colleagues were caring. She said they were very committed to students as demonstrated by their willingness to “stay anytime we need to...we stay every Wednesday after school and work with students on our team, try to provide them incentives with snacks...” Through this extra time spent with students, each student was provided with individual help.

Dottie also stated she showed care for her students by being interested in what they were personally involved in beyond her academic class. She described a situation in which a student had asked if she could practice a solo piece for an upcoming concert in front of her. Dottie reported she was happy to do so and promised to attend the concert because the student’s family would not be unable to attend. She included that after the private rehearsal, the student said “Okay, I’m feeling better.” Dottie also described a situation in which a student was not happy with something she had done. Dottie had heard about it from the counselor and she then spoke with the student. She said “I won’t let it go, it has to be talked about, I have to work this out, you can decide you don’t like me, let’s just coexist and I will continue to care and do what I can do for you...”

Reinforcement and encouragement were also ways that Dottie demonstrated care. She stated that she tried to reward them, not always with something extrinsic, but a lot of time “...just praise them and tell them how wonderful they are.”

At the end of the interview, Dottie reflected “In all honesty, I don’t know exactly what (caring) is because a lot of the stuff I do is off the cuff and it just happens.” However, she had described caring as her being tenacious about wanting all students to

succeed and to learn. In order to do so, she said she spent “a lot of time with students” and took a personal interest in each of them, including ones who reportedly had a problem with her. She also included that she and her colleagues helped students by spending extra time with them before, after and during school. Her teaching style focused on engaging students being interactive in their learning, using positive reinforcement and incorporating humor. On a personal level she encouraged students to share concerns by being open to listening to them and by providing time them to do so. Although Dottie told her students that she cared about them, called them “Honey” and “Cupcake,” she did not plan how she demonstrated care, but she did describe many ways that she demonstrated care.

The other seventh grade teacher, Mattie, reported that she worked at learning all of her students’ names within the first 10 minutes of class. She explained that she wanted them to know “I value you, I’m going to learn your name from the get go...they know that I know them.” For Mattie caring was when she pursued other resources within the school to find out about a challenging student. She related a situation in which she said the student “...really pushed my patience...and really tested my rules and procedures.” In an effort to be able to work with the student she spoke with the counselor and dean to find out what he had been like in other classes. Having more knowledge of the student, she was able to develop a plan of how she would interact with him. The next year, he sent her a thank you note for her help.

Mattie was direct with her students in telling them that she cared about them. As a teacher of communication she said caring was like an advertising agent, “...let them

know and do not let them second guess it, come right out and tell them” that you care. She said that in the classroom, behavior was important to her and that from the first day she tells the students her rules of behavior which include restraint, responsibility, respect and kindness, and she personally models those behaviors. When behavior was an issue, she said she gave the same speech to each student all the time, “...sometimes you’re here to learn the math stuff...and sometimes you’re here to learn social skills and I don’t know if you realize this but what you did was inappropriate, so what can you learn from this...” She thought she demonstrated care by correcting students’ inappropriate behavior privately in the hall. Mattie also spoke about being caring when she would go to see students in “in school” suspension and asked said to them “what you doing there, how could you be there, not you.” She stated that she wanted to convey to them that her expectations are high but that she would never say that they had had let her down. She reassures these students that “...no one will know, just realize and don’t come back here.”

Mattie also gave the example of caring toward a very challenging student who had a history of being a “tough cookie” in other classes. She said she asked other staff members about him and thought about how she would approach him and decided that she was “...always going to keep treating him with respect...” She continued “I was consistent, I didn’t lose my cool, staying steady, being a rock, I don’t know...” However, one day, she reported, he brought her his class picture; something had changed. The next school year the student wrote her a letter, which said “I know I gave you a hard time at first and you stayed and you helped me.”

Another way Mattie reported she thought that she showed caring for her students was to make sure her classroom was a safe place. It was a place where students could try out things, do things at which they may not be perfect. She emphasized that she always tried to show students a positive attitude and was always prepared to teach. She said she knew that there would be times when students brought whatever they were struggling with to class and she would offer to listen if they needed to talk. She said they usually said thank you and did not share but it seemed that just being acknowledged seemed to help.

Mattie said that her students were not strong readers and that she needed to “tweak all the time” to find what would work to help them learn. This year, she had started out reading a book aloud. She described her recitation as “I’m really dramatic when I read...I make the characters come alive,” and the students want her to read more each time. She said in one book she was being very dramatic and running around and “the kids were almost on the floor laughing...you teach them that reading can be the video player in your mind, you can bring it to life.”

Mattie’s description of a caring teacher included straightforward talk about telling students that you care for them, teaching by being consistent with them, having expectations of them and presenting them with very engaging learning materials. She also tried to maintain each student’s self esteem by giving corrections in private and taking time to talk with individual students who had made some bad choices. Mattie’s description of caring also included providing students with a safe learning environment.

She extended her care for her students to using her resources to find out about students of concern, but created her own plan of action to engage the individual in learning.

Mattie said she learned about being a caring teacher as a result of having a professor who did not portray caring behaviors. As a result, Mattie didn't care about the class because the professor did not care about her. At the time she vowed to demonstrate care for her students, who, she hoped, would then care about what she taught.

Mattie also connected caring for students to her being a mother. She would tell students "I'm your mom at school." She would give them individual attention by helping with straightening their clothing or "...be the only smile they have or kind word they got that day, especially in their teen years."

"I think a part of caring is not getting their way or being a soft touch; sometimes being caring is being really tough, the tough love thing and sticking to expectations because I'm not doing them any favors if I'm always going 'oh it's okay this time, bring it to me tomorrow...'" This was the initial description of caring given by the eighth grade teacher Leah. She believed that it was important that she was a role model of her expectations by being organized; she tried to have everything ready to use to teach.

Leah's description of how she was caring also included her methods of teaching, as exemplified by being a role model of being interested in what she was teaching, having a good time teaching her topics and having a room that was welcoming. She also tried to have a sense of humor and joked with students.

Caring was also characterized by Leah as spending extra time doing special things for students. When they were studying the Constitutional Convention, she arranged the

room to somewhat replicate that environment in order for the students to get the feel of what they were learning. Time was also spent by her and her colleagues to sponsor non school time activities such as "... a homework lab after school...and some of us come early..." for those students who needed additional help. She shared that teachers in this grade level demonstrated care by being a part of a mentoring program which connected them after school with students "who may not have role models at home, people who don't have that extra time to give them at home."

Leah made an effort to know struggling students by observing them and listening to comments about them. She noted they were the ones who had a history of "...not being very successful grade wise, the ones that you know don't have anyone to sit with in the cafeteria, the ones that go to the library because they want to avoid that time because they don't have anyone to eat lunch with" or "you hear bits and pieces about children who go home to situations that aren't the best."

Leah also described caring for students as the time teachers took beyond the school day to learn "new techniques, new strategies, and different ways to present information." She said a part of her caring included "constantly learning, willing to be flexible...because every class is not the same..."

Leah described a part of her caring as being flexible with the expectations of a class of challenging students. She explained that she and the learning specialist were "always changing things up for that class...then we decided we have to have totally different set of expectations for that group, they're not any better or worse, just totally different..." Something else that Leah seemed to emphasize was that "every day is a

brand new day. Don't hold a grudge, whatever happened one day; don't bring back in the classroom the next day...Just start fresh!"

For Leah, caring was not something she contemplated and because the classroom situations were unpredictable she could not plan for all situations. As she stated, "(Caring is) not something that every day you sit down and say 'How can I be caring?' It's something you do in the course of the day...who knows what's going to come up on any given day." Leah also described the unidentified characteristics of caring as something "I don't think you ever know at the time" what you did but it may be something a student remembers sometime in the future as the teacher "who took a little extra interest, who helped me out when I was going through a really bad time..." Leah said she cared for her students by how she taught. She tried to keep to the expectations she set for her students and focused on teaching them by making the learning meaningful. She shared that she and her colleagues provided students with out of class opportunities to receive help, and she realized the need to be flexible to help students and provide challenging learning. She also thought it was caring to have fun with her students. She said she did not usually plan how she would be caring, it just happened as a part of what she did and she did not believe either she or the students usually recognized it at the time.

All four of the middle school teachers who were interviewed described that caring was demonstrated by learning about their students as individuals through finding time for the students to share about themselves, either through conversation or writing, listening to and observing them in different situations in and out of school. They also consulted with

other teachers to obtain additional perceptions of students. It was also an act of caring for at least two teachers that they learned their students' names very quickly.

Caring was a part of how they helped students learn. They all had expectations of their students and connected caring to how they taught. However, each teacher had their own unique perspective of how expectations and teaching manifested in the classroom. Sam emphasized trying to have students feeling comfortable in class and immersing them in many forms of reading and writing. He also tried to make the structure of the teaching time more conducive to the attention span and/or the ability to sit for extended time of students in the sixth grade. Caring was also about being intuitive about students' needs.

Dottie's teaching incorporated care by involving students in class discussions and she used reinforcement and encouragement to help them achieve. She thought she was sometimes hard on her students as a way of getting them to move forward. Mattie continually tried to find ways to engage reluctant learners and methods to help her struggling readers. She incorporated her very dramatic readings into class to create an excitement for reading among her students. She also tried to make the learning environment a safe place so students felt comfortable trying out new skills. Leah added that her approach to how she taught demonstrated her caring by taking the time to replicate historical environments connected to the current learning and making all learning meaningful to students. Each teacher said they had expectations of students; they were not a "soft touch" and could be hard on them. However, they were also nurturing to help them meet the expectations. Part of their caring was to use many diverse teaching strategies which, they thought, helped their students achieve.

The three women talked about caring as knowing their students' personal needs as well as their academic ones. They became aware of these needs by allowing students to casually talk during non teaching times or would observe differences in their demeanor. They talked about using humor and having fun in class as demonstrations of care. Sam, the male of the group, was concerned that students of this age group had serious problems at home, but did not say that he spoke to them specifically about the issues.

All four teachers described caring as giving extra time to students in several different ways. Dottie, Mattie and Leah said they were available to help students at times beyond class time and Sam described his television project as a way he gave extra time to students. Leah also described a part of her caring for students as taking time to learn about new techniques to use for teaching.

The more individual ways the middle school teachers described caring included Dottie and Mattie directly telling their students that they care. Dottie had her "cute names" for students and Mattie was the only teacher at this level that talked about being "their mom at school."

Finally, the three female teachers at the middle school level described caring as something that "...happens in spite of you..." or as "not something you plan." It is "...what you do without knowing you are doing it, so it is difficult to know exactly what it was that was caring." The female teachers at this level spoke intuitively about wanting to know students' personal needs and issues while the male teacher kept his conversation about knowing students more focused on their interests and how to help them in class. He

was concerned that they had poor home lives, but did not talk about knowing very personal issues about students.

High school teachers. At the high school level, Kirsten, who taught social studies, was firm in her response of why she was identified as a teacher who did things that were caring. She stated that her philosophy was "... I have a standard and I don't lower my standard and most of my students rise to my standard but I do that by making a connection with every kid, making class fun, interesting." She continued that she also tried to make the subjects she taught relatable to the students and that, she pushed them hard, but did it because she believed they could achieve; this included students who had previously struggled.

Also within the first few minutes of the interview Kirsten said she tried to "...get to know the kids and their interests..." and even knew their birthdays and gave them treats at the beginning of their birthday month. She would also learn about her students by asking them about things she would hear them talking about, such as "...I hear you got a new job, what do they sell?" She added that "you just make little connections and then two weeks later I'm saying how is the job going?" She said these inquiries would only take five minutes as the students would come in the classroom. Kirsten said she sometimes learned about her students' academic abilities, backgrounds, personal lives and health, which may not have been positive, from other teachers. She believed her interest in each student as a person helped her "...understand why the kid was like (he was), to use to your advantage" to be able to engage them and teach them. She gave an example of a student known to be argumentative. Before class she said she would talk

privately with him and ask him to give a challenging question that would subsequently stimulate conversation in the class of which he would be a part. Basically, “you have to figure out the kid,” she reported.

Kirsten said that she demonstrated care differently for each student depending on the student’s needs. At the time, she said she had some students with health or physical issues. Some of the students, she believed, had unsupportive families and another whose father had died suddenly. Her caring was demonstrated by noting in her psychology lesson plans the name of the student whose father had died. She wanted to be sure that she remembered to be cognizant of her situation when they would discuss the stages of grief. She anticipated that this may be a difficult topic for the student and wanted to present the topic in a sensitive manner and be prepared to support the student as needed. Other examples that she shared of her care towards students with specific issues were that she sent cards to those who have been sick and out of school for a while and that she tried to connect daily with a specific student whose home life was very difficult. She said she believed she was also caring through her understanding of a student’s interests and abilities. This led her to having a “...somewhat heart to heart talk” with the mom of a student who did not want to take an Advanced Placement social studies class, but the mother was pushing for him to do so. Kirsten reported she tried to support the student by speaking with his mother and essentially saying “He’s not an AP kid, not a history kid, didn’t want to take AP government...”

In trying to help students in general, Kirsten said “I try to make myself as available as possible to kids, that’s one of the reasons I get here so early in the morning,

because once eight o'clock hits they come in and my contract isn't until eight forty five." Another time, she said she was available to help students was while she supervised study hall. Teachers would send her students who needed help with history tests, and she helped them for as long as they would need it, not sticking with the "required" time of half of the study hall. Care and time were also correlated by Kirsten when she took on an Advanced Placement class for a teacher who was going to be absent for several months. She felt she needed to do this, although she had not taught the class for 12 years, because she realized the students were not learning what they needed to in order to do their best on the exam in May. She also offered these students three hour catch up sessions on Saturdays and Sundays for a month, something she would not get paid to do.

Kirsten also shared that caring was also demonstrated through her teaching style. One way she did this was by improving her lessons when she saw a need. She said that if she found a different way of teaching something she would think "Oooh I want to try this, what about this graphic, and tweak things..." She said she did this because she had taught the subjects for many years and was open to new ideas. On a daily basis, she was observant of her students in class and when she saw they were growing bored or they were not grasping something, she would "...totally do a 360 and talk about how it could relate to them, that would really get them involved, anything to make it fun and exciting!" She also made class interesting by going off on tangents or "play devil's advocate a lot and they think I'm nuts..." She said that another way she made history class interesting was by trying to get students involved in the learning by telling stories and exposing "the quirky things" about history.

Another part of how she taught that was caring was by the structure of her class. She thought the structure of her classes appealed to the students, it was "...very routine, very organized...there is a routine every single day, when the kids walk in the room they know exactly what to expect, they know where the homework is, they know what the makeup policy is, what my expectations are, they know I work about the bell, ...the bell rings we start, the bell rings we stop, ...they know this is fun but serious, if they're goofing around all I have to say is 'okay, let's go!' and instantly it's back on track." She added "I make them keep a binder, it has to be organized."

Kirsten felt she cared for all students. She described herself as "not noticing the various cultures, racial differences, handicaps, we are just around it all the time and it's the hallway." She told the story of a student who told her she was singling him out because he was Black; the whole class was Black or Hispanic. She told him "...do not use that as a crutch, never use that in my classroom, if you are going to go through life as an excuse, you have a tough life and after that his whole outlook totally changed ... and he passed his first (state end of year assessment) in that class."

Kirsten shared that her passion for her job contributed to her caring for students, "I teach because I love the kids and I love my content. There has never been a day I haven't wanted to come to work...my philosophy is the day I dislike coming to work is the day I get a new job." In addition, a part of her caring was "I'm willing to put myself out there...make fun of myself." Her caring was connected to wanting to help students succeed; it sprung from her own competitive spirit. She spent weekends helping students learn the material for their year end Advanced Placement test, doing what she could to

help each student do well. She would not be compensated for the extra time spent with the students, but she said “They’re now my kids!”

Caring for her students was based on Kirsten’s desire and belief that all students could be successful. She provided her students with time for help, a regular classroom routine, high standards, a teaching style that met students’ needs and a personal interest in each student that supported their learning.

In her first statement Jeannine, the other female high school teacher, spoke of connecting with her students by knowing “...how they perform in the classroom but also about what is going on outside of the classroom because I think they bring that into the school, into the class, it affects their performance.” As a teacher of eleventh and twelfth grade students, she said she thought it was caring and important that she be aware of her students’ outside issues, “There’s a lot of stuff that’s going on.” In the interview, she said she knew what they were interested in and what they did. She shared that she tried to go to their extracurricular events and when she is unable to attend these activities she would ask the student “how’d it go?” She also checked in with them about their weekends and vacations.

This was followed by her saying that her first concern about her students was to “have a good relationship and I do honestly care about them; not only how they perform in the classroom but also what is going on outside of the classroom...” She added that she wanted them to feel safe in her classroom since it may be the only place a student may feel that way. Sometimes, caring meant she had to act on her hunches about her students to help provide them safety. Jeannine remembered she had heard students talking about a

girl who had a broken arm. The talk concerned her and she contacted the counselor who remembered that protective services had previously been involved with the student. The outside had come inside and she took an interest in the student's welfare.

Jeannine further described caring as trying to be flexible with individual students, "we always have our rules and regulations and we always try to follow stuff, but there are always certain circumstances that come up." Her example was of a student overwhelmed by too many tests and her first Advanced Placement class exam; she told the student to take the test for her class later. She spoke of another situation when a student looked "...visibly upset..." and was texting in class, something that was not allowed. She demonstrated flexibility by asking the student what was wrong before she jumped all over her for breaking the rules. She took the time to find out why the student was upset and allowed her to make up the class work when she was more focused. In other situations, such as when students had grandparents die, she said she demonstrated flexibility by allowing the students almost indefinite time to make up their work. Her concern was about giving students the opportunity to do their best and not focusing on a regulation. She explained "I work with kids," and it was important to her that students knew "that we care and not just here to give them grades or to give them information."

Another way that Jeannine described her caring was by spending time with each one as needed. She said "...if a student is willing to work , I'll sit down with them...I'll explain things to them...I take the time to discuss with them and say this is why we are doing this or I really appreciate that you did this." She used this approach because she

learned from listening to student discussions in psychology that they prefer the parenting style that provided them with explanations.

She thought students felt comfortable in her class because “they know they’re not going to get shut down and I’m open to everyone talking and I actually care about what they say.” She also said that if a class was really quiet at the beginning of the year she encouraged them to talk. Through conversations in class, she believed the kids knew that she cared about them, she thought she brought “...those kids to a higher level in terms of one to one growth.” She contacted parents when students were not performing as they should and when students questioned why she did this, she said they needed to be responsible for themselves and if they weren’t, that she would need to get the message out, “we are trying to help you be successful...we care enough to not let them fail.”

Another way Jeannine showed care for her students was by being interested in what each one did beyond academics. She tried to go to their events and would ask about the ones she was unable to attend. She added that the way she and her colleagues spoke with students in the hallway about the rules also demonstrated care. They tried to prepare them for the rules in real world, but did it in a way that was really polite and they always tried to “...treat the kids with respect...” She defined respect as treating them “...as you would like to be treated, not talking down to them, just showing them that even though we are teachers and they are students, they’re still people.” She thought this demonstrated a lot of caring.

Jeannine used the information she learned about the individual students to help each one to be able to succeed. She tried to help them remember things in class by

relating “examples back to their lives.” She continued “I don’t know how to say it; in a strange way, it shows that I care about them.” Her intent was to help students understand and to make connections, not to just to memorize information. She believed it helped students remember things because they could “remember it through themselves because they are so egocentric.” She also would repeat examples the students gave and refer back to those examples, which also seemed to help them remember. This was especially helpful for students “...who are teetering on the brink.” She reflected about students who were failing the class, wouldn’t do the work, and wouldn’t drop the class because she thought they were saying “I like the class...she cares about us, we have fun in here, and it’s interesting.” It wasn’t about the grade. She also observed that “they’re staying still shows me there is a connection, still something about this class and the relationship we have makes them want to stay in here.”

Another way that Jeannine felt she showed care for her students was through her concern about their grades and wanting them to feel good about themselves. Her classes were electives, for which students would not always study. In order to engage them, she would discuss “...what was going on outside...” and would spend days on a current event which she thought was important learning. She felt she was helping them learn about the world around them.

In reflecting on how difficult the job of teaching can be, Jeannine talked about a student who would not follow some of the rules. She told him she would email his coach, not out of meanness but in a great desire for “...him to learn you need to shape up and you need to respect people and people will respect you back and I’m not going to let you

turn into this.” She called it a “...kind of tough love thing.” She said she couldn’t write anyone off, “...you always find something good...”

Overall, Jeannine’s concern was about the big picture and each student’s future. She explained “I just don’t want the kids to fail and not just fail grade wise, but not fail self esteem wise and fail when they get out of school.”

Jeannine described that her caring was related to her passion for teaching. She said “teaching to me is more than just a job...it’s hard, I don’t want to say calling, it’s just something that becomes your life; it’s more that just going to the office and coming home.” She thought a strong influence on how she treated students came from her “...very close, loving family.” She said that her background of coming from a very small school in a small town also provided her with role models of teachers knowing students as individuals. Her parents were the ones who were role models for how she gave explanations for how things were or why she had discussions with students about “...why we did this...” She remembered high school teachers who were important to her and reflected about how important the time in high school was. She said she takes her job seriously; she stated “I love the high school kids. They’re so interesting, the drama, and everything that goes on, it’s just fun! ...if you can’t have fun with it then you shouldn’t be doing it.” Jeannine was caring about the whole student; she was determined to never have a student fail academically or personally in school or out in the real world. Caring for her was “...not something you plan for, it’s just something that you do.”

The youngest respondent of the high school teachers, Adam, described his caring as “what I do is simply what I do. I don’t necessarily internalize as much what it is I’m

doing for my students, I just do it.” He said he considered himself caring through his concern about getting to know his students. He said that what he did stemmed from something the principal said to him when he started to teach at this school; “it’s more about building relationships with your students.” He said “...it struck me from that very first day ... I have found that to be true...that when I have taken the time to get to know a student on a little bit more personal level that it paid off in the long run in terms of them wanting to follow (me)...” He said he was able to get to know his students by showing them “that you are human and... (through) my demeanor and my attitude...” He added “It was just me getting to know them and them getting to know me.”

In describing the relationship he had with a student, he related an incident in which the student had acted somewhat defiantly after not getting his way about where he was to sit in class. However, later the same day the student came to Adam and apologized. Adam said at that point they had a “...little interesting conversation about how we couldn’t assume things in life and not everything in life is going to be given to us.” Adam thought it was “...pretty powerful as well that the student took time to come back...” to admit he had done something wrong. Adam said he didn’t dwell on “every single experience that happens” with students.

Adam tried to show students that he was human through his demeanor and attitude. He said he joked around with them a lot; they laughed and had a good time. He added “I think that’s what it’s all about, really.” He believed the use of humor helped to “bridge the gap.....you are going to break down that barrier, the fourth wall and be able to move students in directions you didn’t think possible.”

Adam described that he had different relationships with the students in his yearbook class than those in his academic classes because it is a more casual atmosphere where there was more socializing. He said that these students were able to get to know him better, and he thought that perhaps that helped them open up more to him. He said he felt an outcome of this was demonstrated by a student who had had a few emotional weeks and sought advice from him. The student was very down on himself, and Adam helped him figure out some options for his future. A lot of trust was the basis of this interaction and Adam felt the student was comfortable with him. He thought it "...was neat... a student trusted me so much to invest in telling me these deep dark personal things."

There were times when Adam thought that caring was working with the student's individual needs such as when he felt a need to be flexible with the rules. He described a situation when a student received a really bad grade and could not understand why. When Adam and the student looked over his exam, they realized the mistake was made in bubbling in the answers on the wrong lines. Because Adam knew the student as an honest person and that he had done well on previous quizzes related to the subject, he decided to allow the student to retake that portion of the exam. In the interview, he insisted that "flexibility is really key; you have to be flexible, especially in this job, have to!" Another way Adam described caring was through spending time with students in various formats such as "...coming in early to school...staying after school...me taking a little bit more one on one time with that student in class...at sporting events...casually in the hallway and you talk about whatever it is (they) want to talk about."

Adam described as his whole approach in the classroom as a caring one. He said it is "...an internal drive for me to be friendly, to be nice to everyone...I always like to help, I like to do as much as I can to get you to any level that you need to be at." If students weren't initially receptive he said he tried as many times as he could to break the barrier. He also thought it was caring to give "snippets of reality, what life is really going to be like because we are really in a little microcosm here (in high school) and you have no idea what life will be like after high school." He summarized his approach through a quote he had read before he became a teacher "first and foremost you don't teach content, you teach your students, you teach them about life."

Adam attributed his caring attitude to "my upbringing...what I learned from my family and my parents in terms of how to treat people." He also did not believe that caring was "...necessarily a cognitive or rational decision for me on a day to day basis, it's the way I treat students when I interact with them." He described himself as always having been "very friendly, not necessarily outgoing at the onset...but it has been an internal drive to be friendly, to be nice to everyone. I always like to help..." Students seemed to have been appreciative of these behaviors because Adam described a time he walked into the gym for a sporting event and a whole section of students started to hoot and holler his name. In spite of these acknowledgements, he described times of not being self assured as a teacher. He said once in a while, he questions what he does with students and why he still does this job; he wonders "Why do they like me so much?" He believed that teaching English literature was a difficult job and that at some point he will burn out; presently he was working towards another license to work a different position in a school.

Although he never thought he would be a high school teacher, he has known that he wanted to be a teacher since the second grade. Words he took to heart from his high school English teacher have helped him be the teacher he is. She said "...the minds you are teaching in front of you are very impressionable and are very easily hurt as well and when it comes to writing you have to be careful because you don't want to pick apart every single thing that they do wrong, you need to highlight some of the good things..."

Adam tried to practice all of the advice he has been given through lots of reflection, which he said he didn't really have time to do. However, he divulged that he told a friend "I want to be a rock star teacher and I don't feel like I'm ever going to live up to those expectations." His friend responded, "You already are!" However, Adam's perception was that he was not a rock star, he thought of himself as "just me, it's just what I do..." He added "but I love it, I love what I do, I really do."

Michael, the most reserved respondent, described his view of how he thought he was caring as being fair with students, "...indeed more than fair." He said he tried to "...cut them a lot of slack which gives them comfort, they feel comfortable in my room..." and tried to do things that were fun for the students and him. He reflected that the work for the Advanced Placement English Literature was demanding but that he was "...always trying to do something that is meaningful, that they'll learn something from it and they should enjoy it." He wanted students to know that an aspect of his caring was that he did not "want to waste their time."

Michael also thought he was caring because he liked the students. As he stated, "I like them individually, although some students are not responsive in that way." However,

he said he even cared for the ones who may be "...indifferent or cold..." because he wanted what was best for their welfare. He liked each student by recognizing their strengths and weaknesses and in the seven years of teaching he thought "...they're all nice kids." He described a difficulty with a student who didn't turn in some work until the end of the semester, even though he had been reminded many times. Michael said he considered for several days whether he would accept the very late work and then realized that this was not a student of whom he was particularly fond and that perhaps he was not being fair. He accepted the work from the student.

Michael also told of an incident which he thought he handled in a caring manner; he knew that some students had cheated. He thought the situation was important as a life lesson, and he spoke with all of his classes about the larger implications of cheating and how it affects people's trust in each other. He thought he presented "a caring way of talking to kids who need to know this..."

Michael did not talk directly about knowing students but implied that he knew them when he said "I like them individually...they're good, they have their strengths and weaknesses, but they're all nice kids." He knows his students well enough to see their abilities and where they need support.

As a senior member of the staff in age, Michael described the younger teachers as perhaps demonstrating care as being "...enthusiastic and engaged...and (having) more rapport with students." He continued "I think when you become older as a person and as a teacher, if you're able to maintain your enthusiasm, you just get wiser about stuff, you don't let the little stuff bother you." He added that when changes in the school routine

happen, “you kind of go with the flow and let them enjoy the moment...and then you get on with the work.”

While teaching, Michael said he showed care to his students by joking with them, using funny examples such as with vocabulary, “we’ll use the words in interesting, memorable ways.” When students don’t like the book being read, he said he would keep going back to the students to discuss “why they might want to reconsider their position, how it might apply to their everyday life at this school or how it might help them in future dating situations, that they understand personal relationships and then it’s funny, the book’s funny.”

Although he came into teaching at a much older age than the other teachers interviewed, Michael was attracted to teach English because it was rewarding to see “...kids learn and the light bulb go on and that’s a joy.” He said he probably wouldn’t have been a good teacher if he had started in his twenties; he was hard, aggressive and ambitious, good skills for the young corporate lawyer he was. Now, he believed that he had mellowed and had nothing to prove to his students. He said “I know I know the subject, I know life. I think the students find comfort in that...” He added “I am comfortable teaching and with the rewards I’m getting.”

Michael summarized that caring made it easier for him to teach; “...the atmosphere of the room is better.” He said he presented a wise, relaxed demeanor about caring for students; he focused on helping them know what learning was important and wanted to help them understand life.

The four high school teachers described caring as they related to their students' academic and personal lives. Three of them strongly believed that they demonstrated care for their students by learning about them; each of them talked about learning about their students in the first few responses of their interviews. They described how they learned about their students by inquiring about activities, their lives, asking other staff, listening and remembering things about the students. These teachers also were caring by building relationships with students by letting them get to know something about who they were as people. The fourth teacher was not as direct about how he knew his students.

Each teacher talked about preparing students for life outside of high school, giving them a dose of reality. The focus of their care for students was on student academic learning, and they tried to support students' practical and emotional needs for the present and the future. How they taught was a way they tried to meet these needs; each teacher in some way connected the learning to the students' lives, made it meaningful to them and tried to make it fun and interesting. They used humor while teaching, even though what they were learning may have been serious. Caring was also portrayed by the teachers as when they were flexible to meet the academic or personal needs of individual students. Kirsten added that she adapted lessons as she taught in order to meet the needs of the students as she realized they were bored or not understanding. There was a common belief among the teachers that all students could succeed and described ways they used to help them be successful.

The two women teachers at this level said that they thought they expressed care by having standards for their students and pushing hard, but they helped them be

successful. They also supported ways that their students could feel good about themselves.

The three younger teachers, Kirsten, Jeannine and Adam, added to their descriptions of care as the time they spent with their students beyond their class time. These times were spent helping with academics or personal issues and attending students' extracurricular activities. The teachers were aware of what students were doing and saying, which they used to inform how to make their teaching meaningful and when they needed to attend to students' personal needs in order to help them move on to learning.

These high school teachers described that their caring came from who they were, not that they specifically planned to be caring. They said that their families and past experiences influenced how they interacted with students. Michael, more experienced in life, said that his caring came from his being comfortable with who he was and what he knew.

All levels. The teachers, at all three levels, gave characteristics of caring as treating their students as individuals by knowing their academic and/or personal needs in order to help them learn. The common themes that became evident were that teachers across the grade levels learned about their students as individuals, took individual interest in their students, were vehement about their expectations of their students and were persistent in trying to help them be successful and learn. They were not easy on the students, but understood when to be flexible. Some of this was accomplished by spending time with students beyond regular class time to help them.

The responses from the teachers at all levels indicated they want to know their students as individuals, their likes, academic and personal needs and activities. Although the goal was the same, how they went about it had similarities and differences. Almost all of the teachers said they learned about their students by listening to them and asking them questions about themselves. The most distinguishing differences in the ways that the teachers learned about their students was that elementary teachers made it a point to meet with parents or learned whose parents were not available to meet with them. These teachers also observed who needed sleep, clothes or healthcare. Another way elementary teachers learned about their students was by talking about themselves in order to encourage students to talk about themselves. A distinctive way two of the middle school teachers described getting to know their students was by initially making them feel welcomed by learning their names quickly, which they thought made the students feel they knew them. They also learned about their students from other staff in the school. The high school teachers learned more about their students' personal lives by directly asking them. The teachers at all levels felt that making connections with their students helped them to connect students to the learning.

Other similarities in themes that emerged were that seven of the teachers, scattered from second grade to twelfth, said they connected their knowledge of their students to how they taught them. The almost identical group of teachers also said another way that they cared was by having conversations with their students, and for another similar group having compassion for their students was a demonstration of their care.

There were also differences in how teachers described how they cared. One very striking difference was that three of the elementary and one of the middle school female teachers said they demonstrated care because they were like a “mom” or motherly to their students. None of the high school teachers used any similar terminology in describing being caring towards their students. A difference related to level was that the middle school teachers were also distinctive in their characterization of caring as it was doing extra things for students, how they tried to preserve or supported student’s self esteem, what they did for students personally, or how they structured the classroom or presented material.

There were similarities between high school and middle school teachers’ descriptors of caring which were distinctive from the elementary teachers’. Most of the middle and high school teachers said that how they taught was influenced by family, previous teachers or experiences. They also were the ones who tried to attend their students’ extracurricular activities.

The high school teachers’ descriptors of caring for students were distinguished as the ones who more often said they were open to listening to students concerns, personal or academic, and that they tried to prepare their students for the “real world.” The teachers at this level were explicit about their passion for teaching, although it was a sometimes difficult career. They added that they enjoyed teaching and included humor and having a good time in their teaching and with their students.

Teachers' Descriptors of Not Caring Teachers

Before summarizing the differences by school level, it is important to note that two of the teachers, one in elementary and one in high school, mentioned what they thought were characteristics of teachers who were not caring. These two teachers, who taught students of very different ages, noted a similarity in teachers who they believe seem uncaring; they did not make positive connections with students. Joan, the second grade teacher, said she thought that when students had teachers who were not caring, understanding or who were critical, they would be afraid to make a mistake which would be "...detrimental because if you can't make a mistake...you'll never (learn what you need to learn)."

Adam expressed "there's a fear of students at times, they don't necessarily know how the students will receive them...they're perceived as the authoritarian figure (stern voice) and they're really afraid to break down that wall and to really engage with their students, whereas, I embrace that more."

The Impact of Teacher Caring Related to Academics

The teachers also responded to what they believed was the impact of teacher caring on students. They described ways in which caring teachers impacted student motivation to learn, live up to expectations, or try harder in class.

Elementary school teachers. Joan, the second grade teacher, thought that the impact of teacher caring on the students was that they were able to feel "...it's okay to fail...it's important that if ... (they) struggle, they know they have someone there to help, they can ask for help and not think they are going to be in trouble for not knowing

something.” She shared that she told her students tests were to let her know what they need to learn which “changes their whole attitude about the tests.” Joan also described giving different types of caring for different situations, such as the caring from parents or one teacher as opposed to another. She felt it “helps (students) become more emotionally intelligent...that they are then able to deal with different ...social situations.”

At the third grade, Shawna thought that the impact of “taking care of the whole child” made them “more capable of learning.” By knowing her students she was able to take into consideration other issues in her students’ lives and would try to help resolve them so they were better “...able to learn.” She also expressed that caring for her students “makes them more motivated to try... they’ll be more motivated to give their best effort...we lead by example.” She added that if “they don’t want someone to be disappointed then they will try their hardest. Hopefully, that happening enough times they’ll want to hold themselves accountable, they’ll be intrinsically motivated, they feel better about themselves.”

The impact of caring, as seen from the perspective of the fourth grade teacher Sarah was that students wanted to perform better, “it’s not just someone telling them to do something and they have a goal to please me...” She gave the examples of two students whose parents did not seem to have expectations of them, who worked for her; she believed that her help motivated them because they aimed to please her. She thought the quality of their work went up because of her caring. Sarah added that caring actions such as laminating their work, motivated students. She explained that it “shows them you respect their work, makes them try harder.”

Winnie also thought her fifth grade student learning was impacted by caring. She believed that caring impacted her students also by motivating them to work for her; she said, “I get results from them...” and “...you just get more out of them, it makes them achieve.”

The elementary teachers described the impact of their caring on students as being focused on the students’ efforts to learn. Joan, the second grade teacher said that because of caring students took risks and could ask for help in order to learn. From her perspective, students also learned about different ways of caring in different situations.

The other three elementary teachers described that demonstrating caring for their students in multiple ways would impact the students by motivating them to perform better in order to not disappoint the teachers, which would eventually lead them to be intrinsically motivated and feel better about themselves. Overall, they felt this would lead to student achievement.

Middle school teachers. At the middle school level Sam believed that his caring impacted student learning because his sixth grade students who had started as non readers and became readers after being immersed in language arts’ activities in many different ways. They would tell the teacher “I didn’t like to read until this class and now I can’t get enough books...” He also attributed caring as providing students with an out of class opportunity to create and perform on a school television program. Sam thought that a possible impact of this activity was that more reserved or timid students had the opportunity to become more outgoing. He identified a student who had been a stressed

out sixth grader, and then two years later, had evolved into a confident eighth grade student who hammed it up as the narrator on the broadcast.

According to Dottie, one of the seventh grade teachers, caring impacted students in a variety of ways. Her first example was when she made time to support a student musician. The student told her that she was nervous about a solo guitar piece for the school concert and was concerned she would “mess up.” She asked if she could play her piece for the teacher. During her planning period, Dottie listened to her play the piece and “...told her how wonderful she was, then she played it again and she said okay I’m feeling better.” Her care towards students extended also to a student she knew that lived by her and with whom she had casual conversations outside her home. The impact of caring in this situation was that this student only did the homework for Dottie’s class, and not anyone else’s. In both examples, caring was spending time out of the classroom with students and giving support by listening and interacting with them.

The need for authenticity of caring was also pointed out by Dottie. She sensed that students could tell when teachers were sincere in their caring and how this authenticity impacted their responses. She told of a teacher, who tried to emulate her by saying hello to students as they came in the classroom door. The other teacher was not perceived by the students as genuine, and they grumbled about her greeting. Dottie said the teacher didn’t understand that she did not seem genuine to the students and added “I think students know when you really care about them.”

As with the elementary teachers, Dottie thought an impact of her caring for her students was that they worked for her. She said “...if I care about them then they will

pretty much do anything you ask them to do as far as work and things like that...” She added that caring for her students made them “...happier, they’re willing to look at things a little bit more...they open up...they also feel a little bit more comfortable speaking in class saying things that they think.” An example was that a parent told her that her son “...loves your class...and he’s never liked this subject before...he can’t wait until he can do his work for the class” and, she added, he was doing well in the class. Another instance which was related was an interaction that occurred with a student during her student teaching. Even though she was very intimidated by the high school students, she asked a girl who had no supplies on her desk if she needed paper and pencil. The girl said nothing and without much thought, Dottie gave her the items needed. During her time in that class, when appropriate, Dottie told the student what a wonderful job she was doing. After that the student continued to work for her. At the end of Dottie’s student teaching, the girl reminded her of the first day and thanked her. In this situation Dottie felt she cared by being positive with the student and have expectations of the student which motivated her to participate.

Mattie’s initial comments in the interview were about how a not caring teacher impacted her as a university student. The teacher told the class that she would not learn their names and that they didn’t need to attend class. The result was that Mattie attended class, but did not pay attention and did not care about the material. This made such an impression on Mattie that she made a commitment to be sure she demonstrated care for her students so they would care for her class. Mattie’s caring was validated during a class discussion about why she could be interested in a job that made more money. One of her

students exclaimed that “because you love us!,” she wouldn’t leave them. In another situation Mattie expressed how care by showing him consistent respect impacted a very difficult student. The next year he wrote her a thank you letter stating “...you stayed and you helped me.” Her care made a difference for each of these students.

Mattie thought that her caring also helped students become readers. She described them as “...not strong readers” and therefore she read aloud to them in a “really dramatic” manner. She said she made the characters come alive and the students were engaged in the stories and didn’t want her to stop reading. Her goal was to “...teach them that reading can be the video player in your mind, you can bring it to life...” An impact of making reading engaging was that a special education teacher came to her and said “You did it! You made Lucy a reader!” Another result of her taking the time and energy to read to her students was that they began to read on their own all the time.

Leah, the eighth grade teacher, reported she thought that the little extras she did like arranging her room to represent the time of the signing of the U. S. Constitution; impacted the students’ ability to remember something about the event. She also made the comment that “I don’t think you ever know at the time (what the impact of caring may be), it’s not something they are going to thank you for at the end of the year...it’s something they may not realize for many years down the road and they may not remember who the teacher was ...that took extra interest, who helped me out when I was going through a really bad time.”

The middle school teachers thought that caring impacted their students’ motivation to work for them and learn. The sixth grade teacher thought that caring

promoted student creativity and personal growth. Dottie, one of the seventh grade teachers, thought caring needed to be authentic for it to have an impact on students. Further, she offered that if teachers were genuine in their willingness to support students, then the students would engage with the teachers. Leah pointed out that teachers may never know what impact they have on students. A theme that was expressed by the middle school teachers was that their different ways of caring helped the students; although they may not know exactly how.

High school teachers. In Kirsten's class at the high school level, care helped students who have "...struggled in the past do really well." For her, caring was taking interest in students to ask why they weren't coming to school or why they were thinking about quitting school. After her demonstration of interest in them, the students showed up to class and on graduation day, they gave her cards saying she was the reason they graduated. She also said she tried to make class enjoyable because "...if they enjoy class they will learn the content...they will study more....they will do well in my class because if I care, they care." Another example of the impact of caring Kirsten reported was that she was aware of a student who did not have a good home environment and had not done well in school. Every day she would "try to make a connection with her." After awhile, the class was reviewing for the semester exam by playing Jeopardy, and this girl was "...one of the people jumping out of her seat to answer." Kirsten said "I think because she knows I care about her makes her feel good..." about herself. She believed that "if you care they take more interest, they try a little more."

As a history teacher, Kirsten thought she was hard on her students but tried to help them learn the material by telling stories connected to the history. As a result, she recalled hearing of friends helping friends study for tests; they would use the same stories word for word that she had told them. She also related that a student who was Hispanic said to her that she told her boyfriend the stories in Spanish. The boyfriend subsequently got involved in learning. Kirsten said "...that's how they remember history! ... I cared enough to make it interesting so they're passing it on." She believed the students engaged in learning as a result of her caring.

Kirsten also demonstrated care by having students keep binders that had to be organized. She said she would hear them "...say every other class is a disaster except this one, I can't believe I did all of this!" She thought the impact for students was "...a sense of achievement."

Jeannine, also a high school social studies teacher, stated she believed that because she is caring toward her students that "...they feel comfortable in the room...it helps them want to perform better." She added "I think sometimes when you know someone really cares about you; you don't want to disappoint them." She clarified that was not why she was caring, but that the students were "...more willing to talk more...they know they're not going to be shut down and I'm open to everyone talking and I actually care what they say." To explain this, she referred to her psychology class where they "...get off on a conversation...they know I care about them...we can have discussion...I think I bring kids up on a higher level in terms of one on one learning." She explained this as being very direct and honest with them about how they were doing

in class. She summed up “we know who they are and we care enough to not let them fail.”

Jeannine noted, there were also times, when students don’t have the drive to achieve but seem to be getting something out of the class. She said “I have some kids who are failing, they will not drop the class...and still they don’t do the work...they’ll turn in late stuff...but I think they get it...” She added that her students would say “I like the class...she cares about us, we have fun in here, it’s interesting.” In Jeannine’s words because they “...are still staying in shows me that there is still a connection, still something about this class and the relationship we have makes them want to stay in here.”

Jeannine also cared about what the students were interested in and what they wanted to discuss. She shared that in class she would bring up topics from the “outside” that she thought would be interesting for students. In response, the students would email her information about the topics, showing that they were “going above and beyond and researching things and reading extra articles.”

Adam, one of the high school English teachers, thought his care for students impacted how they viewed their learning in class. He had a student who said “we just aren’t understanding rhetorical devices and we still can’t grasp these devices...but the teacher keeps talking about them, he hasn’t given up on us because every day he comes in with a different strategy or a different exercise for us to try to tackle head on!” A result of caring was that teacher and students didn’t give up on each other.

Adam also described an example when students wanted to let him know the impact his caring had on them. “I...just randomly have kids come into my room...between classes...” and tell him they missed seeing him the week before and wanted to say hi and to “let you know we’re your favorite students...” He has also had students from past years write him saying what an impression he had made on them. One student told him he “... always enjoyed coming to your class...it left an impression on me.” A student from his first year of teaching said “...because I could tell you cared about me, I was willing to bend over backwards for you... you were receptive to me as a student...you left a huge impression on me as a student.” He continued by saying that if students “...sense that you are willing to put in the time and put out for them as much as you can, then they’ll put just as much effort in for you, as much as they can consider...”

From a reciprocal perspective, he thought that students could tell when he was running down, not that they “...intentionally try to build you up but they’ll say something exactly at the right time when you need to feel better about yourself.” He described these experiences as “pretty powerful, very powerful.”

The other male high school English teacher, Michael, thought that his caring was a motivator for students. He said that if a “kid has a rapport with you and doesn’t want to disappoint you personally, it’s a personal thing, and then they’ll put out a little more. They’ll study harder; they’ll work a little harder on that essay, read the book when I keep telling them they ought to...”

Michael also talked about how students were reciprocal in their caring for him. He talked about having cancer the year before and the outpouring of concern from the

students. More recently he had injured his ankle and was on crutches. Students rushed to help him in every way; he felt they were worried about him. He reflected that it went back to rapport, "...if they care about me and how I feel, then they do study harder, because if I don't feel happy with them they know...I'm very frank with them...they'll know I was disappointed with them and that they could do better."

All of the teachers at the high school level described the impact of caring as a motivator for students to be open to learning and to be more persistent to learn. The teachers thought that because they cared, students were motivated to attend school, stay in school, try and study harder and feel good about themselves. As a result of this motivation Jeannine thought students performed better and participated more. Adam and Jeannine described caring as impacting students' connections with them. Some students seemed to stay in a class to maintain contact with the teacher or would just need to touch base and say hello to a teacher. The impact of caring for Michael and Adam included the reciprocity of caring that they received from the students. In the past year when Michael had some health issues, the students rallied around him sending cards and offering help within the school. Adam described the students' caring toward him as when they were unaware of their impact on him, but he realized their actions raised his energy at a low point. At the high school level teaching caring impacted student learning.

All levels. The impact of having a caring teacher was described by all but one of the teachers. The one central theme that emerged was that caring teachers motivated students to do better or their best or inspired them to not want to disappoint their teacher. Another theme, which was described by six of the eight middle and high school

teachers, was that teacher caring influenced the quality of student learning; they learned more or better.

The collective data from the teachers present areas of consensus in what caring teachers do, as well as what seems to be a developmental picture of how teachers care for students of different ages. The purpose of teacher caring was to support student learning, but how teachers cared seem to have a “developmental” aspect.

With one exception, all of the teachers in this study said that they believed that caring teachers know their students as individuals, meaning that they know their students’ academic and personal needs. They expressed that they wanted to help their students be successful and were persistent about giving their help. They added that it was caring to treat their students as individuals and to connect learning to what they knew about their students. They did things with or for students beyond class time with them to help them be successful or to support their needs.

The impact of caring teachers on students was also described by the teacher participants. As a group, except for Joan, the teacher at the youngest grade, the teachers described the impact caring had on students, i.e., students were motivated to their best, wanted to do better or didn’t want to disappoint a teacher who cared about them.

The characteristics of caring teachers that were school level specific seemed to be indicative of the developmental level of the students. The teachers at the elementary school level described the ways they got to know their students was by observing their behaviors, i.e., if they were sad, tired or by the appearance of their clothing. Three of the teachers also shared stories about themselves to the students as a way of learning about

the students. The elementary teachers emphasized that they learned about their students by meeting with and communicating with parents. One teacher noted that she learned about students by whose parents didn't show up to events at school.

A very distinctive theme that emerged at this level and for one of the middle school teachers was that these women talked about being a "mom" to the students or mothering them. This suggests that gender may play a role in how teachers conceive of caring, but any further discussion of this is beyond the scope of the participants and content of this study. Other researchers would have to intentionally conduct a comparative study of how women and men teachers differentially define caring as a teacher characteristic.

The middle school teachers' unique characteristics of what they thought was caring involved how they learned about their students. They said they learned the students' names quickly, listened to the students, or asked others in the school about students. This level of teachers also thought it was caring that they took into consideration the maturity level of the students, interests, and material to be learned when structuring their classes. It was also important to this group of teachers that they help form or preserve student's positive self esteem.

The middle and high school teachers described characteristics of caring that were more developmentally appropriate for students at the middle and high school levels. They interacted with students in ways that would help prepare them for the real world and they attended their activities to demonstrate care. The teachers also described caring as impacting the quality of student learning; they learned more or better as a result of

teacher caring. The teachers in these two school levels shared that they taught in a caring manner because of influences in their lives from family, teachers or other experiences.

The teachers at the high school level specifically characterized caring as having conversations with their students about school and personal issues and being open to listening to students' concerns. These teachers particularly talked about having a passion for what they did, how much they enjoyed their work and their students and how they used humor in their teaching as a caring device.

These data suggest that caring is a motivational device teachers use which is intended to facilitate student learning. The prime way they do this is by knowing and treating their students as the individuals they are. At each grade level the teachers adapted to the students' developmental levels and needs, giving the nature of caring a developmental aspect from one level of schooling to the next.

Summary of How Teachers Described Care for Students

One of the main findings of the study was that the teachers said that caring was difficult to define in words; that caring was more clearly characterized as it was expressed through their interactions with their students and how they related to students. A case in point was Dottie, a seventh grade teacher in this study, who wondered what it was that she did that was caring and stated that it probably happened "...sometimes in spite of me." It wasn't something she thought about, but it was what she did without thinking about it. Caring was described by teachers at all levels in different terms, some were similar and others were related to the developmental needs of the students and the structure of the schools, but there were some clear areas of focus across the 12 teachers.

The most noted descriptors of teacher caring were: teachers wanted to know their students, treated them as individuals, provided extra time to help, had expectations of students, demonstrated compassion, and connected students to the “real world.”

Want to know their students. One of the most common and more clearly defined characteristics identified as caring from teachers at each level of this study was that they wanted to know their students as individuals; this included their interests as well as their academic and personal needs. The elementary teachers more specifically described that they learned about their students by listening to them and asking them questions about themselves during recess and non academic times. They also learned about their students by communicating with their parents, observing which parents came to school activities, and observing the students as to their needs for sleep, clean clothes, or healthcare. An additional way these elementary teachers learned about their students was to talk about themselves in order to encourage the students to share about themselves. Teachers at the elementary level had the opportunity to get to know their students through more casual interactions since they spent most of the day with their students and had more opportunity to interact with them or listen to conversations during recess or transitions during class time.

One of the methods that the middle school teachers used to learn about their approximately 125 students was to talk with them about their needs and interests during non instructional times, such as when they saw them before or after school, passing in the hallway or during their “resource” class. Other means that these teachers used to learn about their students included: two of the teachers lived in the school’s attendance area

and saw the students in their neighborhood, two of them made an effort to learn the students' names the first days of school, and when needed, they would ask other staff in the school about specific needs of students. It should be remembered that teachers at the middle school level might only see their students during their 90 minute class every other day. This meant that in order to get to know their students individually, beyond time spent on academics, the teachers needed to create ways to interact with students.

Teachers at the high school level had approximately 150 students in their classes, which limited the time they had to get to know their students as individuals. However, each of the teachers in the present study believed that getting to know their students was a part of caring. They managed to learn about each student by asking her/him about her/his job, extracurricular activities, families, etc. as they came or left class, during study halls or as they passed in the hall.

Treat students as individuals. All of the teachers in this study described a part of caring as knowing their students as individuals, which then informed them of ways they could recognize when individual students needed help academically or personally. They seemed to accept the students for who they were and wanted to help them to learn from where they were. At the elementary level, the teachers indicated that they couldn't treat all the students the same because they had different academic, emotional and physical issues. They tried to meet these needs by adjusting the curriculum, giving them open ended activities to meet their different learning styles, supporting them when they seemed stressed about personal concerns or by providing needed items such as a hat and mittens for cold weather.

At the middle school level all four teachers talked about caring as helping individual students learn. These teachers said they created a comfortable, developmentally appropriate environment in which they communicated to students that they would help each of them to be successful. They also described providing calm, consistent, individualized support to students, and allowing for flexibility when needed. Three of the teachers specifically said that they spoke privately to individual students about inappropriate behavior in order to preserve the student's self esteem.

The high school teachers also thought that a part of care was in knowing individual student's needs and then trying to give the appropriate support. They had students who had academic, health, physical or emotional issues that needed to be met in order to facilitate learning. The teachers described situations in which they were caring by meeting student's different needs such as being aware of how lesson content might impact a student who was grieving and the topic in psychology was grief, helping students work through personal disappointment or concern, speaking with a parent or counselor about a student's needs, or helping individual students be academically successful. The teachers also described caring as being flexible with individual students related to tests, late work and the rules.

Provide extra time for students. The time that teachers were available to their students or were connecting with them beyond the allotted classroom time was another common descriptor of care stated by all of the teachers. At the elementary level, the time teachers spent talking and being with students beyond the prescribed academic time was during recess, at lunch and for a limited amount before and after school. The teachers at

this level spent time beyond their school day sending students postcards about their work and contacting parents for good behavior and for behaviors which they considered not academically productive. The need for teachers at this level to spend time with their students beyond the school day may not have been stated often because of the structure of the elementary school day where the teachers spend most of the day with the same group of students. The teachers are also more limited in their time with their students outside of the school day because of students' transportation needs.

The middle school teachers described several ways that they were caring by spending extra time beyond teaching with students. These teachers said they would eat lunch with their students, speak with them about their concerns, interests or activities at recess, homeroom, resource (study hall), or when they passed in the hall. The three teachers in the higher grades said they and their colleagues provided before and after school tutoring sessions for all students who needed help or wanted to use that time to talk with them.

Overall, the high school teachers cared for students, as one of them described, through spending time with students in various formats such as “coming in early to school...staying after school...casually in the hallway and you talk about whatever it is (they) want to talk about.” One of these high school teachers also relayed a story about meeting a student at a coffee shop who was in distress about college. He said he spent time helping the student sort out his options. Another high school teacher offered a group of students 12 three hour weekend sessions of intense review to help them prepare for an Advanced Placement exam.

Another way that two middle school and two high school teachers described caring was by spending time attending students' events that took place beyond the school day, such as concerts, plays, athletics, etc. Teachers said their ability to attend the events was sometimes limited by personal commitments, but if they did not attend they made it a point to ask the students about the activities.

Have expectations of students. All of the elementary and middle, and two of the high school teachers included in their descriptions of care having expectations of students and helping them reach these expectations. At the elementary level, all four of the teachers described caring as pushing their students to work hard, having high expectations of them, holding them accountable, and being a “nurturing authority figure. One teacher said she did not reward a student’s mediocre work but she would coach the student to a better outcome. She would use continuous questioning to scaffold the student to a better understanding. These teachers made it clear they were not “fluffy” or a “soft touch” in their approaches, but fostered student learning. At the elementary level, there were also behavioral expectations, in particular to be respectful. The intent was that the students knew they had support in reaching the expectations.

The middle school teachers said they were also caring by having expectations of students and giving the support needed to reach the expectations at this level. As with the elementary teachers, at this level there were also behavioral expectations. These teachers reported that they modeled the behaviors they expected from the students by being prepared to teach and being respectful. They also emphasized that caring was not being a soft touch, but that sometimes caring was not letting students “have their way.” As one

teacher said being caring "...is being really tough, the tough love thing and sticking to expectations."

Two of the high school teachers specifically described caring as having expectations of students; they had standards that all were to achieve and most did. The teachers said they facilitated this by having made connections with each student and making class fun and interesting. They pushed students hard because they knew the students could do it, this included students who had previously struggled. These teachers were also there to help the students meet the expectations. At this level, as with the others, there was the behavioral expectation that the students would be respectful.

Demonstrate compassion. Teachers at all three of the levels also thought that compassion was an attribute of a caring teacher. Compassion was evident from what the elementary teachers described as caring; they wanted "to fix" a student's home life and they were willing to make the effort and energy to help a student rather than just saying "he didn't do his homework again." Compassion was also when they noticed something was not right or when a student could be doing more and the teacher made the extra effort to find out why. One of the teachers said she became upset if a student doesn't pass because they do not have the support needed. She believed it was not the student's fault and that she did what she could.

At the middle school level the teachers stated they thought the students had many things that stressed them out. The teachers tried to make their class "like an oasis" in which students could learn and feel safe. They acknowledged that some of the students

came from horrific backgrounds and that they tried to meet their needs as best as they could.

Compassion was also evident in how the high school teachers described caring. For them, caring encompassed concern for the whole student and personally being determined to never let a student fail academically or personally, in school or out in the world.

Connect students to “real world.” One of the unique characteristics of caring noted by three of the high school teachers was that they tried to help students connect what they were presently doing to the “real world.” They tried to give them what one teacher said were “snippets of reality, what life is going to be like because we are really in a little microcosm here (in high school) and you have no idea what life will be like after high school...” These teachers wanted to find ways to make school meaningful for their students. \One way they did this was by connecting what may seem like an isolated school incident such as, cheating, to the bigger scope of real life, losing trust. They also tried to prepare them for the life after high school by helping them be mindful of the rules and reminding them to be respectful. One teacher said “first and foremost you don’t teach content, you teach students, you teach them about life.”

Becoming a Caring Teacher

In this next section is a discussion of the findings which may provide information about why these teachers demonstrate caring. It includes their perspectives about what has influenced them as teachers and their attitudes about teaching

Influences on teachers. The teachers in this study described the influences on them that helped to form who they were as teachers who were caring. These included being moms, their families and their own educational experiences.

The theme of being “like a mother” to the students was a caring attribute mentioned by three of the elementary teachers and one middle school teacher. They said that being a mother influenced how they treated their students because they knew that each child was different and “you can’t treat them the same.” These teachers described their caring as “very motherly,” having the “mom...instinct,” and that it was a part of the “... job to mother these kids...” This connection of mother and teacher was perceived as a help to the teachers in understanding why a student would act in a certain way. The middle school teacher told her students she was their “...mom at school” because she thought it might be the only positive attention her teenage students may have in a day.

Teachers’ personal backgrounds provided diverse influences on how they demonstrated care for their students. One elementary teacher said she had standards for teaching students because she was personally driven as a student, and was determined to have all of her students pass. The middle school teachers described a range of reasons they thought they were caring towards their students, such as the result of feeling invisible in middle school, a strong Southern upbringing or and having an uncaring college professor. For one teacher at the high school level caring was fueled by her own competitive spirit that all her students be successful. Two of the teachers said strong influences on how they cared for students came from their own close, loving families and personal experiences in high school. They stated that they learned from their families

how to treat people and stimulate conversation and that their high school teachers were role models for knowing students and being sensitive to their needs. From a very different perspective, the oldest of the teachers believed that his age and experience have influenced how he was caring with students and that through time, he had mellowed and had nothing to prove to his students. He said with confidence “I know I know the subject, I know life.”

Attitudes about teaching. Teacher caring also included how the teachers at the different levels felt about teaching even when it was challenging and how they approached their students on a daily basis. Elementary teachers said it was caring to be concerned about what happens to students and that it took more effort to go above what was expected to help a student, but they couldn’t just let a student fail or accept that a student hadn’t done his homework, again. They said they needed to do whatever was needed, which meant to differentiate for students. One teacher said “it becomes your natural way of teaching...going the extra step...it’s your job!” Caring for these teachers was also remaining positive, which on some days was difficult; sometimes the teacher had to stand back and search for something positive to say about the situation.

One elementary and all of the middle and high school teachers made an effort to include fun in their classes. They talked about using humor, joking with them, and using funny examples to help students be engaged in the learning and to feel comfortable in the class.

At elementary, middle and high school levels, the attitudes about caring and teaching included the teachers just being who they were, not planning to be caring. They

did not think about how to be caring because classroom situations were different and unpredictable. It was just how they treated and interacted with their students, something that happened during the day, which they may never know what it was that they did; they just did it.

In describing how they cared for their students, the teachers at the middle and high school levels also talked about their feelings about teaching. The male middle school teacher summed up his feelings about teaching as “it’s a crazy job, but I love it!” The teachers at the high school level added to this sentiment by sharing that they loved the students and what they taught, and that although they took their jobs seriously, they had fun doing it. These teachers also said that it was a demanding job, partially because they wanted to be very good at what they were doing. These teachers’ interactions with their students and their passion for their jobs was stated by Adam as “(I am) just me, it’s just what I do...but I love it, I love what I do, I really do.”

From a perspective of comfort, rather than passion, the oldest teacher of the group expressed that age had something to do with his attitude towards teaching. He said as long as he could be enthusiastic, he was more inclined to go with the flow. He was comfortable with who he was and what he was teaching.

How Teachers Described the Impact of Teacher Care

The teachers at the three different levels of school described in much less detail how they thought teacher caring impacted students than they did the descriptors of caring. They gave very limited responses to the question. One middle school teacher may have given an explanation for this when she said caring was just what they did without

knowing what it was or the impact it had on students. She added that years in the future the student may think back and say, “I remember when a teacher did ...” but that the teacher might not know, which suggests that teachers live in a realm of ongoing dedication without much feedback from the students about its impact.

Taking from what the teachers said at the elementary level, caring in many different ways helped students be more capable of learning and “you get more out of them.” One of them stated that after establishing the relationship the students were more likely to share confidential concerns with her. The middle school teachers indirectly said that because of caring their students read more and appreciated the time and efforts the teachers made for them regarding academic and personal issues. At the high school level the teachers thought that through the time spent with students and the listening they did with the students, there were changes of attitude about learning and that students sought them out for help. The lack of description of the impact that teacher caring had on students might be invisible to the teachers was also demonstrated through the example given by one of the high school teachers. He said that one night he went to a game in the school gym, and as he walked by, a large group of students all stood up, clapped, cheered and called his name. He had no idea why, but apparently he had done something for which they wanted to acknowledge him; he had somehow made an impact on them.

Reciprocity was a subtle response to caring expressed from students. At all levels the teachers described how they were caring and then would talk about what students did as a response, such as to ask for help with academics or personal issues or to give the teacher some type of demonstration of appreciation for helping them.

5. Results

Analysis of Student Responses

The students produced numerous descriptors of how they believed teachers cared and how the caring affected them. The analysis of the data is based on the perspectives given by the individual students. As presented in Chapter 3, data were collected from the weeks in December before winter break through the end of January.

The elementary students responded to the questionnaires before and after the break and the middle school students responded right after the break and before their midyear exams or grades in mid-January. The high school students participated around the time of their midterm exams in the middle to the end of January. The 193 total respondents, drawn from the classrooms of the participating teachers, included 77 elementary students, 39%, 56 middle school students, 29% and 60 high school students 31% students surveyed in this study. The summaries of reported data have taken in into consideration the percentages of students represented at each level, not just the raw numbers.

The section will present data related to these research questions:

3. How do students at different grade levels describe how teachers care about them?
4. How do students at different grade levels describe how a caring teacher

impacts them?

Perceptions of caring seemed to be rather personal; the students in this study seemed to have an overall belief that the teachers who cared about them were the ones who knew their needs and in some way helped to meet those needs. Like their teachers, each student's needs came from their individual perceptions and may have had no similarity to what anyone else would have thought their needs would have been. Although there were similarities of what students in this study believed to be caring or the impact it had on them, each student described what she/he thought the teacher knew about him personally or what she/he wanted the teacher to know about her/him as an individual.

Students' Descriptors of Caring Teachers

The data collected suggest that students wanted teachers to know their needs related to their academic and personal lives. The descriptors that students provided were grouped within the themes of caring as communicating, helping with academic needs and helping with personal needs.

Caring as communicating. One high school junior stated "Teachers are caring when they know the students individually, if they are doing well or not." Students described ways that caring teachers would have learned about their lives in all areas. They communicated with them, had conversations with them, would listen to their ideas and stories, or would ask them personal questions.

Thirty eight students (one elementary, seven middle school and 30 high school) expressed that caring teachers were those who generally communicated with them. One

student, a high school senior seemed to summarize the thoughts of the other students as, "...teachers show care...by communication between student and teacher." High school students were the majority of the students who described communication between teachers and students as caring by the teachers. There were other students who perceived teachers as caring because they communicated with students more specifically by having conversations with them, asking them questions about who they were and what they liked or listening to them. Five students, one in the eighth grade and four in high school, described caring teachers as those who had "actual conversations" with them. The eighth grader wrote "I love when teachers have one-on-one conversations with students. I think it really shows they care." There was also a twelfth grade student who thought it was "really awesome" that teachers would pull him aside to talk with him. The older students found having conversations with teachers to be a caring attribute.

Eight students particularly expressed that a caring teacher talked with them about their interests or recent activities. Two fourth grade students talked with their teachers about horses or discussing one's dance pictures. Six high school students had conversations with their teachers that covered several areas of their personal interests: swim meets, plans for the weekend, jobs, college applications or specific news articles.

Teachers were also described as caring when they questioned students about different aspects of their lives or created opportunities to learn about the students. There were 18 students (five middle and 13 high school) who responded that caring teachers were ones who made efforts to know more about them by asking students' questions about how their day was, how they were doing, or how their life in general was going.

One eighth grade student defined it as “something my teachers have done that shows that they care about me is finding out more about me. This shows they care to know about me by asking what my favorite show is or what music I like to listen to.” One of the high school students said that when the teachers asked about his day, it was enough to make the teacher seem like they were caring and another student believed the teacher who cared was genuinely interested in what the students liked or how they learned. Sometimes caring teachers were more specific about their inquiries; two seniors thought it was meaningful when teachers wanted to know “...how their winter break was and if (they) had a good time” and “... about (his) weekend and home life.” Middle and high school students were the ones who characterized a caring aspect of teachers as teachers who learned about them by asking about their daily lives in and out of school and took genuine interest in how they spent their time, what they liked or how they learned.

The listening part of communication was important to eight students. One fourth grade student thought that a caring teacher was one who “...listened to what I have to say,” and an eighth grade student described caring teachers as those who had listened to their thoughts and ideas about different subjects. There were six high school students who collectively described caring teachers as those who listened to their stories, problems and questions. The elementary student focused on a caring teacher as being someone who generally listened to what he said, whereas the middle and high school students clarified that caring teachers listen to their personal thoughts and concerns.

Teachers were described by 72 students as caring because the teachers communicated with them, had conversations with them, listened to their thoughts and

ideas or asked the students questions about themselves. Of this group of students, there were four elementary school, 13 middle school and 55 high school students. Two of the students at the elementary level were more general in their descriptions of caring teachers as those who communicated with them or listened to them. Two other elementary students spoke of caring as when they communicated with their teachers about their specific interests. The larger number of middle and high school students who responded using these descriptors indicates that these students valued verbal interactions with their teachers, specifically including interactions that provided the teachers with information about them and their interests.

The high school students were the ones who, over twice as often as the other two groups of students together, expressed that caring teachers were those who communicated with them and got to know them personally by verbally interacting with them and finding out about their interests. This may be accounted for by high school students wanting to have more conversations with significant adults.

Caring as individual attention. The students described caring teachers as those who supported their individual academic and personal needs and how that support affected them. The academic themes that developed were need based; students described a teacher they said was caring as one who helped them as individuals in various ways with perceived personal academic needs. The students said that what these teachers did was to help them in general, when they spent extra time with them, with learning, by using various teaching methods, when they were struggling, with tests/quizzes, or with specific projects or work. Students also said that teachers who were caring influenced

them academically; they were motivated in various ways, and their learning improved. There were also students who stated that characteristics of teachers who cared knew their perceived personal social/emotional needs or impacted those needs. These teachers were described as meeting the students' needs of being personally acknowledged, giving them valued benefits, exhibiting a positive presence in class or demonstrating concern for a student's personal issues. Students also described the various ways in which having caring teachers affected them; they were comfortable in class, had better feelings about themselves, were happy, not stressed or had several other positive reactions to having a teacher they thought cared about them.

Caring as help with academics needs. Students identified caring teachers as those who supported their needs related to academic learning. Caring teachers were thought to be those who helped students related to academics, provided motivation, or taught using effective methods as perceived by the students. Of the students answering the questionnaire, a characteristic of a caring teacher which was stated often, compared to other themes, was when the teacher responded to a student's need for help. One eleventh grade student gave an encompassing statement that caring teachers "would always know areas you need help with." However, it was mostly elementary and middle school students who distinguished caring teachers as those who helped them in general or helped them more specifically with their learning, tests, with projects, or when they were struggling. These students also thought their caring teachers helped them understand the material.

Forty-nine of the student respondents identified teachers as caring because they felt the teachers generally helped them. This group of 14 elementary students, 23 middle school students and 12 high school students stated that caring teachers helped them whenever it was needed, in every possible way or that the teacher had gone out of their way in order to help them. This was exemplified by a third grade student who stated “Well my second grade teacher was caring about me because she was helping me,” and a fourth grade student who said “I think teachers care about me because they help me with stuff.” There was a sixth grade student who phrased help from caring teachers as “...they are always with you when you need help,” and a seventh grader stated “They help me individually as much as possible.” The high school students described care from teachers as when “she helps us when we need it” and “they have gone out of their way in order to help.” These students generally described caring teachers as those who were available to help them, individually, whenever needed. Caring teachers knew their students well enough to know when they individually needed help.

A related theme that emerged from mostly middle and high school students’ perceptions of caring teachers was when teachers helped them by spending time with them beyond scheduled class time. The expressed need for extra time that teachers spent with students increased as the grade levels got older. There were two elementary students, fifth graders, who stated that a caring teacher “Worked with kids during lunch for math help” and that the teacher “takes her lunchtime to review math.” As stated earlier, fifth grade students in this study spent about 75% of their day with the same teacher and would have time to receive help within the framework of the regular school

day. This is in contrast to the other, older students, 13 in middle school and 23 in high school, who saw their teachers in class for 90 minutes every other day. This time schedule made seeing their teachers outside of class a planned, extra event. A sixth grade student generally expressed, “Because they always care about you, you know they’re always there for you.” The students felt it was caring of their teachers to find time to help them one to one, when not in class, either during the school day or before or after school. A seventh grade student said, “My teachers ask me how I am doing and they find the time to ‘step out’ and help me when I’m confused.” Two other seventh grade students said “they offer to stay after school to help you and others” and “they stay after school to let me know they will help with everything.” Another student said her teacher “... would always give one to one time to make sure you understand the topic.” At the high school level, an eleventh grade student described caring teachers as “they come in early or after school if I need help.” Another student stated “(a caring) teacher would not stay after school because they have to, but because they are there for the students.” An eleventh grader said, “The teacher is always there when I need her, whether it be in school or out, she’s always in early and responds to my e mail quickly.” High school students also described characteristics of caring teachers as those who take the time to “hold review session and contact me when I am sick...” and as the ones who “...take time to explain the material to me, after a few days, they check and make sure I’m on the right track.” They are also the ones who “...actually take the time out to teach and make sure you are understanding.” Course work was not the only extra time caring teachers spent for students; a senior perceived they were the ones who “helped me with college stuff, some

helped with my personal statement, another wrote my recommendation.” They were also the ones who “take the time to say hello or ask how things are going.” Caring teachers, in the mind of one high school student, were those who offered weekend review sessions to make sure students understood old material before midterm exams. Another senior portrayed the “...consummate caring teacher (as someone who) would need to spend inordinate amounts of time becoming so. To be considered caring by a majority of people they would need to find the time to talk and be individually concerned with the ...problems of each individual student.”

The data suggest that more high school students needed the help given by caring teachers in the form of the time spent with them beyond what was expected. This may be a result of older students only being scheduled to see their teachers for 90 minutes every other day in the company of approximately 25 other students. These students are also more likely to have more independent work and/or long term projects with which they may need help.

According to a seventh grade student, “... (caring) changes the way they teach you”. This suggests that teaching requires teachers to get to know how their students learn and then to design instruction which considers how each individual learns content. Teachers who were flexible in their teaching were perceived as caring by a total of 34 students, (seven elementary, six middle and 21 high school). Caring teachers for 19 of these students were those who were specifically flexible by providing with extra time to do work when needed. Thirteen of the 19 students who described teachers in this way were high school students; the others included two elementary school and four middle

school students. A fourth grade student told of remembering “When my second grade teacher said my math homework sheet was due tomorrow but I didn’t even start...I told her and she gave me a whole other week to finish it.” From a different perspective of being given extra time, a fifth grade student thought it was caring for teachers who “...have been giving us time to think.” At the middle school level, there were three different views of caring related to extra time: extra time to do work, allowance for forgetting homework, and being given personal time during vacation. One seventh grade student thought it was caring when the teacher was “giving (him) extra time to finish stuff,” and another said that caring teachers “...might go easy if we forget our homework or other supplies.” The time of the study was around winter break, and two of the eighth grade students thought their teachers were caring by giving them extra personal time. One of the students stated “Lately most of my teachers are letting up on homework or giving us make-up days so we have less to worry about over the winter break,” and another similarly said “They have not given me any homework for the holiday break.” Five of the high school students thought it was caring that teachers understood their need for extra time to complete work after they had been sick, out of town, or because of family situations. One of these times was described by a twelfth grade student as “the last few weeks I’ve been really sick and my teachers have worked with me ... on extra time to complete my assignments.” Another senior thought teachers were caring when he “attended a funeral last week (and) my teachers were very understanding and gave me extra time before turning in work.” A very personal perspective of how a teacher demonstrated caring was stated as “I can’t be sure if it’s because he knows about my

home life from my journals, but my teacher gives me extensions or reduced penalties when my assignments are late (not that they are often).” High school students also thought it was caring when teachers factored in student’s individual class schedules when planning homework or tests. One of them said, “...they take into consideration other classes you may have in assigning homework or tests/quizzes so you are not stressed.” Another student was more descriptive about the same sentiment, “The best way I can think of for teachers to show they care about their students, would be to be mindful of the students’ schedules. This is especially important when they are scheduling tests and quizzes, too often they fall on the same day which is stressful to students and makes it harder to do well on either. Teachers could show they care by simply talking to each other and to their students to eliminate these types of stressful situations.”

Although there were different reasons for the needs for extra time, it was at the high school level that students indicated that they expected more from their teachers who cared; they wanted them to know about their academic schedules and personal needs and to have expectations of their time, accordingly. The larger number of high school students who described caring teachers as those who provided extra time for different circumstances may be because they have more responsibilities in and out of school and would usually have larger assignments related to classes.

Caring as instructional practices. In addition to flexibility with time, the various teaching methods caring teachers used to meet students’ needs were also described by 11 students, two third grade, two seventh grade and seven high school. One third grader explained that caring teachers give “...everything they have, like videos and our study

guides, not just one thing.” Another elementary student said the caring was “That they give you a better study guide.” Middle school students said it was caring when the teachers “...go at a pace that you and the class likes” and when the teachers “cared about you, they would explain everything.” At the high school level, an eleventh grade student described caring as “... (the teacher) not just giving notes after notes ... (but) doing more activities or movies related to the subject.” Three other high school students each identified a teaching method that teachers used that was meaningful for them: repetition and hands on activities, telling stories or relating information that was relevant to the learning. Two of these students stated “I learn more easily in this class than my other classes because she uses repetition and hands on activities for our benefit” and “I remember what I learn better...because my teacher is always asking and telling stories.” The third student stated that because “...she cares, she always has things to relate information to which helps the information become relevant and we remember and learn better.” Two more high school students described, not specifically a teaching method, but a presence of being through which teachers demonstrated caring. One student wrote “Because she cares and likes what she teachers she gives enthusiasm which makes us enthusiastic and interested and when students get interested, we do well” and another said, “I am more likely to remember information that was presented in an interesting way by an enthusiastic teacher.” Students at the different grade levels described different teaching methods they thought demonstrated caring by teachers. The students described teachers who used methods that met their individual academic needs to help them learn.

Twenty six students (15 elementary, seven middle and four high school) thought teachers were caring because they actually helped them learn in general or learn particular subjects. Within this group, 16 students (nine in elementary, five in middle and one in high school) described the general help for learning that caring teachers gave them. It was described by an eighth grade student, “I think anything teachers do to help you learn is a way for them to show they care about you.” There was a third grade student who believed a caring teacher tries “... to help you learn things you never knew” and a seventh grade student commented that a caring teacher “...helps me learn because if I don’t understand something they will help or show me step by step so I can get it down.”

Eleven other students in the group, six elementary, two middle school and three high school students, described how caring teachers did things that helped them learn specific skills or content such as to read, write, spell, do math, or art. One third grade student said that a caring teacher “...helped me write...and spell.” Another student in that grade said that “...my art teacher (was caring) because she was helping me draw.” A fourth grade student said a caring teacher “...helped me a lot with problems on math that I did not know,” and an eleventh grade student further described how a caring teacher helped him “...learn (subject) and made it fun to learn. If we have a question she’ll answer right away and then move on with a lesson unlike some teachers that don’t really give individual help.” At the middle school level, a sixth grade student said that “a teacher helped me last week with some Spanish during class time because this is my first time learning Spanish,” and an eighth grader described a caring teacher as “...my English teacher (who) helped me with my spelling.” A twelfth grade student described caring as

“a teacher that has never been my classroom teacher but he has always been available for any help that I may need, typically in math.” There may be more elementary students who described this as a caring characteristic because at the elementary level students are focused on learning very specific new skills such as reading, writing and math, but as students progress through the grades, the learning of specific skills is less identifiable because they learn in more complex units.

Other students expressed that teachers demonstrated care because they helped them when they were struggling in class. An eighth grade student seemed to capture the theme by stating “I think it’s (caring is) important because when they care they want to make sure you can do the best you can do and will help you when you struggle.” A fourth grade student stated the caring teachers “...help you when you are having trouble with something or getting bad grades,” and an eleventh grade student said “I feel a teacher really cares when they help you one on one if you are struggling.” The general description given by 21 students (seven elementary, nine middle school and five high school) of caring as helping students when they were struggling, demonstrated this was not an age specific issue. The fairly even dispersal of students by level demonstrated that students of all ages feel that they may need help in class.

Caring teachers were also described by students as those who helped them when they were preparing for or taking tests. Thirteen students (five elementary, three middle and five high school) perceived help as stated by a second grader “(the teacher) reads the questions on a social studies quiz,” or when teachers helped students from the fifth grade through high school prepare for tests and exams. A fifth grader pointed out that the caring

teacher "...helped me in every way they can so I know I can pass the quiz," and a twelfth grade student stated that "they helped review for our exams that are coming up so we don't forget and get good grades." Tests and exams were issues for students at all ages.

Twelve other students, (five in elementary and seven in middle school) identified caring teachers as those who helped them specifically with their work, projects or homework. A fourth grade student wrote "I think the teacher cares about me because she helps me a lot with my work." For a sixth grade student caring was when the teacher "...helped me with projects and homework" and a seventh grade student was helped by "one teacher seam ripped my sewing project for me over one weekend, which gave me more time me to finish and much less work." As stated earlier, since teachers are more available to students in elementary school, middle school students may have been expected to be less dependent on a teacher. These specific help situations may have been above and beyond the usual or expected amount of help.

There were also teachers who were perceived by 10 (five middle and five high school) students as caring because they actively helped students gain understanding of the learning. One seventh grade student exemplified this perception by stating "...if I don't understand something they will help or show me step by step so I can get it down," and another stated "I think it makes a difference because they help you understand better and spend more time on explaining it if you have trouble." An eighth grade student said, "I think it is better because you get more out of the class. Caring teachers help you understand." Teachers who were caring helped high school students understand better as stated by two students, "If they care they will make sure you understand what you are

learning” and “Normally, a good teacher will make sure that an individual is really understanding and will try and help.” These middle and high school students thought that teachers who cared helped them understand.

One other characteristic of teachers, which was perceived by five students (four elementary and one high school), described caring as related to instructional practices in that teachers who care gave them challenging work. The second graders seemed focused on math by saying a caring teacher “gave us hard math” and “that they gave us really hard math papers.” A fourth grade student thought a caring teacher “...might give a little more homework...” and another said, “She wants us to pass fourth to fifth grade so it is hard...” The one high school student to say challenging work was caring stated that his “...teacher...is one of the hardest teachers and the hardest subject, yet I managed to score 102% on my test!” To be challenged was caring to these students, but this may not be the case for other students.

The data provided here demonstrate that within this group of students, mainly those in middle and high school, caring teachers were identified as those who: used different teaching methods by providing them with extra time to do work, used various materials or a variety of strategies to teach, or who knew which students needed more challenging work.

The Impact of Teacher Caring Related to Academics

Students described the affects they thought a caring teacher had on them. They said that caring from a teacher motivated them to try harder in the teacher’s class, made them want to listen or be more attentive in class, go to school or the class, learn a specific

subject, or succeed in the class. Also students felt that caring teachers positively impacted the quality of their learning by helping them to understand what they learned, enabling them to have fun while learning, or improving the quality of their understanding of learning.

Caring as motivation. Consistent with the teachers, 98 students (15 elementary, 30 middle and 53 high school) thought that when a teacher cared, it was motivational for them to try harder or succeed, listen or be more attentive in class, want to go to school or class, or want to learn. Analyzing the data further indicates that the presence of a caring teacher provided the most impact on student motivation to try or work harder in that teacher's class; 37 students (two elementary, nine middle and 26 high school) wrote about being motivated to generally to do better or succeed in class or to try/work harder. Eleven students in this group (two middle and nine high school) made general statements that having a caring teacher made a difference for them because they were motivated to improve how they did in that teacher's class. A seventh grade student supported this by stating "I think you will do better if a teacher cares about you" and an eighth grade student similarly stated "If a teacher cares for you, I think you will do a lot better in that specific class." Two high school students specifically described wanting to excel because they had a teacher that cared. One was an eleventh grader who wrote, "I am better motivated to learn when I know a teacher understands me and cares about me... it also motivates me to excel in the classroom." Another student wrote of being motivated to excel: "It makes me want to do the work that is given and excel in his/her class." More specifically, 26 other students (two elementary, seven middle and 17 high school) within

this group that they were motivated to work or try harder because they had a teacher who cared about them. The two fifth graders responded similarly that they "...want to work harder because she cares," and because a teacher cares "...you want to work hard." An eighth grade student responded that "If a teacher cares about you, you'll like class more and you'll try harder." Eleventh grade students described that having a teacher that cared about them "...makes me want to try harder and want to learn" and that "you have more inspiration to work harder." From a reverse point of view, one eighth grader and three high school seniors made the point that they would not try as hard if the teacher was not caring. The eighth grader stated "You don't try as hard for a teacher that doesn't care" and one of the high school students said "If the teacher doesn't care, I don't try as hard." A similar response by another high school student was "If I feel a teacher doesn't care, I am less likely to try as hard because they don't care." The high school students stated more often that they were motivated to try harder because they had caring teachers. This could be because elementary students may be more developmentally inclined to do as they are told without thinking about why and that as students get older they need more of a reason for doing something.

Twenty eight students (nine elementary, six middle school and 13 high school) also reported that teachers who were caring influenced their listening and classroom attentiveness behaviors. For example, a seventh grade student said, "I think it makes a difference because people can focus on work and not be afraid to speak up." For several eighth grade students, caring helped them be attentive in class. This was expressed in their statements as "In a class that your teacher cares about you, you'll pay attention ...,"

“you listen more,” “...you will listen better”, and having a caring teacher “...makes me listen to what they have to say.” One other eighth grader stated “I think having a caring teacher helps you focus more...” At the high school level, students also thought that having a caring teacher helped them be more attentive in class. An eleventh grade student stated “You actually pay attention in the class; you have respect for them and their class.” Another student said, “It affects how I learn because if a teacher cares about me I listen to them more and pay attention.” A senior stated “When your teacher cares about you it makes it easier for you to stay focused and you feel like you should pay attention because they pay attention to you so you learn.” Other seniors expressed their views of the influence of a caring teacher on their attentiveness as “It is easier...to listen to them,” and “you focus more on what you’re supposed to do, than the way you feel about your teachers.” There was a general theme that these middle and high school students thought that caring influenced their listening, focusing and overall attentiveness in class. However, there were different influences on their attending: their respect for teacher, how it affected learning, whether the teachers paid attention to them or if they learned more. Having a teacher who cared about them also kept them more focused on learning than on worrying about how the teacher felt about them, they didn’t need to guess or worry about that. From a different viewpoint, two middle school students said of teachers who were not caring “the teacher who doesn’t care about you, makes you not want to listen” or “(you would) have no real desire to listen to them.”

Nineteen students reported that they were influenced by a caring teacher as to whether they wanted to go to school or not. Thirteen students (seven in middle school and

six in high school) identified that they were motivated or looked forward to going to school or a specific class because they would encounter a teacher who was caring. A sixth grade student stated “If you have a teacher who cares, you’ll always look forward to going to that class.” One seventh grade student said if the “teacher is caring...I enjoy her class and love walking in her door since there is a sense of warm caring feelings in her room...making me want to keep learning.” At the high school level, a student added to this theme by stating “I look forward to seeing the teacher and participating in class.” In contrast to being motivated by a caring teacher to be in class, six (two elementary and four middle school) students stated they would not want to go to school or be in class if they knew their teachers were not caring. One second grader plainly stated that “if you had a bad teacher you might not want to go to school.” One of the sixth grade students explained that a non caring teacher may be a reason for not being motivated to go to class: “If you know your teacher doesn’t care about you, then why would you want to be in their class?” In addition, an eighth grade student said, “If I had a teacher that didn’t like or care for me, I would dread going to their class every day.” These data indicate caring teachers were an impetus for middle and high school students to go to school, while the elementary students thought they would not want to come to school if teachers were not caring.

Students were not only motivated to be in class because they had a teacher they thought was caring, but also because caring teachers influenced them to learn. Having a caring teacher motivated 14 students (two elementary, four middle and eight high school students) to want to learn. The two elementary students were fifth graders who said,

“Knowing they care about how well prepared I am, I am eager to learn more” and “...want to learn more.” One of the middle school students said that having a caring teacher “makes me want to keep learning,” and another said, “Having a teacher who cares about you makes you want to learn...” The statements from three of the high school students expressed that having a caring teacher motivated them to learn; “I feel that having a teacher that cares makes me want to learn,” “...I’m willing to learn more,” and “It gives you a will to learn about the topic.” Another high school student said, “when the teacher is caring and motivated to teach me, it motivates me to learn more...” There was a fourth grade student who did not seem as directly motivated to learn, but was responsive enough to the caring from the teacher to be motivated into being resigned to learn. He stated “It makes me think they’re trying to help me, I might as well learn.” Caring teachers influenced students from the fifth grade through high school to be motivated to learn. The responses that included this theme doubled at each level as the students were in higher grades.

Although students at all grade levels made similar statements, more high school students said that caring teachers motivated them to succeed or try harder in the teacher’s class, to listen or be more attentive in class, want to go to school or not, or to want to learn. In high school a caring teacher seems to be more motivating, and there is some reason to conclude from these data that an uncaring teacher may have negative effects on student motivation, and by extension, student academic achievement in class.

Caring affects learning. Overall, there were 77 students (26 elementary, 16 middle and 35 high school) who responded that a caring teacher positively affected the

quality of their learning, their understanding or that a caring teacher made learning easier. Sixty-one students (22 elementary, 13 middle and 26 high school) believed that because they had a caring teacher they learned better, more, or more easily, or would remember information longer. It is unclear if students used these terms interchangeably. For the purpose of this analysis, each term has been described separately here, as best as possible. A third grade student expressed that having a caring teacher "...makes a difference because it would help me learn better." A fourth grade student said, "I believe that when you have a teacher that cares about you then you learn better." At the middle school level two eighth grade students thought "you learn better because if a teacher didn't care for you, you wouldn't care about learning from them" and because "...you learn better because you get more out of class." An eleventh grade student stated "because she cares, she always has things to relate information to which helps information become relevant and we remember and learn better." There was also the point of view of a twelfth grade student who said, "I think that having a caring teacher makes a lot of difference. I feel like you learn better and can achieve more."

There were also students who thought they learned more from having a caring teacher. A fourth grade student said, "I learn more with non yelling teachers than with yelling ones" and another simply said "I learn more" with a teacher who cares. A fifth grader stated "I think (caring teachers) would make students learn more" and another said, "(I) want to learn more." It was stated by an eighth grade student "I definitely learn more with nice teachers." From the perspective of an eighth grade student: "If you are in a caring environment, it helps you to absorb the information more because the teacher

cares and wants you to do well.” At the high school level, an eleventh grader stated “I willing to learn more.” There was a twelfth grade student who described the influence of a caring teacher as “I can usually have a higher rate of retaining the material because I will pay attention.” Students at all levels stated that having a caring teacher supported them to learn better, more, or for longer.

Having a caring teacher was also described as making learning easier. A third grade student reported that “It makes it easier to learn because she breaks it down,” a fifth grade student said, “they (caring teachers) help me, which makes it easy for me to learn,” and similarly a seventh grader expressed that having a caring teacher “... would (make it) easier to learn.” It was more explicitly stated by an eighth grade student: “If your teacher cares for you, you feel that learning that subject is a lot easier. If the subject has been hard for you with a teacher that cares about you, that subject may not be a struggle for you.” Added to these statements, an eleventh grade student said, “I feel that learning may come easier.” There were also two students in the eleventh and twelfth grades who said, “It makes learning easier.”

There was a group of six students (one elementary, two middle and three high school) who said that caring teachers had an influence on the quality of their understanding of what was taught. The statements that created this theme were represented by a fourth grade student who said, “You can understand what they’re talking about, instead of teachers that don’t care talk ...so you don’t understand what they’re talking about.” Other comments which sustained this view came from students in middle school including one by a seventh grader who said, “It makes a difference because you

understand more” and another by an eighth grader who wrote “It’s easier to understand them and vice versa.” One senior in high school described that a caring teacher “... helps enhance the learning experience and makes the material easier to understand” and another said “you understand better...” The data indicated that as students get older they feel that having a teacher that cares helps them to better understand what they are learning. This may be because they are more able to be analytical and express what influences their learning.

Of the 61 students who identified caring teachers as those who made learning better, 10 students (three in elementary, one in middle school and six in high school) thought learning was more fun when teachers were caring. Learning was “fun, interesting and special” for a fourth grade student when a teacher was caring. A fifth grade student said, “If they care about you a lot it makes learning fun,” and for a high school student having a caring teacher “... makes it fun to learn.” It can be drawn from these data that for this group of students having a caring teacher helped the quality of their learning.

Teacher Caring Related to Students’ Personal Needs

Student descriptions of the impact of teacher caring also related to students social/emotional needs. One senior described “The consummate caring teacher, I believe, would need to spend inordinate amounts of time becoming so. To be considered caring by majority of people they would need to find the time to talk and be individually concerned with the extracurricular problems of each student.”

There were students who thought of teachers as caring because they thought their teachers knew their social/emotional needs. These teachers were perceived by students

from two points of view related to their social/emotional needs: 1) what the teachers did for them and 2) how having a caring teacher affected them.

Caring teachers help students with social/emotional needs. Caring teachers were described as those who students thought supported their efforts through personal acknowledgement, gave them valued benefits, exhibited a positive presence in class or demonstrated understanding or concern for students' personal issues. Students perceived teachers to be caring when they personally acknowledged them, gave them feedback, responded to their questions, or gave reinforcement or encouragement. Fifty students (12 elementary, 11 middle and 27 high school) gave general descriptors of how teachers acknowledged them. A second grade student stated a teacher was caring because she "gave me a hug," and a third grade student said, "I think they were caring when they send letters to me." Another third grade student said a teacher cared when "A week ago my second grade teacher said, 'have a good weekend.'" At the middle school level, a seventh grade student responded that caring was when a "teacher said they missed me and was glad to see me back..." and an eighth grade student described teacher caring as "when I come in teachers usually ask how I'm doing." This personal acknowledgement is similar to what high school students expressed as what caring teachers did. High school students said that teachers who were caring "... ask how you are doing and seem interested in what you say," "take time to say hello in the hallway or ask how things are going" and "just start having a conversation with me about my weekend and home life, even about my brother, who they had in previous years." A senior seemed to capture many of the descriptors by stating "Sometimes just smiling and asking 'how was your day' is enough

to make teachers seem like they are caring...simply inquiring about life.” This data indicate that elementary students think that caring is when a teachers does something to let students know the teacher is aware of them. The middle school students demonstrated some of the transition expected at those grades when they said that caring was when teachers asked how they were, and at the high school level, the students described caring as a more extended interaction about the student’s life.

Students who felt they were recognized for their individual accomplishments described caring teachers as those who gave them feedback about how they were doing related to their academic work. Twenty-seven students (five elementary, 10 middle school and 12 high school) thought that caring was when teachers commented on their class work, academic achievements, or gave them information on how they could improve. Feeling cared for was described by a third grade student as “they will say good job if you get the answer right” and a seventh grade student whose caring teacher “...congratulated me on making it into the geography bee.” For a sixth grade student, caring was experienced when the “...teacher used my project as an example because (she) thought it was perfect.” One of the middle school students and three of the high school students thought that the comments that teachers wrote on their papers demonstrated caring. This was illustrated by a senior who responded that “Teachers show care by writing comments on my papers, what I did wrong and how I can fix it,” and another senior thought that caring looked like comments “...on essays telling how to improve.” Two other high school students, unexpected for the age, thought that caring was feedback from teachers when they were given stickers on tests or were given “a pat

on the back, smiley stamps on good/improved grades.” From these data, it seems that students at all grade levels thought that caring was expressed by teachers who gave them feedback in relation to their work. The younger students described simple verbal feedback, and the older students thought caring was given in the form of how to improve work, stickers, or positive comments.

Students whose questions were answered by their teachers reported that they felt cared for by those teachers. A fourth grade student explained “my teachers have answered anything I have a question about,” and a middle school student said, “My teachers have helped me with my questions when I have them.” The high school students responded in a similar way by stating “(The teacher) is incredible, willing to answer any questions I have” and “they have gone out of their way...to answer questions.” There were a total of 11 students (two elementary, four middle school and five high school) who described caring teachers as those who were responsive to their individual questions.

Caring teachers were recognized by some students as those who gave encouragement and reinforcement for their efforts. Ten students (four in elementary, one in middle school and five in high school) described caring teachers as those who gave them encouragement or reinforcement. Tangible reinforcement was described by two third grade students. They said that a manner in which a teacher cared was by “giving us fish for our good behavior” and “they give us fish, ” a part of the school wide behavior token system, for their personal good behavior. A fourth grade student described caring as a personal comment from a teacher “...telling you ‘you can do it,’” and the middle school student said, “they give me encouragement.” The high school students believed

caring was exhibited when a teacher “smiled, (had) been patient, little extras here and there” or when as one student said, a math teacher “...gave me a lot of help and encouragement at times when I was struggling.” A twelfth grade student was encouraged by a caring choir teacher who “begged me to do the musical and had given me opportunities to go to concerts. She really wants me to get the best musical experience possible.” Although encouragement and reinforcement were described in a variety of ways by students at various grade levels, they were referred to in terms of more concrete rewards by a few of the younger students. The two elementary students were reinforced by their teachers giving them tokens from the school behavior program. These younger students described more concrete objects as demonstrations of reinforcement as caring, and the older students described more abstract or subtle expressions of encouragement and reinforcement as caring.

These data suggest that as students became older caring was expressed directly as more personal/individual acknowledgement from teachers and that there was more two way interaction between teacher and student. Caring could also be expressed however, it in was which are more subtle. These types of caring behaviors were described by 100 students (24 elementary, 27 middle school and 49 high school) who responded that attributes of caring teachers were when the teachers personally generally acknowledged them, answered their questions, gave them feedback, encouraged them, or provided reinforcement.

Caring as recognition of accomplishments. A large number of the student respondents thought that it was caring on the teacher’s part to give them something

students seemed to value. Thirty-nine of the 77 total elementary participants and three middle school students thought a caring characteristic of a teacher was that they gave students things the students considered to be valued benefits. Fourteen of the elementary students described, from different perspectives, a valued benefit to be related to recess such as getting extra time, picking recess activities or whether recess would take place inside or outside. One second grade student said a caring teacher “let us pick our center or pick indoor or outdoor recess,” and a third grade student put it in the terms of: “She let(s) us have extra recess.” Teacher’s caring related to recess was stated by a fourth grade student as “our...teacher gave us little more recess than she usually did.” There were four other elementary students who thought caring was expressed by teachers when they showed movies. For example, a second grader wrote that a teacher was caring who “let us watch a movie every Friday,” and a fifth grader said caring was when teachers allowed students to “watch movies at special times.” Teachers were also seen as caring by five elementary and two middle school students when the teachers gave students food such as pizza, candy, gum or popcorn. A third grade student thought that a caring characteristic of a teacher was to “let us eat popcorn,” and for a fifth grader it was when a teacher “let us chew gum.” One middle school student said that “some teachers would sort of care when they bribe you with candy if you get a good grade.” Three elementary students had thought having a party was caring. Two of them were fifth graders who stated caring was being “thrown a party” and “doing gingerbread and parties.” A second grader wrote that caring was when the teacher “...gives us prizes on Monday if you are nice.” Having no homework was a demonstration of caring from a teacher for four third

grade students; as they wrote: “I would like the teacher to give us no homework the rest of the week” or they “give me no homework.’

Unique ideas of what would be a valued benefit were given by a few students and were exemplified by a third grade student who stated that a teacher demonstrated care by “...reading a great book” and a fourth grader who thought it was caring when teachers allowed them to “...do more arts and crafts...” For one third grade student, a characteristic of caring was when the teacher “lets us play when we are on red,” the strictest level of discipline.

These data demonstrate that elementary students perceived a connection between caring teachers and receiving valued benefits. They voiced that caring was demonstrated by teachers when they gave the students tangible things they wanted or earned as rewards. However, it should be kept in mind that these students responded between Thanksgiving and winter break and many parties and different activities happen at that time which may have influenced their responses.

Caring as being “nice” and “positive.” Teachers were also perceived by students as being caring because they presented a positive presence to students in the form of being nice or having a positive attitude toward the students. Elementary students were the majority of the students (16 elementary and seven middle school) who thought caring teachers were nice. Nine of the students in second through fifth grades described the characteristic of nice as “She’s really nice,” “by being nice” and “they were very nice.” Others in this group elaborated a little more by stating that caring teachers “Treat me good, doing nice things,” “they speak nicely to me...,” and “they do nice things for

you.” The seven middle school students who identified nice as a characteristic of a caring teacher told of several ways that teachers were nice such as: “when they do nice things for you,” “sometimes they ask how are you, which is nice,” and a caring teacher was “always nice and smiles.” A few of the students at this level described how teachers were nice by saying “My teachers are nice to me and make jokes but they are still strict” and “My teachers have been nice and not made me go up to the board when I don’t want to.” One eighth grader stated that caring was “...nice when a teacher remembers your name when you go to visit them the next year.” Another view of a caring teacher being nice came from a fourth grade student who responded, “I think it makes a difference because if they care about you then they are very nice teacher and if they don’t then they are bad.” Nice is a word with multiple definitions including pleasant, kind, respectable (Encarta dictionary, August 2, 2009) and its general use by students in this study leaves room for interpretation. However, it was primarily elementary students used this broad term to describe how teachers were caring which may be a result of limited vocabulary.

Four high school students identified a caring teacher as one who had a positive attitude. One said, “I think that a teacher that has a positive attitude will impact the attitude of students and create a better classroom experience.” Another said, “It shows that they are here because they genuinely want to help students learn, rather than just doing it because it’s their job and they’re getting paid for it.” Stated in the reverse of presenting a positive attitude, one student’s perspective was “Because they aren’t trying to be smarter than you.”

These 27 students who described an attribute of a caring teacher as nice or having a positive attitude may have had similar intentions in their uses of nice and positive attitude. Nice may be having a positive attitude. For example, from the perspectives of elementary students who speak in basic terms, and high school students who think in terms of a person's attitude, nice and positive attitude may have similar meaning.

Caring as personal understanding. Another attribute of a caring teacher for some students related to teachers' understanding of what the students considered to be their personal issues. The students' perceptions were that teachers wanted to hear what was going on in their lives and to understand students' feelings and problems such as personal issues, problems at home or hurt or sad feelings. The 17 students who identified this type of personal understanding as caring included three elementary students, five middle school students and nine high school students. Two of the students had very individual views of caring teachers. For example, a fourth grade student said a caring teacher "...is always understanding about one's feelings. My teacher has shown me that she cares by knowing my feelings and switching me from one math class to another so I could learn better," and an eleventh grade student said that caring teachers "understand how teenagers function." Another eleventh grade student wrote that teachers were caring regarding home issues when he said, "I've had some problems at home and when I'm in school and my teachers are aware about my problems they talk to me and support me and bring me all the help that I need. Also, when they notice I'm down, they try to get closer to me by talking. I think teachers care about me when they talk to me and make me realize I'm messing up or not putting in enough effort." Patience was also a specific way

of caring as understanding needed by a seventh grade student who wrote that caring teachers “are very patient with me.”

There were also six students (three middle school students and three high school) who thought caring teachers were those who consoled them when circumstances upset them or when they had experienced a friend’s death or a parent’s illness. For example, one high school senior wrote “When my mom was diagnosed with cancer, they were able to talk to me, to see if I was dealing with it alright (*sic*) and asking how she was doing,” and another senior responded “I’ve had a teacher talk to me one on one when my two friends died in Iraq.”

The data indicate that elementary students focused more on feelings than personal issues. The middle and high school students more often identified caring teachers from this very personal perspective. What was an issue or concern for one student would not usually be the same for another. Students envisioned teachers as people who cared about them by recognizing, being sympathetic and communicating with students about their individual situations.

The Impact of Teacher Caring Related to Students’ Social/Emotional Needs

Students not only described what caring teachers did, but also described the various ways in which having caring teachers affected them. They said they were comfortable in class, wanted to reciprocate caring to teachers, had better feelings about themselves, were happy, not stressed, or several other positive reactions when they thought a teacher was caring to them. There were three elementary, three middle and 13 high school students who said they felt comfortable in class because they had a caring

teacher. The elementary students described having a caring teacher as making "...a difference because it makes you feel comfortable and relaxed" and "You are more at ease, your mind is more at ease and helps you improve in you weaknesses." At the middle school level a student said, "I think that if a teacher cares about you, you feel you can be yourself..." and another wrote "I feel more comfortable and open up and try hard." One high school student generally stated "You feel a more personal relationship with that (caring) teacher. You feel more comfortable with them," and another said "It makes the class more comfortable and therefore easier to learn and understand." A senior said that when a teacher cared, "I feel more comfortable sharing my thoughts in class and I am able to seek help from them easily." The ability to interact with the teacher because of feeling comfortable was expressed slightly differently by another student who said, "I am comfortable to joke with them and visa versa; it also makes the person more approachable." Interacting with the content of the class was also impacted by feeling comfortable because a teacher was caring. One student said, "being comfortable prompts more interest in the subject, so you focus more on what you're supposed to do, than the way you feel about the teacher," and another student's statement was "If the care is noticed and appreciated it creates an atmosphere wherein the student would feel more comfortable and would feel that the material matters to them more, if only because it matters to the teacher." An unintended summary about how caring teachers were perceived to help students feel comfortable may be from a student who said, "It's comforting to have a caring teacher...It'll encourage students to be more active in a class because they are in a comfortable environment." From these data, it is indicated that

mostly high school students described the impact of having a caring teacher as one who promoted comfort for them in the class and with whom they developed relationships which facilitated their interactions.

Students also perceived having better feelings about themselves as a result of having a caring teacher. Fourteen students (one elementary, five middle and eight high school) described being more confident or had better self esteem because they had a teacher that cared about them. The fifth grade student said a caring teacher “Makes me feel more confident,” and seventh grade students stated, “you might feel more confident in your work and how we do it” and “You’re more confident with your work. You know someone cares about your world and what you do.” Improved confidence was also expressed by the high school students and they added how the confidence impacted them. At the high school level, one student worked for the “continual praise” which raised his confidence. Others said, “It makes you feel like you’ve accomplished something. It gives you confidence and makes you want to work harder” and “...you are confident in that class and get better grades because you are not afraid to ask questions.” Five of these students specifically described improved self esteem because of having a caring teacher. Two middle school students made statements such as “I think having a caring teacher makes you have better self esteem...you feel better about yourself so you know you can do well and are eager to learn” and it “gives us more self esteem about ourselves...” The high school students stated that because a caring teacher “wants you to succeed...makes you feel good about yourself” and that it makes you feel better to know that a teacher likes you and thinks you are a good student.” These statements indicate that students feel

better about themselves when a teacher, whomever that may be, was caring in a way they valued. A high school student gave a statement that may be encompassing of these opinions: “It certainly makes me feel important (when a teacher is caring). It makes me feel that I am of some value as a student and as a person.”

There were also students who wanted to reciprocate their care back to teachers. Thirteen students described what Noddings (1988) referred to as reciprocity, or when a student returns in some way the caring from a teacher. The one fifth grade student and one seventh grader expressed that they wanted to please or do their best to give back their teachers’ niceness and efforts to help them. Mostly high school students wanted to give back in some way to teachers they thought to be caring. The eleventh and twelfth grade students stated their desires to reciprocate as “I want to do better in those classes to impress the teacher and to show I care about them” and “I want to learn to not only be successful for myself, but also for my teacher.” Of this group, there were also two eighth grade and three high school students who wanted to respond by demonstrating respect for their teachers who cared about them. For one senior, it was a way to “...to show how much you appreciated their care.”

Mostly elementary students, 10 of 11 total, described ways in which having a caring teacher made them feel better about themselves. Three second grade students thought that the teacher who cared about them made them smart. One student expressed this as “We would be smart and if she didn’t care we would not be smart” and another said, “it makes us very smart.” Five other elementary students thought that a teacher caring about them helped them feel good or better. They commented, “(having a caring

teacher) makes a difference because it makes me feel better” and “it makes me feel kind of good.” Three other students (two in fifth grade and one in seventh grade) more specifically stated that having a caring teacher made them feel better about their future and their education. One fifth grade student said, “(I feel) less sad, (I have) a better future,” and according to the seventh grader “Having a caring teacher gives you a positive insight or look on teachers and education...” These young students generally expressed feeling better or feeling better about their futures because they had teachers who cared.

Caring teachers also support student’s positive feelings of being happy. Eight elementary students and two middle school students expressed that having a caring teacher made them feel happy by using statements such as “it makes me happy” and “I feel happy.” One elementary student said, “I think that having a teacher that cares about me would get me to like them better. It would make me happier to know what him or her thinks about me.” The two middle school students thought, “...you’d get better grades, be happier” and “It makes you happier to know someone pays attention to you.”

From a different viewpoint, seven students (two elementary, two middle and three high school) described that having a caring teacher helped to decrease their stress. A fourth grade student stated that having a caring teacher “... doesn’t make you feel so uptight so you don’t get the wrong answers,” and the fifth grader said it “makes you happy and not stressed so you can work easier.” The middle school students said, “If you have a teacher that cares about you, you might not feel so much pressure over test and other things” and “You don’t have to be nervous or different around them, when I know I

have a caring teacher I don't worry as much." The high school students in this group generally said that when teachers are caring, "There's less stress with that specific subject" and "It lowers my stress level immensely." The data show students at all three levels said caring teachers lowered their stress levels.

Students' personal need to trust someone were perceived to be met by having a teacher who was caring as stated by two middle school and two high school students. This was expressed by a sixth grader as: "It helps by knowing your teacher cares about you because you can trust them...and participate more in class." The high school students stated it as: "You can trust them and be friends. So it is like talking to a buddy" and "Knowing that you have someone you can trust and talk it is important, especially when the person is taking the time to give you an education." The younger students described how trust impacted class participation, whereas the older students described how trust helped them create relationships and conversations with their caring teachers.

Four students, who were clustered by their grades (two in fifth grade, one in sixth and one in seventh), described feeling safer because they had teachers who demonstrated care. The sixth and seventh grade students had similar ideas about the impact of caring on students by responding that "you feel safe with them and then you can concentrate on your work" and "...because people can focus on work and not be afraid to speak up." One of the fifth graders put it in different terms: "So you won't feel scared and you can work hard." From either perspective, caring teachers provide these students with a safe feeling that allows them to work better in class.

Not only did students feel happy because they thought their teachers cared about them, but three students believed that because they had a caring teacher they enjoyed class more. Two middle school students and one high school student described different ways they enjoyed class as a result of having a caring teacher because "...you will enjoy being around them" and another middle school student put forth that "If you have a teacher that doesn't care about you won't enjoy the class." Class enjoyment for these three students was at least partially dependent on if their teachers cared about them.

The younger students were more simplistic in saying they felt smarter or better as a result of having a teacher who cared. As the students matured in age, their responses were more descriptive about how they felt better about their personal abilities and feelings about a class because a teacher demonstrated care towards them.

The students at different levels gave various descriptors of how teachers were caring and how the caring impacted them. Table 2 provides a display of the descriptors of teacher caring and Table 3 shows their responses about how teacher caring impacted them.

Table 2

Students' Descriptors of How Teachers Care

Descriptor	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Caring as communicating (total)	4	13	55	72
Caring as generally communicating	1	7	30	38
Talked about student interests/activities	2	0	6	8
Teachers questioned students about lives	0	5	13	18
Listened to students	1	1	6	8
Caring as individual attention (total)	25	46	69	140
Helped them when needed	14	23	12	49
Spending extra time with them	2	13	23	38
Flexible in general	7	6	21	34
flexible extra time to do work	2	4	13	19
Instructional practices (total)	38	33	27	98
Various strategies	2	2	7	11
Helped learning (total)	15	7	4	26
General	9	5	1	15
specific	6	2	3	11
Helped when struggling	7	9	5	21
Helped preparing for tests	5	3	5	13
Helped work on projects	5	7	0	12
Helped understand	0	5	5	10
Gave challenging work	4	0	1	5
Helps with social /emotional needs (total)	81	45	65	191
Personal acknowledge.	12	11	27	50
Feedback	5	10	12	27
Teacher answered questions	2	5	5	12
Encouragement/reinforcement	4	1	5	10
Give something of value	39	3	0	42

Descriptor	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Teacher presence (total)	16	7	4	27
nice	16	7	0	23
positive	0	0	4	4
teacher understanding	3	5	9	17
consoling	0	3	3	6

Table 3

Students' Descriptions of How Teacher Caring Impacts Them

Impact	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Impact on academics (total)	41	46	88	175
Motivation (total)	15	30	53	98
Succeed/try harder (total)	2	9	26	37
Improve	0	2	9	11
Try harder	2	7	17	26
Listened	9	6	13	28
Wanted to go to school/class	0	7	6	13
Not go	2	4	0	6
Want to learn	2	4	8	14
Affects on learning (total)	26	16	35	77
Learned better	22	13	26	61
Influenced quality of understanding	1	2	3	6
More fun	3	1	6	10
Impact on social/emotional (total)	17	17	37	71
Was comfortable in class	3	3	13	19
Had better feeling about self	1	5	8	14
Wanted to reciprocate caring	1	1	11	13
Felt happy in class	8	2	0	10
Decreased stress	2	2	3	7
Trusted	0	2	2	4
Felt safer	2	2	0	4

Summary of Students' Descriptors of Teacher Care

In general, the data demonstrated that the high school students gave more ideas in one answer and therefore contributed more data to this investigation. This was perhaps because of one or more reasons that may include that high school students: a) possess

greater ability to articulate their thoughts; b) understand better how teachers behave and how learning happens; c) are more aware of their own learning needs; and d) are more able to think in the abstract. It should also be noted that in analyzing the data, it was taken into consideration the overall percentage of students at each level who participated in the study.

The students at all levels gave many descriptions of how teachers were caring. Their perceptions of caring were that the teachers knew their needs and in some way met those needs. Although what they described may have been similar, each student had a personal perception of what their own needs were. Their responses were about what they wanted their teachers to know about each of them as individuals, how teachers helped with academic needs, and how they helped with social/emotional needs. Through these descriptors, the students seemed to have an underlying feeling of acceptance as individuals from the teachers.

Know individual student's needs. Students most often stated that teachers demonstrated caring by learning about them as individuals. They did this by communicating with them, listening to their thoughts and ideas, and asking the students questions about themselves. The students described caring teachers as those who had one to one conversations with them, asked about their personal interests and activities, and made efforts to know more about them by asking questions about how their day was going and their lives in general. Through these interactions, the students thought the teachers were genuinely interested in what they liked or how they learned. There were twice as many high school students as the other two groups combined who responded that

a caring teacher was one who communicated with them and got to know them through verbal interactions. The few elementary students who identified personal communication as a characteristic of a caring teacher did so in general terms, whereas the older students indicated that they valued more extensive or in depth verbal interactions with their teachers, specifically if it gave the teachers personal information about them.

Help with students' academic needs. Students at all levels said that characteristics of a caring teacher were that they knew when the student needed academic help or when they provided help to them. Related to this theme, the largest amount of respondents, across the levels said that caring teachers generally helped each of them when it was needed. Of this group, there were more middle school students who said that caring teachers helped each of them in general whenever they needed, in every possible way, or that the teacher had gone out of her/his way to help them. The students claimed these teachers knew them well enough to anticipate when they needed individual help.

Another often noted characteristic of a caring teacher reported almost exclusively by middle and high school students was that the teacher helped by spending time with them beyond scheduled class time. Only two elementary students said that their teachers who were caring helped them outside of class time such as with math at lunch. The limited number of elementary students responding in this way may be because they spend approximately 75% of their day with the same teacher and have a lot of time to receive teacher help. The older students said caring teachers found time to help them one to one before and after school, during weekend review sessions, or made time to help them when they had been sick or needed something extra such as a college recommendation.

One senior in high school portrayed the "...consummate caring teacher (as someone who) would need to spend inordinate amounts of time becoming so." This extra time needed for individual help from teachers at the middle and high school levels may be because these students are only scheduled to see their teachers for 90 minutes every other day in classes of 25 students or more. They also have more independent projects with which they may need help or desire the time for individual attention.

Another attribute of a caring teacher was stated by one student as caring "...changes the way they teach." This suggests that teaching is a rather complex activity that requires teachers to get to know how their students learn and then design instruction which considers how each individual learns content. High school students reported that teachers who were caring were flexible in considering individual student's personal circumstances in needing extra time to complete work or were mindful of the student's schedule. The high school students also had expectations that teachers would know what obligations they had for other classes and be caring by planning accordingly.

The various teaching methods caring teachers used to meet student's needs were identified by students across the school levels. They said caring teachers gave better study guides, used repetition and hands on materials, and were enthusiastic and interested in what they were teaching. The students reported that the methods teachers used met the students' individual academic needs helped them learn.

More elementary students than students at the other school levels said that caring teachers helped them learn in general or learn specific subjects. A third grader described a caring teacher as one who tried "...to help you learn things you never knew." The

larger amount of elementary students who said that caring teachers helped them learn may have been because at that level they learn more specific, identifiable skills such as reading and basic math skills, and as they get older, students are exposed to more complex concepts. Students across the grade levels also identified teachers as caring because they helped them when they were struggling or preparing for tests, apparently more universal concerns, but what help was needed at each level or for each student was not defined.

Students at the different levels said that caring teachers helped them, however, each student, at any grade level may have interpreted “help” in a different way, but expected the teacher to know how each of them needed help. This suggests that teachers no longer “teach a class of students” but rather that they teach a class of “individuals” who have varying needs, but with similar student expectations that the teacher cares for them. For example, not all students would think that having challenging work would be an act of caring from a teacher. There was also the possibility that caring was when a teacher gave extra time to do work or gave challenging work when the student was ready for it both of which would depend on the teacher’s knowledge of what would support the student’s academic need at a particular time, as well as each individual student’s expectations for how he/she wants and hopes to be treated.

Help with students’ personal needs. Students identified teachers as caring because they thought the teachers knew and supported their social/emotional needs. Students described caring teachers as those who supported their personal efforts through personally acknowledging them, giving them valued benefits, exhibiting a positive

presence in class or demonstrating understanding or concern for a student's personal situation. More than twice as many high school students than the other two levels combined gave general descriptors of how teachers personally acknowledged them. The elementary students responded in a way that indicated that caring was when teachers let the student know they are aware of her/him, such as a hug or telling her/him to have a good weekend. The middle school students exhibited in their responses a somewhat transitional experience in that the teacher asked them how they were and then seemed to expect a response, and the high school students described personal acknowledgement as having more extended interactions with their teachers about their lives and activities.

Another way students thought teachers were caring about their social/emotional concerns was by giving them feedback about their individual accomplishments or how they were doing in their academic work. There were more middle and high schools students who said that caring was when teachers remarked about their class work, or academic achievements or gave them information on how they could improve. For the few elementary students who said feedback was an example of caring, simple verbal feedback or comments such as "good job" were enough, but the older students described caring as feedback in the form of comments on papers about how to improve, positive comments in general and even awarding stickers.

Across the grade levels, students reported a characteristic of teachers who were caring as ones who personally acknowledged them by answering their questions. One student was impressed by this individual attention: "(The teacher) is incredible, willing to answer any questions I have..." A mixture of students also recognized caring teachers as

those who gave them personal encouragement and reinforcement. The younger students described caring as when they received more concrete objects as reinforcement and the older students described caring as a more abstract or a more subtle expression of encouragement and reinforcement. Mainly elementary students thought there was a connection between caring teachers and being given something they valued. Over half of the responding elementary students stated that caring teachers gave them things they liked such as more recess, parties, special food, movies or less homework.

According to students, caring was also associated with teachers who had a positive presence. Students in the elementary and middle school levels thought that caring teachers were nice, either in general or that they treated the students nicely, spoke to them nicely, or did nice things for them. “Nice” was portrayed as making jokes for one student and for another, it was that the teacher remembered his name the next year. “Nice” is a term that has multiple definitions and may have been interpreted by students in many different ways. This was represented a little differently by high school students who said that a caring teacher was also one who had a positive presence: they spoke of teachers who cared as having a positive attitude toward students and genuinely wanting to help student learn and not just doing a job they got paid to do.

Another attribute of a caring teacher was that they wanted to hear what was going on in the students’ lives and to understand the students’ personal issues and problems. Although there were more high school students who contributed to this theme, all levels of students expressed that caring teachers understood their feelings. The high school students, once again, were more expressive about how teachers demonstrated care. They

said the teachers were understanding in general, understood them as teens, supported students with personal home issues, or noticed when students were feeling down.

Overall, middle and high school students more often identified caring from teachers in this very personal perspective. This may in part be because students in these age groups are more aware of the world around them and of their own personal situations.

Students' Description of the Impact of Teacher Caring

The students at all levels described the impact that teacher caring had on them. The middle and high school students' responses were more explicit about how teacher caring impacted them in class, but students at each level expressed that caring from a teacher motivated them to be a more active participant in their own learning and provided them with positive feelings about being in class. As previously noted, the students' responses were focused on what impacted them as individuals.

Caring motivated students to participate in learning. The students in the different levels said that having caring teachers affected them by motivating them to be more of a participant in their own learning or improving the quality of their learning. These students' responses, represented by more high school students than elementary and middle school combined, described that caring teachers motivated them to improve how they did in a teacher's class or that they wanted to do the work because they had a teacher who cared. Other students in this group said they were motivated to "try harder" or "to work hard" because a teacher cared about them. Students also said that having a not caring teacher also influenced their efforts; they would not work as hard if they had a teacher that didn't care: "...you don't try as hard."

Other ways that students of all levels, but mostly high school students, described the impact that a caring teacher had on them was by making comments like "...you'll pay attention...", "you'll listen more...", "you'll listen better...", or that having a caring teacher makes a student "...listen to what they have to say." These students also said that having a caring teacher helped them focus more or be more attentive in class. Having a teacher who demonstrated care also motivated students to go to school or a particular class. In contrast, there were younger students who said that they would not want to go to school if they knew their teachers were not caring. There were also students who said they were motivated to learn because they had a caring teacher. One student specifically stated, "Knowing they care about how well prepared I am, I am eager to learn more." The students across the levels made similar statements about caring teachers motivating them to be more involved in their learning; however, there were more high school students who gave responses related to this theme. This may be because younger students are more likely to do as their teachers ask, whereas high school students want to have a reason to do what they do, suggesting a difference by school level.

Seventy seven students responded that having a caring teacher positively affected the quality of their learning; almost half of them were in high school. They thought that because they had a caring teacher they learned better "...because you get more out of class." They also said they learned more and had a higher rate of retention because of having a teacher who cared. Caring teachers also made learning in a particular class easier for a group of students from third grade through twelfth. They expressed that if a teacher cared the learning would be easier and "...that subject may not be a struggle for

you.” The quality of students’ understanding of what they learned was enhanced by having a caring teacher for students of all levels. One more outcome of caring from a teacher was that learning was more fun for some students. As reported mostly by high school students, the effects on learning as influenced by having a caring teacher, included that they learned or understood better, easier, or more, or that they had more fun learning.

Caring gave students positive feelings. Students at all levels described the various ways in which having caring teachers affected them related to their feelings about being in class or about themselves. The impact most stated by students relative to this theme was that because they had caring teachers they were comfortable in class. Younger students said they felt more at ease and that they were better able to improve their weaknesses. However, it was the larger number of high school students who described feeling more comfortable as being able to share their thoughts, seek help more easily, or joke with caring teachers which helped them feel they had a more personal relationship with the teacher. One student said that “being comfortable prompts more interest in the subject, so you focus more on what you’re supposed to do, than the way you feel about the teacher.”

The influence that teachers had on students was evident when students said that caring teachers helped them have better feelings about themselves, such as having more confidence or better self esteem. This impact was expressed by middle and high schools students who said they were more confident, which in turn made them work harder and to not be afraid to ask questions. The students that said a caring teacher helped them have an

improved self esteem, which made them eager to learn and to see themselves as good students. The students felt valued by the teachers who cared.

Another way that students, mostly in high school, expressed that caring teachers impacted them was by saying that caring teachers made them feel as if they wanted to “give back” to the teachers. The students wanted to show care for their teacher by doing better in order to impress her/him, or they wanted to learn and be successful for themselves and the teacher who had been caring towards them. The students also wanted to demonstrate respect by communicating that they “...appreciated their care.”

The student data also indicated that caring teachers supported the positive feelings of students. There were eight elementary students and two middle school students who simply said that having a caring teacher made them happy. One middle school student explained, “It makes you happier to know someone pays attention to you.”

Small groups of students across the levels described other positive impacts caring teachers had on them. The younger students described how trust for the teacher impacted their class participation, whereas the older students said that trust helped them create relationships and conversations with their caring teachers. Students also described other positive feelings they gained from having a caring teacher. These included feeling safer, which allowed them to work better in class; feeling smart and more positive about their future, feeling happy in the class and enjoying class more.

There are many ways that students described how caring teachers impacted them; each descriptor was important to the student who said it. This speaks to the challenge of

defining teacher caring; it still remains very personal despite the broader themes found in the present study.

A Comparison of Teachers' and Students' Responses about Caring

Each teacher and each student had her/his own perceptions of how caring was demonstrated by teachers and the impact the caring had on students. This section compares the data as they related to the research question:

5. How do these teachers' and students' descriptions compare and contrast?

A Comparison of Themes from Teacher and Student Data

Using the major themes that emerged from the teachers' and students' responses, the similarities of their responses are described from their particular perspectives. The most noted theme that emerged from this study was that caring was defined as operating at the individual level of interaction. All of the teachers described that caring required knowing their students as individuals and treating them individually. They felt it important to know their academic and their personal needs. The teachers at the different grade levels learned about their students in different ways, but the students at all the school levels acknowledged that the teachers knew them because they helped them in ways each one needed. The most frequent response given by the students was that a caring teacher helped them in some manner. This was a response that was differentiated by student development as discussed earlier. The younger students focused on caring teachers as those who helped with learning, whereas the middle school students wanted help in general and the high school students, in particular, thought that caring was when

teachers helped beyond classroom time, or invested in them in some individual way. Obviously, not all students needed the same help, but the caring teachers at all levels knew the particular kind of help each student would need. The teachers thought it was important to know their students, and their students acknowledged that because the teachers tried to meet their needs they generally felt that the teachers knew them.

Knowing their students also had teachers responding to other needs of students in ways that were perceived as caring by the students. In particular, the elementary students thought caring teachers were nice to them and gave the students things they valued, such as food and added recess. In comparison, the middle school students identified caring as teachers giving them feedback and answering their questions. At the high school level, students thought caring teachers gave them personal acknowledgement, had conversations with them, were understanding and or concerned about their personal situations, or created an environment in which they were comfortable and wanted to reciprocate the care to the teacher. The younger students expressed their needs in more basic terms than did the high school students who were able to be more specific about what their needs were.

When asked about the impact of caring teachers on students, teachers and high school students in particular described the motivational impact that teacher caring has on students. The teachers' perspectives of the impact were that if they demonstrated a caring disposition toward the students then the students would be motivated to do their best or better. Similarly, the high school students responded that they didn't want to disappoint their teachers who had demonstrated a disposition to care about them. This is a

remarkable consistency between these two groups: teachers believe that demonstrating a caring attitude will motivate students, and by high school, the students report wanting to work harder not to let down caring teachers. The students focused on caring from teachers as having their needs met, but the teachers gave added ways they believed teachers demonstrated caring. These descriptors of caring would have developed out of the teachers knowing their students' abilities and needs. Ten of the teachers described that caring was having standards and high expectations of students and also helping them achieve those criteria. Perhaps stemming from the developmental levels of the students, the teachers at the various grade levels reported the different ways in which they saw themselves as caring, but which were unmentioned by students. For example, the teachers of the younger students highlighted that caring included their communications with parents and described their role of being a mom or mothering their students. The middle school teachers emphasized that they showed care by fostering their students' self esteem and structuring their classes in ways that supported the students' development as learners. The middle and high school level teachers stressed that they knew their students' interests, attended their extracurricular activities, and tried to prepare them for the "real world." These teachers also added that the caring way in which they taught was based in their backgrounds and experiences as learners themselves.

Although several of the teachers commented that they did not know what they did that was caring, the teachers in this study were chosen because they fit the description of being a caring teacher as determined by their building's principal. However, teaching is a focus of their lives, and they either directly or indirectly think about what they do with

students every day. The teachers were more explicit in their responses than were the students, but that should be expected. Students aren't expected to think about how learning happens; teachers are. This may be the first time the students have ever been asked to think about what happens in the classroom or how it affects them. While the different developmental age groups also influenced the depth of their responses, the students were able to give more responses than the teachers about how caring impacted them.

The descriptions of caring, as described by the teachers and the students, were focused on facilitating learning for the students. There were several similarities and differences of how the teachers and students in this study described caring.

The similarities included the main descriptors of caring by the teachers and students. The teachers said that caring was learning about their students as individuals, and the students stated that caring was their teachers learning about them as individuals. This attribute of caring was described by both groups of participants as the teachers getting to know each student through one to one conversations and asking about personal interests, how the student's day was going, or about life in general. The teachers said these interactions usually took place during non instructional time. They explained they wanted to know their students as individuals in order to identify how to meet their academic and personal needs, knowing that students could not be treated the same because their needs and circumstances were different. The students indicated that they wanted their teachers to know about them as individuals so the teacher could help them

as needed. Students identified needing help in general, for a specific subject, when struggling or preparing for tests.

The teachers and students also identified that the help given to students was incorporated into how the caring teacher taught. The teachers were more general in their descriptions of how caring was incorporated into teaching. They said they adjusted the curriculum to meet students' needs, used different learning styles, and spent extra time with students to help them when it was needed. They also made contact through email, mail or phone calls with students or their parents beyond the school day. These characteristics may have been a part of the compassion that the teachers described by wanting to do all they could to help students and not have them fail. The students more specifically described caring as how teachers taught using a variety of techniques such as assorted teaching materials, hands on activities, and making the information meaningful. The students gave the details that caring from teachers was demonstrated as spending extra time with them beyond class time, through giving them personal acknowledgement and feedback, answering their questions; providing encouragement, reinforcement, or valued items; and being nice and having a positive attitude. There were some students who thought that caring teachers gave them extra time to complete work or were considerate of the student's schedule.

The teachers described other ways that they thought caring was shown to students. Almost all of them described having expectations of their students; they pushed them, had standards or were tough. They made clear that they were not "fluffy" or "soft touches." At the high school level specifically, teachers demonstrated care by helping

their students have glimpses of life beyond high school when situations arose that helped make the connection to the “real world.”

There were also the elementary and middle school teachers who said that they were like a “mom” to their students. However, there were no students who said that their caring teacher was like a “mom” to them.

Teachers were unique from students by stating that their caring for students was influenced by their personal drive and experiences. They described their different upbringings, personal and school experiences, and their ambition to help students learn as the general reasons for how they cared. They also described themselves being serious about teaching and having a passion for teaching students and content; although at times teaching was difficult, they wanted their classes to be fun or positive.

Teachers identified the impact of caring as providing students motivation to try harder, perform better and particularly at the high school level, to come to school. The students, mostly in high school, had thoughts about how caring teachers affected them. They said that because of having a caring teacher they were personally motivated to work hard and to be successful, and that the caring improved the quality of their learning. Students stated they were also inspired to pay attention, listen, focus in class, go to a specific class, or go to school, because they had a teacher who cared about them. From students’ perspectives, the impact of teacher caring also included improved quality of learning, comfort in class, and self confidence.

Teachers and students gave very similar descriptors of caring; the students were at times more descriptive were the more general statements from the teachers. The

differences were twofold in that the teachers described why they were caring and how they felt about teaching, which, in most cases, would not be something students would consider, and the students described how the teacher caring impacted them. Perhaps these differences are actually similar, because each group described how caring, or not, from others, impacted how they were with each other. The perspectives of each group influenced how they described caring, but in the end, both groups saw similar effects in the motivation of the students to work harder for a caring teacher.

6. Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

In the seminal study by Poplin and Weeres (1992) caring was the number one need identified from the perspectives of all the people connected to the schools from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. However, caring was not defined. This study provides descriptors of teacher caring and how caring impacted students through the voices of elementary, middle and high school teachers and their students all of whom were connected by being in the same cluster of schools. The responses of teachers and students were also compared. Data analysis of the participants' responses allowed some conclusions to evolve.

Toward a Grounded Theory of Teacher Caring

The data from the present study allow for speculating on a theory of teacher caring which can be developed further through additional research. This section of the chapter will build a tentative theory of teacher caring that begins with its impacts on students and then examines how those impacts are influenced by the teachers and how they perceive caring. There appeared to be five dimensions to this emerging theoretical perspective: 1) teachers and students agreed that helping and "being there" were forms of caring; 2) teachers performed these acts of caring unconsciously; 3) the students reported the caring as motivating them to work for these caring teachers; 4) teachers received

invisible reciprocity of care from students; and 5) there were school level differences that deserve further scrutiny. Each is discussed below.

Helping as Caring

The data suggested that the overarching impact of caring centers on student motivation which was the result of teachers helping students. Both the teachers and the students agreed that all of the actions teachers undertook focused toward helping students become active participants in their own learning. This was consistent with the data of other researchers (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Daniels & Arpostathis, 2005; Miller & Dweck, 1998; Murdock & Miller, 2003) who found that how teachers interacted with students had an impact on student motivation. As reported in the data for this present study, teachers were central actors in motivating students to learn, and it appeared that demonstrating care toward the individual student, especially in middle and high school, and to a lesser extent in elementary, was perceived by the teachers and the students as motivating. It should be noted here that the elementary students also reported a group dimension to caring that they also perceived as motivating. As such, students perceived caring teachers as supportive of their education, and the teachers perceived that getting to know each student as an individual, knowing about what is going on in their lives, having instructional and interpersonal strategies for helping them with school work, as well as with personal matters, were motivational.

When one looks across all of the data from the teachers and from the students, teacher caring was described by teachers and students in this study as helping each student learn, and that it was this form of caring that was motivating for the students.

That is, both the teachers and the students saw caring as momentary, focused on each individual student and getting to know that student to be able to provide the most appropriate help at any given moment. The teachers were clear that caring was not about being “fluffy” or “a soft touch;” in fact, at times it was about “being tough” or “doing the tough love thing.” Teachers across the grade levels said that teaching was difficult but they were doing the job they wanted to be doing.

Unconscious Competence

The teachers reported that their caring is an unconscious yet competent act teachers “just” perform. The data suggested that caring that was not planned and was not “necessarily a cognitive or rational decision for me on a day to day basis; it’s a way I treat students...” and it was described as “... a lot of stuff I do off the cuff,” which suggests it was a “way of being” for them, where they were comfortable that sometimes their acts of care may not have the intended effects. One teacher pointed out that as a situation was happening, the teacher and/or the student may not have recognized how caring was demonstrated, but that the student may someday look back and say, “I remember the teacher who did...” These descriptors of caring indicated a process that focused on a teachers’ interactions and observations of each student which influenced how teachers helped students learn. This process was very fluid and depended on the academic and personal needs of the student in a given situation. Although caring was something that teachers said they did without conscious thought or planning, they did say that they were influenced in how they interacted with students by their own experiences, both positive and negative. For example, teachers at the elementary level and one in

middle school described that they cared similar to how they were a mother and that they perceived themselves to be “a mom” to students at school. Teachers of middle and high school students said what they did came from their own experiences in their families and life, as well as from being students themselves.

Caring Motivates Students

The overall responses from teachers and students described caring as teachers knowing the students and helping them academically and/or personally in ways that stimulated learning. Teachers and students said that teacher demonstrations of care motivated students to learn, to want to go to school, to stay in school, to be in class, or to try harder. Students at the elementary and middle school levels said teacher caring helped them be happy and created a trust for their teachers, whereas high school students said they were more interested in learning and had better feelings about themselves as learners. The students described how the teachers’ actions made them comfortable in class and helped them be more open to and active in the process of learning. Perhaps related, teachers and students said caring improved the quality of student learning.

Indirect Reciprocity

Although their actions were not thought out, the teachers described caring as their intention to engage students in learning and to be available to help them. They were selfless in their expectations; they did not suggest that students would reciprocate caring to them personally. However, the students, particularly those at the middle and high school levels, said that because teachers were caring, they were motivated to be involved in learning, wanted to work harder for them and did not want to disappoint them. This

was the impact that teachers desired, but it was an indirect reciprocation of care from the students. A part of this theory is that students indirectly reciprocate care to teachers by being engaged in their learning.

School-level Differences

This emerging theory of teacher caring also speculates that there are school-level or developmental differences that may influence the nature of how teachers care.

Teachers at the elementary level communicated with parents and were attentive to differences in their students, recognizing when students were distraught because lunch had been left on the bus, not feeling well, or observing that a student did not have a hat or mittens in winter. They were the teachers who characterized their interactions with their students as mothering. Although caring was mainly focused on individual students, the students at this level uniquely reported a group dimension to caring, such as getting more recess and parties. Elementary students used more simplistic terms such as “nice” than did the older students to describe how teachers were caring. They also seemed more accepting of how teaching and learning was presented to them.

The middle and high school level teachers also described being aware of changes in students’ demeanor or situations, but their students said they would seek help for academic and personal needs from teachers whom they thought were caring. The students at these levels expressed more concern about having their personal needs met than did the elementary students. Another distinction of caring stated by teachers and students in middle and high school was that teachers were available to help students beyond class time. The high school teachers and students demonstrated a more mature relationship by

having more interactions about what help students needed, what expectations were, or about life in general. The differences at the levels seem related to how students at different ages recognize and/or access help when needed.

In sum, the emerging theory of caring as motivation from this study is that the simple act of helping is perceived as caring. Teachers did not know what they did that was caring; rather, it was that they perceived their jobs to be doing what was needed to help students be successful learners. The teachers were caring in ways that were appropriate for the level of children they taught, and the students said that caring teachers were available to them to help them academically and personally, which motivated them to be engaged in their own learning. This could be expressed as a theoretical framework that is represented by the teacher, unconsciously does caring actions toward the student to help with academic and personal needs, which motivates the student to participate in learning by trying harder, listening in class, going to school/class and wanting to learn. The students indirectly reciprocate by being engaged in learning.

Returning to the literature, Poplin and Weeres (1992) stated that caring was the number one need identified by all the teachers, students, parents, administrators, custodians, etc., who participated in the elementary middle, and high schools in their study. The students said that what they liked best about school was "...particularly teachers cared about them..." and the teachers said they cared because they "sacrificed above and beyond" (p. 19). The students' descriptions of care were given in general terms of "...authentic relationships... being trusted...spoken to honestly and warmly..." (p. 21). The present study has provided more detail about what caring was and how it

impacted students from the perspectives of teachers and their students from elementary school through high school.

The teachers and students in this study demonstrated through their responses that teacher caring was comparable to a certain extent, to Noddings' (1988) theory of caring. Noddings (1998) theorized that caring was a natural relationship created between a teacher and a student that was appropriate for that particular situation and that each relationship was influenced by the individual teacher's and student's backgrounds. In this study, caring teachers were described as what Noddings (1988) referred to as "caring for" someone; the teachers felt a need to do something for a specific person with whom a relationship had been established. Caring teachers were not concerned with themselves, but selflessly focused on the needs of the student, or what some labeled a maternal response. Caring teachers in both this study and in Noddings' (1998) writings were available to students to help in all situations and to give affirmation and encouragement to students so they could be positive and successful. In addition, the responses of the participants in both this study and in Noddings (1998) established that caring was expressed in many ways.

A difference between the present study and Noddings' (1988, 1998, 2001) theory was the impact of caring on students. In the present study, both the teachers' and students' perspectives were that caring motivated students to be more involved in their own learning and that learning was qualitatively improved. Noddings (1998) described how, as a part of caring, that students reciprocated the teacher's care by acknowledging the care that had been expressed through dialogues or exchanges, but noted that because

caring was so enveloping for the care-giver it would be difficult for a teacher to do for a whole class.

The teachers and students in this study as well as in previous research (Dempsey, 1994; Noblit, 1993; Noblit et al., 1995; Rogers, 1994; Rogers & Webb, 1991) described caring and the influence of caring with great similarity. The teachers in both studies said that caring was difficult to define, but that it was expressed through their actions and embedded in their interactions with students. The teachers valued the individuality of each student and tried to meet each one's needs. In general, they provided learning experiences that were interesting and promoted students to do their best work. They said that caring was a part of their responsibility of being a teacher to help students learn. Noblit (1993) added the perspective that caring was the teacher's power to help students; the teacher had to be tough and spirited to maintain what was good for students. The students described caring teachers as those who treated them as individuals and were considerate of their needs. Students concurred with the teachers that caring was demonstrated through the design of interesting curriculum (Rogers, 1994). As these previous researchers reported, the influence of teacher caring on students was that they wanted to participate in learning to maintain their relationships with teachers. What is interesting is that the teachers' theme of "tough love" was not mentioned by the students: perhaps, students don't mind "tough love" if they perceive it is in their best interest.

In a more recent study of preservice and practicing teachers, McBee (2007) also found that experienced teachers described caring as intentionally learning about their students as individuals and using the information for instructional and personal

interactions. Similar to the present study these teachers said that caring was helping students by going beyond what was expected of them. Care was not described in one way, but rather using a variety of characteristics.

Lastly, although there has been a lapse of many years between the writings of Noddings (1988, 1998), the “Caring Study” (Dempsey, 1994; Noblit, 1993; Noblit et al., 1995; Rogers, 1994; Rogers & Webb, 1991), and McBee (2007) and the present study, there are consistencies. Simply, caring teachers are those who learn about individual students and use that information to help students, as individuals, learn. This study adds to the literature that caring is teachers “being there” for students and helping them as appropriate for their individual needs. The students interpreted caring as teachers being available to them to help them academically and personally, which motivated them to be engaged in their own learning.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study provide a description of how this group of teachers and their students described caring and how caring impacted students. However, the teachers in this study were selected by their principal as caring using a definition of caring that was provided to them. There is a need to conduct further research that includes students’ descriptors of teachers they thought were “non caring” or “not there” for students; would the descriptors of care be different or would students be similarly motivated to learn? The students in this study said that a teacher caring was motivating but what impact does that motivation have on their actual learning? It would also be pertinent to do a study in which students were interviewed, not just surveyed.

It would also be beneficial to do a similar study in different locations, such as metropolitan and rural school districts. The questions which might surface from studying teachers and students in different environments include: do teachers and/or students of different racial backgrounds and/or socio-economic circumstances perceive caring differently than what is portrayed in this study? If they do, then how does that impact teacher education?

From another standpoint, there is the question of how or whether caring as defined by the students' interpretation of "being there" can be taught to pre service and/or practicing teachers? Goldstein and Lake (2000) described how some preservice teachers in a group became more experienced in terms of caring they were more aware that caring was a deeper, more complex concept. However, others did not. This example makes relevant the questions how did that awareness occur and can schools of education or professional development in public schools teach teachers how to care?

Lastly, if helping is perceived as caring, and caring in turn motivates students, then research is needed as to whether caring links to student achievement. From these data, teachers cared in the absence of ongoing and tangible reciprocity. Rather, their unconscious caring was based in the hope that all of their efforts will keep students connected to learning. The students reported that when teachers cared they too cared about learning, which suggests an indirect relationship to at the least, better grades and improved test scores. However, this study did not research that relationship at all, and future researchers are encouraged to build upon and extend this grounded theory of teacher caring for its effects in these areas.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study indicate that teacher caring has a role in motivating students to be more active participants in learning at the elementary, middle and high school levels. This information would be of benefit for use for staff development for teachers of students in grades K-12 and teacher education programs, and for interviewing prospective teachers and teacher education candidates, as well as within the classroom and for supervisors of teachers and preservice teachers.

In professional development training for practicing teachers or a class for preservice teachers, the participants would be given the opportunity develop their own conclusions about what caring is and the impact caring has on students. To help the teachers understand caring from their own and their colleagues' perspectives, they would each be given the same questions as the teachers in this study were asked during the interview: "How do you believe you are a caring teacher to your students?," "How do you demonstrate caring with your students?," "How do you think caring for your impacts students?," and "How do you think caring for your students impacts their learning?" The teachers would individually write their answers. All the participants would anonymously share their responses with the entire group by writing them as short answers on chart paper that would have one question listed at the top of each sheet. As duplicate answers appeared, they would be tallied to demonstrate common themes that developed for the group, which could then be put in ascending order to create a visual of the most common themes. The teachers would then discuss in small groups how they could incorporate the identified concepts into their teaching. For example, because learning about students and

knowing their needs were main characteristics of caring in this study, they may be characteristics described in another group. Using those themes, the teachers would brainstorm ideas of how they could get to know their students and stay in touch with their needs. Using this method would foster self discovery and perhaps more ownership of the characteristics of caring and how it impacts their students, which may lead to better acceptance of the ideas shared, as opposed to being told that caring motivates students and they need to do it in a certain way.

Preservice teachers could observe their supervising teachers to see how they relate to students as individuals and notice the responses of the students. They could also interview the experienced teacher using the interview questions. From a personal perspective, preservice teachers could reflect on teachers who were caring or not caring in their lives, what the teachers did that they thought was caring and how they thought caring impacted them.

As previously stated, this study demonstrated that teachers and students believed that caring teachers know students as individuals and use this information to meet individual student's needs, which subsequently motivated students to be more active in their learning. To facilitate this, administrators of K-12 schools and college professors could use questions from the teacher interviews from this study to provide them with information about how program applicants would interact with their students. Practicing preservice teachers could use the questions from the student questionnaire as a method of initiating the process of knowing their students and their individual needs. Administrators and professors should also be role models of knowing the people they supervise and

consult with them to help them incorporate the caring actions which motivate students to learn.

APPENDIX A

Cover letter for teachers

Caroline Fuhrman
503-319-3647
cfuhrman@gmu.edu

November, 2008

Hello

I hope that the beginning of your school year has been a very positive one. I am not only starting the school year as a counselor at Freedom High School, but also doing the research for my Ph.D. dissertation. Your name has been given to me as a person who demonstrates care for your students. I would like to know if you would be willing to share some of your beliefs, ideas, and/or thoughts with me through some open ended questions. Your principal _____ has approved of this request.

If you would like to participate in this study, I will give you more information and a consent form. Also, if you participate I would need to have your students respond to a one time only writing prompt. I would need you to send home the prepared permission slips for them to participate.

All responses to the interviews and to the writing prompts will remain confidential.

Please e mail me or call me to let me know if this is something you would consider doing or have any questions.

Thanks you so much.

Caroline Fuhrman

APPENDIX B

Informed consent form for teachers

Current "Voices from the Inside": Hearing the voices of teachers and students about caring in classrooms

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to inform the research about what teacher and students believe about caring in the classroom. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed by Caroline Fuhrman, the researcher at a time convenient to you. The interview will be recorded. There may also be follow up clarification questions within a month of your original responses.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in about teaching and learning.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. Your name has been given to me by an administrator or counselor at your school as being identified as a teacher who demonstrates care toward students; they will intuitively know who responded to the surveys. However, no one will know specifically what you personally responded. Coded identifiable data state the following, (1) your name will not appear on the tape or on any transcription (2) you will be given a pseudonym; (3) through the use of an identification key, the researcher will be able to link your interview to your identity; and (4) only the researcher will have access to the identification key.)

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Caroline Fuhrman, a Ph.D. Candidate in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. She may be reached at ...for questions or to report a research-related problem. Or you may contact Dr. Gary Galluzzo at 703-993-2567 or ggalluzz@gmu.edu. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study. (Please return to C Fuhrman)

APPENDIX C

Cover letter for parents and students

Caroline Fuhrman
cfuhrman@gmu.edu

Hello Students and Parents,

I hope your year has been good. I am a counselor at Freedom High School, but also doing the research for my Ph.D. dissertation. Your teacher is going to help me with some research by answering some general questions about teaching and learning. Because you are this class, I am also asking for your help. One day in the next few weeks in your class you will be given a paper with some questions to answer about yourself and a writing prompt about how teachers teach. *There are no right answers, just your opinion!* Your teacher will not know your answers. Your principal has approved of this class' participation.

If you would like to participate in this study, I have attached a consent form for both student and parent to sign. Please return both of them signed, to your teacher. If you do not sign the consent form and choose not to participate you will have something else to write about during this class time.

All responses to the questionnaires and to the writing prompts will remain confidential.

Please e mail me or call me to let me know if this is something you would consider doing or have any questions.

Thanks you so much. I am excited to see what you think!

Please return to your teacher within three days

Caroline Fuhrman
cfuhrman@gmu.edu
703-957-4307

APPENIDX D

Informed consent form for parents

Current "Voices from the Inside": Hearing the voices of teachers and students about caring in classrooms

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for Parents

RESEARCH PROCEDURES This research is being conducted to inform educators about what teachers and students believe about caring in the classroom. If you agree to have your child participate, they will be given a questionnaire that includes five demographic questions and about four open ended questions. This will take place at a time in class chosen by the teacher.

RISKS There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS There are no benefits to your student as a participant other than to inform educators about caring in teaching and learning.

CONFIDENTIALITY The data in this study will be confidential. Your student's name will never be known to anyone connected to this study. All questionnaires will be pre coded with the teacher's name and a number (1-30). The students will be randomly handed the surveys by the teacher who will know which student has parental permission.

PARTICIPATION Your student's participation is voluntary and will take p to 30 minutes during a pre planned time with the teacher. Your student may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If your student decides not to participate or if he/she withdraws from the study, there are no penalties. All students in the class, participants or not, will receive a "treat".

ALTERNATIVES Students who do not answer the questions for the study will respond to a writing prompt, not associated with the study. This will be at the time participating students are responding to the study questionnaire. All students in the class, participants or not, will receive the "treat".

CONTACT This research is being conducted by Caroline Fuhrman, a Ph.D. Candidate in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. She may be reached at ... for questions or to report a research-related problem. Or you may contact Dr. Gary Galluzzo at 703-993-2567 ggalluzz@gmu.edu. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study. (Please return to your student's classroom teacher by). Your Name: _____ Student's name _____ Date of Signature _____

APPENDIX E

Informed assent form for students

Current "Voices from the Inside": Hearing the voices of teachers and students about caring in classrooms
Informed Assent form for Students

RESEARCH PROCEDURES This research is being conducted to inform educators about what teachers and students believe about caring in the classroom. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer some questions about who you are, such as how old you are, if you are a boy or a girl, or what is your background. Then you will be asked to answer four questions about what you think is caring. There are no right answers, *only what you think*. You will write about this during one class period chosen by the teacher. It will take less than 30 minutes.

RISKS There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS There are no benefits to your student as a participant other than to inform educators about caring in teaching and learning.

CONFIDENTIALITY The data in this study will be confidential. Your name will not appear on the paper. Each survey will be pre coded with the teacher's name and a number (1-30). Neither the teacher nor I will know which paper is yours. The students will be randomly handed the surveys by the teacher who will know which student has parental permission.

PARTICIPATION Your participation is voluntary and will take up to 30 minutes during a pre planned time with the teacher. Your student may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If your student decides not to participate or if he/she withdraws from the study, there are no penalties. All students in the class, participants or not, will receive a "treat".

ALTERNATIVES Students who do not answer the questions for the study will respond to a writing prompt, not associated with the study. This will be at the time participating students are responding to the study questionnaire. All students in the class, participants or not, will receive the "treat".

CONTACT This research is being conducted by Caroline Fuhrman, a Ph.D. Candidate in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. She may be reached at ... for questions or to report a research-related problem. Or you may contact Dr. Gary Galluzzo at 703-993-2567 ggalluzz@gmu.edu. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study. (Please return to your student's classroom teacher by).

Your Name: _____ students' name _____ Date of Signature _____

APPENDIX F

Teacher interview

Thank you for contributing your valuable information!

All information will remain confidential.

Please complete the demographic information:

Gender: M/F Racial/ethnic background: _____ Total years teaching: ___

Grade level/ Subject with student participants in study (e.g. 5th math, 10th alg. I): _____

Please share your beliefs about the following questions.

“How do you believe you are a caring teacher to your students?”

“How do you demonstrate caring with your students?”

“How do you think caring for your impacts students?”

“How do you think caring for your students impacts their learning?”

Thank you!

APPENDIX G

Student questionnaire

Thank you for helping me discover what students think!!!

Please answer 3 questions about you, no names, please.

Are you a girl/female or a boy/male? _____ How old are you? _____

What is your ethnic/racial background? (check all that are you)

African American __, Asian __, Caucasian/white __, Hispanic __, Native American __

Thanks!

Now, think about the teachers you have had, or would like to have, and give your honest opinion about the following questions. (Grammar and spelling don't matter, but please write so I am able to read your important opinions!) You may write as much as you want, including on the back of the paper.

Describe what teachers have done, or you would like them to do, that make you think they were caring about you.

How do you think teachers show that they care?

How do you think that having a teacher that cares about you makes a difference?

How do you think that having a teacher that cares about you makes a difference in how you learn?

APPENDIX H

Protocol for answering questions

(To be read after being introduced by teacher. Clarify as necessary for the age group)

Hello Students! I am _____ and I think you are very important and I want to know what you think! **THERE ARE NO RIGHT ANSWERS!**

I am writing a paper what teachers and students think is caring from teachers to students and I need your opinion. I do not want your names on the papers and no one will know what you wrote, because I don't know you and there is no name.

Think of teachers that you have had that you think were caring and tell me about what them. I also want to know how their caring impacted you.

If you need help in understanding anything, we will help you or we can write for you, if needed.

Thank you so much!

APPENDIX I

Writing prompts for student not participating in the study

Elementary:

Choose one or two topics to write about.

Think of a place that's so special to you that you just love thinking about it. It might be as big as a city or as small as one corner of a room. Describe this place so clearly that your reader will know just what it's like to be there.

Think of a Friend you have, in or out of school. Tell one story that comes to mind when you think about this friend.

Middle and high school:

Choose one or two topics to write about.

Think of something you have done that brought you satisfaction, pleasure, or a sense of accomplishment. Write about that activity or event and tell why it sticks in your mind.

Think of an event you will want to remember when you are old. Tell about what happened in a way that's so clear that if you read this story again when you are eighty, every detail will come flooding back to you.

It is 20 years from now. Your name has just been called and you are about to receive an award. Tell the story of how you came to be so successful and win this award.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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