Interpretations of the meaning of care: Creating caring relationships in a middle school classroom

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INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MEANING OF CARE:  
CREATING CARING RELATIONSHIPS IN A  
MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM

by

Nora I. Alder

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this year long interpretive study was to examine the creation of caring relationships among and the meanings of care to middle school students and their teacher. Specifically, I asked what care means to middle school aged students and their teacher; how caring relationships are created by middle school students and their teacher; and what influences support a teacher's inclination to care?

Because caring relationships are interactive and subject to the interpretations of the people involved in those relationships, symbolic interactionism was the framework for the study. Qualitative methodology for data gathering and the constant comparative method of data analysis were used for the investigation.

Findings indicate the students and their teacher have some agreement on the meanings and symbolic acts of care; these include talking, listening, and showing concern. The teacher struggles with the issue of when coddling or tough love is in the best interest of his students. The uniquely personal nature of care is examined through detailed accounts of students whose meaningful life experiences strongly influenced their interpretations of care and through an exploration of the teacher's inclination to care.

The importance of being able to take the role of the other and recognize the personal nature of care
underscored the value of knowing students well. Students expressed their interpretations of "good teaching" as it influenced their perceptions of care; their views were closely aligned with effective teaching research.

Implications for classroom teachers, teacher educators, and educational leaders were drawn and discussed. These included the importance of dialogue about the meaning of care, the value of interdisciplinary teams in encouraging and assisting teachers to care, and the importance of administrators providing support for teachers and modeling caring behavior. Finally, the power of caring relationships in middle level school transformation is discussed.
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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction to the Problem

Students complain that teachers do not care (Comer, 1988; Noddings, 1992), and they could be right about some teachers. One problem may be that many caring teachers do not know how to create caring relationships with their students. Another problem may be that perceptions of what constitutes a caring relationship and the meanings of care may differ among students and their teachers.

thorough definitions and theories of care in school classrooms.

Nel Noddings (1992) suggests that developing caring, loving, and lovable students should be the first aim of our nation’s schools. Noddings (1992) and Mayeroff (1971) assume that the need to care and be cared for is a fundamental human quality. Rogers and Webb (1991) link caring to the fulfillment of Maslow’s theory of human needs, the needs for security and belonging. Also suggestive of Maslow, Mayeroff (1971) discusses care as helping others grow and actualize themselves. If the caring relation is a basic human need, the absence of caring relationships may be a major factor in some of the more troubling aspects of the lives of today’s adolescents (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Noddings, 1992), and thus the pressing necessity of learning to build caring relationships with students is apparent. The experience of caring relationships can affect youngsters ability to be caring adults, and other aspects of their moral development (Kohn, 1991).

served as a starting place through which to analyze caring relations. Noddings (1992) has developed a language of care that has been widely shared by researchers in this arena (Bosworth, 1995; Kohn, 1991; Noblit, 1993; Pierce, 1993; Rogers & Webb, 1991). Although the students and teacher in this study may articulate the same language or patterns that fit Noddings' categories, no attempt was made to force such a match in this study. Rather, in keeping with Blumer's (cited in Jacob, 1897) notion of sensitizing concept, Noddings' work was a starting point in what was essentially viewed as an inductive study, open to whatever possibilities the participants' perceptions initiated (Erikson, 1986).

The perceived absence of care in the lives of adolescents could be impacting some of the recent developments with teenagers. Turning Points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) notes that one half of our nation's adolescents are susceptible to moderate to high risk behaviors and school failure. For example, teenage suicides and pregnancies have doubled since 1965; homicide is the number one cause of death for inner-city male youth. With the rise of
violence among youth in American cities, many schools are now using metal detectors for gun control.

Student resistance to classroom learning is perceived by teachers who complain about student lack of motivation (Ogbu, 1990; Haberman, 1987). Urban students, responding in part to years of uncaring relationships with teachers, sometimes adapt the posture of daring teachers to teach them anything (Haberman, 1986). Today's adolescents seldom experience close knit relationships, lack adult guidance, experience isolation, and rely on friends who have no more life experience than they have (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Slavin, 1991).

With a vision of the middle school as a reasonable place to implement large scale intervention and assist our nation's young people, the proponents of the middle school concept have concentrated on restructuring the organization and guiding purposes of middle level education (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Wiles & Bondi, 1993). In the context of this study the concept of middle level philosophy refers to the purposes of middle schools as articulated in Turning Points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent}
Of primary importance to middle school philosophy is the creation of school environments wherein students can develop "close, trusting relationships with adults and peers" (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, p. 10) that support students' personal and intellectual growth. The emphasis on caring relationships and creating a sense of belonging (National Middle School Association, 1993) has been embraced by theorists (Noddings, 1993, Lyons, 1990) but has received little attention in research. Studies that focus on how caring relationships are actually created and maintained is needed (National Middle School Association, 1993; Dillon, 1993).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how a middle school teacher demonstrates and communicates care in ways that establish caring relations with students. Because this study sought to understand the meaning of care from the point of view of the people involved in caring student-teacher relationships, this study was grounded in the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is
concerned with meanings people derive from their interactions with one another. Noddings (1993; 1992; 1989; 1986; 1984), Gilligan (1984), and Macmurray (1961/1991) provide the base for viewing care as grounded in relation. The perceptions of both the care giver (teacher) and the care receiver (student) are, therefore, essential for understanding the caring relationships between them. This investigation was intended to advance our understanding of what caring means to both students and teachers and how those relationships are created and sustained.

Statement of the Problem

There is little research on care in schools, and most existing studies have occurred within the context of the elementary school classroom (Noblit, 1993; Rogers & Webb, 1991; McLaughlin, 1991; Stark, 1991). The issue of care in middle schools remains largely unexplored. Preadolescent students tend to see the teacher as an adult they prefer to please (Slavin, 1991); however, teachers of adolescent students find their authority frequently challenged (Slavin, 1991). Student and teacher perceptions of the meaning of caring relationships may differ. If, indeed, today's
students need to establish caring relationships with supportive adults, it is important to understand what care means to both teachers and students. It also is important to explore the perceptions of teachers and students about caring relationships.

Caring for students is frequently cited by novice teachers as a primary rationale for entering the teaching profession (McLaughlin, 1991); yet, surprisingly little attention is given in teacher education programs to what it means to care and to how caring relationships are built and maintained with students.

Research Goal and Questions

The goal of this study was to explore the nature of caring relationships between middle school students and teachers by examining a middle school teacher and his students and by exploring their perceptions of caring relationships.

Specifically, I asked:
1. What does care mean to middle school students and their teacher?
2. How are caring relationships created by middle school students and their teacher?
3. From his perspective, what has influenced the teacher's inclination to care?

Theoretical Framework

This study focuses on the perceptions of the interpreted meanings of care as experienced by the participants in their interactions with one another over a school year; therefore, it is most appropriately placed in the framework of symbolic interactionism and conducted using ethnographic methodology (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Erikson, 1986; Zaharlick, 1992).

Caring relationships are both interactive and subject to the interpretations of the people involved in those relationships (Noddings, 1993; Mayeroff, 1971). Symbolic interactionism, which suggests that people construct meaning through their interactions and that meanings change as interactions occur over time (Charon, 1985; Blumer, 1962; Jacob, 1987), assumes that people interpret meaning through their interactions with one another and themselves (Charon, 1985). As we interpret interactions with others, we ascribe meanings to those interactions that form the basis for our subsequent actions (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Charon, 1985).
Since interpreted meanings change over time with consecutive interactions, reality is not fixed but changes with the newly constructed perceptions of people within a context (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The care we feel for a stranded motorist is generally fleeting; the development of caring relationships with students in the context of a school classroom is a personal, long-term, and evolving connection (Noddings, 1992; Mayoreff, 1971). Symbolic interactionism provides the lens for examining the changing perceptions of students and teachers involved in relationships that are evolving over time in the classroom.

Contributions of the Study

The significance of this study is in its application to teacher education as an example of the successful construction of caring relations with middle school students. Because the study focuses on how students and teachers create caring relationships and their interpreted meanings of caring relationships, themes generated from the data could assist teachers and teacher educators in further developing a language of care that is accessible and meaningful.
Furthermore, due to the limited research on establishing caring relations with middle school students, this study addresses a gap in the literature. The philosophy of middle level education supports the idea of creating supportive, warm, and caring school and classroom climates that attend to the needs of the whole child and augment a sense of belonging (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Turning Points explicitly challenges schools to help teens become "caring and ethical" individuals (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, p. 15). However, little research has been done to guide classroom practice in realizing caring relationships.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Care

This chapter explores the notion of care through a thorough review of the literature on care as it relates to the roles of teachers and students. No attempt is made to operationalize a definition of care, because the purpose of the study is to examine what care means to middle school teachers and students. Rather, the concept of care is examined in an attempt to sensitize the reader and the researcher to the idea of care in current literature. Because caring student/teacher relationships may influence students' moral development, this chapter explores the literature on the relationship between care and moral education. Following a discussion of the school's role in moral education is a report on the research on care in schools. Further, literature regarding the middle school concept and the value of caring relationships in
middle schools is explored. Finally, the rationale for using symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework for this study is supported by the literature reviewed.

**Toward a Definition of Care**

The greatest danger to the infant educational paradigm that uses words like care, response, story, relationship, trust and life is the host of intelligent, well intentioned researchers who want us to operationalize these terms so that they can be measured (Noddings, 1993, p. 235).

All of us come into the world needing care (Macmurray, 1961/1991). In that state of self-helplessness we rely on the responsiveness of another to recognize our needs and attend to them. The person responding to us is generally our mothers, our first care-giver (Noddings, 1984) and our first relation (Macmurray, 1961/1991). The exact actions taken in fulfillment of infant needs are cultural and personal (Noddings, 1992; Willard, in Gilligan, 1988; Ruddick, 1980) yet specific enough to be biologically adequate (Macmurry, 1961/1991). In other words, babies tend to
physically survive across all cultures.

Because caring may involve action (Tronto, 1993; Stark, 1991; Noddings, 1984) or inaction (Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1993), the presence of care is not always observable, and intention must be taken into account by the researcher (Noddings, 1993). Care is at times discussed as an attitude (Noddings, 1984), an emotion, (Vandenberg, 1990), a commitment (Noddings, 1993; Mayeroff, 1971), a practice (Tronto, 1993; Noddings, 1993, 1984), a process (Noddings, 1992; Mayeroff, 1971) and an ethic (Gilligan, 1984; Noddings, 1993; Tronto, 1993; Vandenberg, 1990, Goodlad, et al, 1990). Caring has been described as a combination of honesty and patience, trust and respect, humility and courage, experience of others, encouragement and devotion (Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1993; Gilligan, 1984; Tronto, 1993; Macmurray, 1961/1991; Rogers, 1980).

**Care as Growth and Acceptance.** Mayeroff (1971) simply defined caring as one person helping the other grow. Dewey (1938/1961) qualified educational growth as only that growth that is conducive to further growth. For Dewey, any experiences that inhibited
future learning or led to negative experiences were considered miseducative. Mayeroff (1971), Noddings (1992) and others (Tronto, 1992; Kohl, 1984; Zehm & Kottler, 1993; Strike & Soltis, 1992) relate growth to increased personal autonomy and inward sense of personal competence.

When caring is genuine, there is respect for the individuals cared for in their own right as equal moral agents (Noddings, 1993; Tom, 1984; Mayeroff, 1971). Acceptance of and respect for students allow the teacher to gain the students' confidence and trust. This is essential if teachers are to gain enough knowledge of the students to assist with their growth (Noddings, 1993; Mayeroff, 1971; Dewey, 1938/1961). Macmurray (1961/1991) and Tronto (1993) note that care is only moral when it carries an intention to sustain the freedom of the cared for. Indeed, without freedom there may be no growth (Tronto, 1993; Strike & Soltis, 1992; Vandenberg, 1990; Dewey, 1961).

Care as Relationship. From the connection between a mother and her child to the bond among friends, care is viewed in terms of relationship (Noddings, 1992; Gilligan, 1984; Macmurray, 1961/1991). Gilligan's
(1984) work explored the ethic of care as an ethic based on the establishment and sustenance of relationships, while Piaget (1932\1966) wrote, "Apart from our relationships to other people, there can be no moral necessity" (p.196).

Macmurray (1961/1991) and Noddings (1984; 1992) examined the relationships of infants and their mothers to clarify the relation of "natural care" (Noddings, 1993). Noddings (1992) expressed the idea that caring must be acknowledged by both the caregiver and the recipient of care for that relation to be complete. The acknowledgement, however, need not be a return of care. The infant is unable to care for the parent. The student does not typically have the life experience necessary to take the perspective of the teacher in the same way that the teacher may be able to take the perspective of the student. The caring relationship is, therefore, not necessarily reciprocal in identical forms. Reciprocity, however, is present (Noddings, 1992; Mayeroff, 1971; Macmurray, 1961/1991) if the caring relation is to be sustained. Reciprocity can be demonstrated through the infant’s coos or the student’s smile if these coos and smiles are personally
meaningful to parents and teachers. Reciprocity in the caring relation is any exchange from the cared for to the caring one that assists in maintaining the caring relation (Noddings, 1992; Noddings, 1993; Mayeroff, 1971; Kohl, 1984).

Care as Attentiveness and Receptivity. Noddings (1992; 1984) discussed engrossment and motivational displacement as two facets of extreme attentiveness. Engrossment, according to Noddings, is fully giving one’s attention to another. Motivational displacement is putting one’s own needs aside temporarily and focusing on the needs of the other. For Noddings (1993), motivational displacement and engrossment are necessary to fully receive the other in a way that resembles Buber’s (1970) I and Thou relationship.

He is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes and Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor a condition that can be experienced and described, a loose bundle of named qualities. Neighborless and seamless, he is Thou and fills the firmament (Buber, 1970, p. 59).

Receiving others in this way is not a projection
of ourselves into another, as is empathy (Noddings, 1984). Receiving others is not an intellectual exercise, attempting to figure out how the other feels or what the other is experiencing. Receiving others is, rather, a temporary relinquishing of prior judgements and knowledge in order to be able to clearly see the other. Receptivity is aligned with acceptance of the other and with commitment to the other's well being and growth (Noddings, 1984; Mayeroff, 1971). Caring for others often involves reason and well thought out planning, but the basic relationship is not rationale. "Hence, in caring, rational powers are not diminished but enrolled in the service of my engrossment of the other" (Noddings, 1984, p. 36). Similarly, Gilligan & Wiggins (in Gilligan, 1988) referred to the nature of "co-feeling" as distinct from empathy in that co-feeling implies that one can feel with another in the other’s own terms. Empathy, to Gilligan (1988), suggests only an identity of feelings. Kohl (1991) talked about empathy and receptivity in caring as the ability to take the perspective of the other through active listening. Teachers who are able to exercise a high degree of actively listening to
their students are demonstrating care. Listening, as a particular demonstration of care, can lead teachers into being better informed about the special needs, interests, and concerns of their students (Noddings, 1984; Mayeroff, 1971; Dewey, 1938/1961).

Care as Responsiveness. Lyons (1990) provided an image of the Heraclitus spider, "sitting in the middle of its web, able to feel and respond to any tug in any part of its complicated structure" (p. 160), as a metaphor for the degree of responsiveness teachers need. Because caring is a responsive relationship, the caring teacher utilizes information about students in making decisions about students (Noddings, 1992; Gilligan, 1984; Kohn, 1991; Dillon, 1989; Dewey, 1934/1963). The willingness to relate the curriculum to students' lives in meaningful ways and to incorporate student interests may be essential if teachers are to be truly responsive to students (Cummins, 1993; Noddings, 1992; Good & Brophy, 1991; Banks, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Dewey, 1928/1963).

Studies of diverse learners disclose that their need for relevant, meaningful and responsive teaching is of distinct import (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Cummins,
1993; King, 1993; Bainer, 1991; Banks, 1988; Grant & Secada, 1990). Perceptions that teachers care and have a personal relationship with students are particularly significant to many children of color (King, 1993; Bainer, 1991; Good & Brophy, 1991; Dillon, 1989). Students in Dillon’s (1989) year long ethnographic study of a teacher and his inner city junior high school reading classroom reported that the teacher’s personal and caring approach is important to them. The teacher’s care for them personally and for their academic growth, they said in interviews, prompted them to care about their school work. Caring teachers make it their business to be aware of the particular learning styles of all students and then gear their curriculum and instruction and social organizational decisions accordingly (Good & Brophy, 1991; Bainer, 1991; Gollnick & Chinn, 1983).

The School’s Role in Moral Development

Moral education has a long history in American schools (See Tom, 1984; Noddings, 1988; Vandenberg, 1990; Tronto, 1993; Sichel, 1988; Dewey, 1938/1961; Kliebard, 1993). Often the historical mandate for moral education has been to promote a capable citizenry

In our view, the compelling matter [in students' development] is growth as a moral agent, as someone who cares about others and is willing and able to accept responsibility for one's self, as someone who can engage in open, undominated dialogue with others about a common life and accept shared responsibility for the group's life. Promoting this kind of development is what teachers ought to be fundamentally about, whatever else it is that they are about. We are first and foremost in the business of creating persons. It is our first duty to respect the dignity and value of our students and to help them to achieve their status as free, rational, and feeling moral agents (Strike & Soltis, 1992, p.90).

Caring relationships contribute to the development
of all persons (Spiecker, 1988; Kohn, 1991; Noddings, 1993). Critics have suggested that too often moral education in practice consists of teaching students about morality (Tom, 1984; Noddings, 1993) rather than "helping students be positively connected to others" (Kohn, 1991, p. 501). "Unless the young child has acquired a positive propensity toward other persons, subsequent moral education will become virtually impotent" (Spiecker, 1988, p. 103).


Much of the moral education for teachers in the past has focused on solving moral dilemmas, practicing Kantian, Kolbergian, or utilitarian logic to solve moral situations based on conflicting interests or rights (Sichel, 1988; Strike & Soltis, 1992; Vandenberg, 1990; Chazan, 1985). The study of these moral dimensions is concerned chiefly with their
application to the public good and, as such, may be seen as extensions of the concept of care, which is generally viewed as a concern of the private sphere (Sichel, 1988; Noddings, 1993). To care for is personal; to care about is more general (See Noddings, 1993). Noddings (1993) described care as extending out in concentric circles. Those people on the periphery of the circle are more likely to be the cared about than cared for. Care for others involves personal relation, receptivity, attentiveness, and concern for growth (Noddings, 1993). Teaching "entails an intervention by one person in another's intellectual and personal development" (Tom, 1984, p. 96). The moral imperative to care in schools (Noddings, 1993; Tronto, 1993) is a moral imperative to be personal in relating with students. Dewey (1938/1963) implores that all educators should act as a "wise mother" with students (p.41), attending to needs, yet owning the responsibility for the conditions of that attendance. "The mature person, to put it in moral terms, has no right to withhold from the young on given occasions whatever capacity for sympathetic understanding his own experience has given him" (Dewey, 1938/1963. p. 38).
Noddings’ Components of Moral Education

The importance of providing caring, moral education that is experiential and tied to a sense of community has been widely discussed in the literature (Kohn, 1991; Dewey, 1938/1963; Vandenberg, 1990; Macmurray, 1991; Tronto, 1993; Gergen, 1991; Bellah, et al, 1985; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1990). Noddings (1984; 1988; 1993), therefore, proposed four components of moral education that, when practiced by teachers, provide students with the experience of caring relationships in community, both as being cared for and being the ones caring. These four components of moral education are modeling, confirmation, dialogue, and practice.

Modeling. Studies have shown that children and adults who watch another person behave altruistically are more likely to do so than those who are merely spoken to about behaving altruistically (See Kohn, 1991). The teacher who is interested in shaping a caring and altruistic person has to model the behavior that is subjectively deemed appropriate in interactions with students (Noddings, 1993; Ruddick, 1986). No time is lost from instruction when teachers treat students
with respect. Even greater motivation is observed in students who are given encouragement and safe, comfortable classroom environments in which to learn (Good & Brophy, 1991). For teachers who are committed to an ethic of care, all interactions with students are seen as having the potential to be caring occasions (Noddings, 1988). These caring occasions, then, provide an experiential base necessary for the development of a sense of self as a caring, moral person (Tom, 1984; Noddings, 1992; Kohn, 1991).

**Confirmation.** For Noddings (1984), confirmation is attributing the student’s behavior to the highest conceivable motive. Verbally linking students’ behavior to the kinds of persons they are - people who enjoy helping others, for example - increases the likelihood that they will see themselves as that kind of person (Kohn, 1991). Students who are caught cheating, Noddings (1988) suggests, will benefit more from confirmation than condemnation. Noddings (1993) suggests that teachers look for the most respectable motive possible when discussing such actions with students. In a cheating incident a teacher may acknowledge that she is aware of how important doing
well on the test was to the student or how important it was not to disappoint a parent with a poor grade. The basis for confirmation is to confirm the student's ethical ideal (Noddings, 1988).

When we attribute the best possible motive consonant with reality to the cared-for, we confirm him; that is, we reveal to him an attainable image of himself that is lovelier than that manifested in his present acts. In an important sense, we embrace him as one with us in devotion to caring. In education, what we reveal to a student about himself as an ethical and intellectual being has the power to nurture the ethical ideal or to destroy it (Noddings, 1984, p. 193).

Dialogue. The concept of dialogue was discussed by Freire (1974) as a conceptual approach for developing communication between adult students and teachers that is based on equality, respect, and equity. Dialogue has emerged as a way to talk about cultivating interactions that move participants toward a sense of genuine connection and understanding (Noddings, 1993; Cummins, 1993, Kenway & Modra, 1981).
True dialogue is seen as shifting student/teacher interactive relationships away from the view of teachers as sole expert authority and into interactive relationships in which the student's voice is heard and recognized as wholly valuable (Freire, 1974; Cummins, 1993; Noddings, 1993). In the realization of dialogic relationships the teacher becomes the student and the student becomes the teacher, with each contributing to the discourse in mutually reciprocating ways (Freire, 1974).

For Noddings (1993; 1988; 1984) the concept of dialogue implies equality as moral agents through respecting the students' opinions, rationales, and motives. Dialogue is enhanced through engrossment, active listening, motivational displacement, and honesty. When teachers have discussions with students without preconceived judgements about the outcomes of those discussions, dialogue is open (Noddings, 1988). Unlike some other modeled teacher behavior, dialogue takes time, and trust is a necessary ingredient for caring relationships (Noddings, 1988).

Practice. School-based community service, a potential tool for demonstrating care, has been shown
through both qualitative and quantitative research (Conrad & Hedin, 1989) to develop social and personal skills. Though tutoring has been shown to yield the most significant academic gains, other service activities have demonstrated significance to students' personal meanings and values (Conrad & Hedin, 1989). Noddings (1988) cautions that service "can be rendered in caring or noncaring ways" (p. 223). Students may need to be taught how to be supportive and encouraging to one another through modeling and instruction (Noddings, 1988). The use of cooperative learning that emphasizes cooperation and a sense of interdependence over competition, mutual problem solving, and consensus can encourage positive student interactions, prosocial behavior, and a sense of community (Noddings, 1984; Kohn, 1991; Slavin, 1991).

The Ethic of Care

The concept of care has been criticized as being idiosyncratic, personal, vague, and ambiguous (Strike & Soltis, 1990; Vandenberg, 1990; Sichel, 1988); yet, virtually no one is against it as a virtue, an ethic, or a moral imperative (Strike & Soltis, 1990; Vandenberg, 1990; Noddings, 1993; Buber, 1970). The
The ethic of care is contrasted here with the ethic of justice because the ethic of justice has been a traditional ideal by which to measure moral standards (Vandenberg, 1990).

The ethic of care is an ethic based on the establishment and sustenance of relationships. Whereas the ethic of justice places value on the notion of equality - that everyone will be treated fairly - the ethic of care values the notion that no one will be hurt (Gilligan, 1984; Noddings, 1984; Vandenberg, 1990). Justice has been aligned with seeking rules and principles which assist in making objective, logical judgements in the protection of individual rights (Gilligan, 1984; Noddings, 1993; Blenkley, et al, 1986). The ethic of care is concerned with connectedness, understanding, meanings, and motives (Gilligan, 1984; Gergen, 1991; Noddings, 1993; Blenkley, et al, 1986). The ethic of justice relies on a sense of duty and obligation (Kant, 1965); the ethic of care calls on a sense of duty and obligation when the natural inclination to care is lacking (Noddings, 1988).
Research on Care in Schools

School-based research on care is limited (Noddings, 1888). Much of the research on care has been conducted in elementary schools (Pierce, 1993; Harris, 1993) or has limited its participants to adults (Nazelrod, 1992; McLaughlin, 1991; Stark, 1991; Noblit, 1993). The importance of understanding the perceptions of the meaning of caring relationships from the perceptions of the carer and the cared for was underscored in a study by Webb (et al, 1993), which sought the perceptions of students, teachers, administrators and parents. Findings indicated that each group thought it cared about the other groups, but no group ever consulted the other. The result of the absence of dialogue was that caring acts were not being interpreted as such by the cared for.

Two studies that examined student perceptions underscored the value students place on care as a teacher attribute (Dillon, 1989; Edmonds, 1992). Students said they worked harder when they perceived that their teachers cared about them personally and academically. Students in Dillon’s (1989) investigation attributed the relaxed atmosphere of the
classroom, the teacher’s sense of humor and high expectations for students to be contributing factors in their perceptions of their teacher as caring.

Bosworth (1995) presented one of the rare studies that directly asked middle level students how they defined care and where they saw teachers demonstrating care. The students in her study saw helpfulness as the governing theme in caring relationships, with attitudes of respect and kindness seen as important by most students. Teachers they saw as caring were attentive to individual student needs and enjoyed helping students. Further, caring teachers were involved, polite, and concerned with student success.

A group of elementary students supported the idea of the caring teacher as one who helps (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995). Findings also stressed the importance of reciprocal dialogue:

Talk cannot be overemphasized, since it was through talk that children revealed their lives and teachers supported and nurtured them. Talk was reciprocal, requiring each to listen and hear as well as to speak...Talk became the currency of caring; each opportunity to talk came
to have a history and a future (Noblit, et al, 1995, p. 684).

The relationship between care and control in the classroom was studied by Noblit (1993) and McLaughlin (1991). Noblit (1993), in his study of caring in a teacher-centered second grade class, found that caring had less to do with democracy than it did with the ethical use of power. The teacher in Noblit's (1993) study was able to make each child feel special within the context of a teacher-centered classroom.

McLaughlin (1991) looked at student teachers who struggled with the interplay of establishing legitimate control (positional) and care (personal) in their classrooms. McLaughlin (1991) noticed that student teachers' desire to establish caring relationships with their students, a long-term goal, at times conflicted with their desire to be in control in the classroom, a short term goal. Interestingly, ethical caring was established in student teachers' classrooms through establishing interpersonal relationships with students and adjusting the curriculum to keep students interested. McLaughlin (1991) and Valli (1993) found that the development of personal, caring relationships
actually enhanced classroom control.

Middle Level Philosophy

Although caring relationships are important for students at all grade levels, advocates of middle-level education have been particularly outspoken in addressing the need for caring relationships between students and teachers. From creating community to empowering students, teachers, and administrators, to ensuring success and reengaging families (National Middle School Association, 1982/1992; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Johnston & Markle, 1986; George, et al, 1992; Irvin, 1992), the language of middle school educators is brimming with the language of care. The middle school philosophy represents educators’ efforts at responding to the developmental levels of early adolescents through restructuring middle level schools and reeducating middle level teachers and administrators in ways that support the student through careful attention to individual and group needs (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989).

Some middle school restructuring efforts are intended to support the development of caring student-
teacher relationships. Interdisciplinary teams of academic teachers who work with the same cohort of students and share common planning periods often are created (Merenbloom, 1988). This enables these teachers to discuss students with colleagues in an effort to understand the students and their needs more clearly. Shared responsibility allows teachers more opportunities to respond to students' needs. The teams of students and teachers also address the goal of creating small communities with which students can identify (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1990).

Teacher advisors are assigned to provide further interactive opportunities for students to develop closer ties with adults (National Middle School Association, 1982/1992). The advisor/advisee concept is meant to provide each student with an adult professional who agrees to take a special interest in him/her. In addition, specific extracurricular programs and activities, such as intramural sports and play production, have been recommended to promote a sense of belonging and build a sense of community (Wiles & Bondi, 1993).
Middle school literature recommends that schools perform needs assessments that empower students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community (Wiles & Bondi, 1993). Wiles & Bondi, (1993) also recommended that students be involved in curriculum planning. This broad-based empowerment creates a sense of community as people work together to identify local concerns. It allows planning to address, explicitly, the needs of students, thereby promoting a sense that students are cared for.

Care and Adolescent Development. The entire middle school philosophy relates to care in that it is based on a response to the specific qualities of young adolescents. Ten-to-fifteen-year-olds face a time of great change in their physical, emotional and intellectual development (Slavin, 1991; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Early adolescence is a time of emotional instability and vulnerability and also a time of great responsiveness and intellectual growth (See Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; National Middle School Association, 1982/1992; Wiles & Bondi, 1993). The need for caring adult relationships and the

There is a critical need to help adolescents at this early age to acquire durable self esteem, flexible and inquiring habits of mind, reliable and relatively close human relationships, a sense of belonging in a valued group, and a sense of usefulness in some way beyond the self (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, p. 17).

Care, the ability to naturally care for and about others, increases self-esteem, augments a sense of belonging, creates a sense of service to others, and cannot be maintained without employing intellectual inquiry and flexibility (Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1993). The ability to care for others effectively requires a commitment to care for one's self (Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1988; Kohn, 1991). Early adolescence is a period of exploring values and developing a sense of identity (Wiles & Bondi, 1993; Irvin, 1992). A
sense of one's self as a caring and altruistic person is vital to the actualization of caring and altruistic behaviors (Kohn, 1991). Spiecker (1988) and Noddings (1993) argue that, for children, experiences with caring and trustworthy adults are imperative if these children are to grow into caring, morally capable adults.

The Role of Symbolic Interactionism in Understanding Caring Relationships

Symbolic interactionism views the self as being intricately tied to society, the other, because the self is defined through its interpretations of others' perceptions (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1992). These interpretations are made through imagining how others see us. Taking the role of the other is uniquely human (Blumer, 1962) and, when coupled with empathy or sympathy, becomes a necessary skill in the act of caring (Charon, 1992; Noddings, 1988). Care implies taking the other's needs into account (Noddings, 1993). This is accomplished through taking the role of the other (Charon, 1992), receiving the other with extreme attentiveness (Noddings, 1993), and entering into the other's perception of the world (Mead, cited in Charon,
Symbolic interactionism's focus on the processes of human interaction is aimed at understanding human behavior (Jacob, 1987). Symbolic interactionists believe that action is the result of the meanings we ascribe to experiences (Charon, 1992). Meanings are derived from interactions we have with others and the interpretations we ascribe to those interactions (Charon, 1992). The meanings we assign to interactions are decisions we make at each point in time, since interaction is always in the present (Blumer, 1962; Jacob, 1987). One interest of this study is how interactions might be interpreted as caring over time.

The past does not cause our actions, according to symbolic interactionism, but it is taken into account as we interpret interaction in the present (Charon, 1992). A teacher does not cause a student to behave in certain ways; the teacher influences student decisions through interaction. Interaction and the shared meanings that are developed over time are negotiated in a constant process of interaction and interpretation of interactions over time. The student and teacher, as actors in each interaction with one another, define the
situation and act on the basis of those definitions (Charon, 1992). Understanding the processes that both the student and teacher undergo to ascribe meanings to their interactions with one another is vital to understanding how caring relationships are constructed by them.

Symbolic interactionism views the development of self-identity as being influenced by our interpretations of interactions with others (Charon, 1992). An individual is viewed to be socially constructed yet an active participant in that construction (Blumer, 1962). Identity, clearly influential in how we interpret situations (Kohn, 1991), is developed over time as a result of what Charon (1992) calls streams of action. Streams of action are the tendencies of interactions we have with others and the ways we interpret those interactions over time. Interactions with others may, for example, have a tendency to be abusive in abusive situations; the meanings one may or may not give to abusive situations may influence how one views the self, the world at large, and significant others. Streams of action are influenced by the symbolic interactions we
have with one another and the decisions we make at each moment as we give meaning to these interactions (Charon, 1992). In other words, the directions streams of actions take are influenced by each decision and act, the interpretations of that act, the subsequent decisions, and our interpretations of the actions of others. If we tend to interpret our interactions with an individual as respectful, for example, we may assume that subsequent interactions will also be respectful and characterize that individual as respectful. In this way, caring relationships and other kinds of relationships are constructed by people over time.

Conclusion

This review of the literature serves primarily to provide a context for understanding the concept of care as it relates to middle level student and teacher relationships. Care has not fit neatly into an operationalized definition (Noddings, 1992). Theorists concerned with the concept of care tend to approach it as a multifaceted abstraction (Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1988; Tronto, 1994) inclusive of growth, acceptance, relationship, attentiveness, receptivity and responsiveness. Despite its abstract nature, the
actualization of those components of care is far from abstract. They are the building blocks of genuine, authentic relationships (Noddings, 1992; Kohn, 1991).

In spite of the fact that some feel that care and the development of caring relationships is not the concern of schools, the literature clearly links the experience of caring relationships to the development of ethical adults (Kohn, 1991; Noddings, 1992; Mayeroff, 1971). Assisting students in becoming ethical adults is a major goal of middle level philosophy (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989), and beginning teachers cite care as a primary motivation for choosing teaching. A review of the literature illustrates that care is an appropriate concern of schools; therefore, we need to explore how caring relationships between students and teachers are created. The lack of available research on this subject affirms the need for further exploration of this topic.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Beginning with a delineation of the research design, this chapter provides a description of the research participants and an explanation of how they were selected. Procedures to ensure human rights protection and confidentiality are outlined, and descriptions of the research context are then provided. Next, methods for data collection and interpretation are delineated. Finally, analyses of the limitations, assumptions, the role of the researcher and the goodness of the study are reported.

Research Design

An interpretive research design incorporating ethnographic methodology (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993) was deemed appropriate for examining the construction of caring relationships and the meaning students and teachers attribute to their interactions. The basic tenets of interpretive research and symbolic
interactionism are aligned in that each assumes that people construct meanings through their interactions (Erikson, 1986; Lecompte & Preissle, 1993). Interpretive research designs are used when research takes place in natural settings and researchers are interested in specific interactions at specific locations in order to increase our understanding of local meanings (Erikson, 1986). Interpretive researchers typically want to know more about meaning-making and the points of view of particular people in particular settings (Erikson, 1986). Symbolic interactionism offers an explanation for how meaning-making occurs within and among individuals and how interactions among particular actors influence meaning-making decisions and subsequent action (Charon, 1992). Erikson (1986) reported that an assumption of interpretive research involves the idea that people "impute symbolic meaning to others' actions and take their own actions in accord with the meaning interpretations they have made" (p. 127). The integration of interpretive research design (Erikson, 1986) with the framework of symbolic interactionism (Charon, 1992) seems a reasonable fit.
Description of Research Participants

This study focused on a middle level teacher and 25 of his students who were enrolled in two of his classes. Mickey, the pseudonym for the teacher in the study, holds a bachelor’s degree in history from a west coast university and a master’s degree from a southwestern university. At the time of the study he was in his fifth year of teaching middle school social studies. Mickey was a thirty-eight year old whose work experience prior to teaching included employment as an interpreter and tutor.

Mickey’s personal interest in cultural geography began as a youth. His father was Jewish and his mother Italian; in fact, Italian was his first language. Mickey speaks five languages fluently and has an insatiable interest in linguistics. Mickey’s willingness to communicate and his apparent ease in expressing himself were major determining factors in his selection.

The twenty-five students in the study were all in the eighth grade and enrolled in Mickey’s third or fourth period social studies class. Three were Hispanic American, one was African American, one was
Asian American and twenty were European American. Twelve were male, and thirteen were female.

Selection of Participants

The selection of participants for the study began with securing human subjects protocol approval from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (See Appendix A). The school district for which Mickey taught also had an approval process for classroom-based studies; permission to study was granted. Descriptions of the steps taken to select the teacher and student participants follow.

Selection of the Teacher. I began the teacher selection process by explaining my study to school administrators and university professors. I sought their expert opinions about the nature of potential participants. Based on their opinions, I met with and interviewed ten teachers. The interviews provided a basis for determining their general rapport with me and gave me some insight into the teachers' verbal communication skills.

Mickey was reported to be a caring teacher by his administrators, team teachers and the few parents I met. Because of his reputation as a caring teacher,
rapport with me, verbal communication skills, and his willingness to participate in the study, I purposively selected Mickey as the teacher participant in the study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Selection of the Students. Twenty-five students were selected because they were in the teacher’s classes and because they were willing to participate in the study. The first step I took in the selection of the student participants was to observe all four of Mickey’s classes for the first two weeks of school. Mickey and I decided that periods three and four would be the best groups on which to focus because they represented a wide range of student abilities; some students were in the special education inclusion program, others were identified as gifted and talented, and others were in the regular education program. I also considered the fact that these classes met back to back and were followed by lunch and the team preparation time. This afforded me with good opportunity, on a regular basis following observations, to have informal conversations with the students and Mickey.

As I began collecting human subjects documentation
from the students, I clearly saw how any judgements students made about me and the value they placed on the idea of care could influence whether they volunteered for the study. Originally, Mickey announced to the two identified classes that they were going to be observed as part of a study on care. He gave each student a human subjects consent form that briefly explained the nature of the study and asked for student and parent signatures from students willing to participate in the study (See Appendix B).

When I came to observe over the next couple of weeks, I was concerned because only a few consent forms had been returned. It was then that I began to realize that I needed to interact more with the students if I wanted them to get interested in the study. I talked with the two classes designated for the study about the value of having a voice in studies that could influence schools. I talked about caring, supportive relationships with teachers; mostly they just stared. Then I talked about teachers saying they care, yet students saying teachers don’t care. Several students said, "Oh," with an intonation as if they were saying, "Aha!" They then raised their hands and wanted another
human subjects permission letter. In all, twenty-five of the 62 students returned letters signed by themselves and their parents.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to all participants in human subject consent letters and through conversations. All reports used pseudonyms for the participants, the school district, and the city where the study took place. Audio tapes used to transcribe interviews were erased following transcriptions.

Research Context

The context for this study was a middle level teacher’s classroom in a southwestern, metropolitan school district. Characteristics of the district, the school, and the classroom follow.

The District

The rapidly growing school district in which the study took place served over 140,000 students during the study. The overall ethnic composition of the students in the 1994-1995 school year was approximately 61% European American, 13% African American, 19% Hispanic American, 1% Native American and 5% Asian
American. The typical grade configurations of schools in the district were K-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

Encouraged by a state task force which made recommendations for middle level education that built on those outlined in *Turning Points* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989), the school district had previously formed a middle-level curriculum committee which then published guidelines for reform of middle level education. Each middle-level school developed its own plan to implement various restructuring elements, some of which included interdisciplinary teaming, advisor-advisee assignments, and exploratory electives.

The School

Southwest Middle School (SWMS), which opened in 1991 as a "true" middle school, served 1400 students in the 1994-1995 school year. The ethnic make up of the school at that time was approximately 77% European American, 11% Hispanic American, 5% African American, 5% Asian American and 0.2% Native American.

The original plan at SWMS was to provide continuity for students in sixth and seventh grade by keeping students and teachers on the same
interdisciplinary teams for two years. In eighth grade the teaching teams typically changed, and the eighth grade faculty taught their students for that year only. As SWMS dealt with growing student populations, Mickey had been assigned to three different teams for each of three years. Because of the changes, he had taught over two thirds of his current eighth grade students in the previous years; therefore, the students on his current team had encountered Mickey as a social studies teacher anywhere from one to three years by the end of the eighth grade.

The Classroom

Mickey was the social studies teacher on a four-person teaching team. During the year of the study, Mickey taught four classes of eighth grade geography. He and his teammates had back-to-back individual and team preparation periods during the school day. Class size for Mickey averaged 36 students. There were 144 students on Mickey’s team; three were African American, ten were Hispanic American, seven were Asian American, and 114 were European American.

Mickey rearranged his classroom several times throughout the year, but most of the time the students
faced a middle aisle and one another. His desk always remained at the back of the room next to the door and opposite the white board area. This allowed me to move around the room without disrupting student work. Cooperative learning and other small group work within the classroom enabled me to observe the interactions between students and between students and the teacher. I sometimes could not overhear interactions between participants. Sometimes they chose to tell me about those conversations later. There were times during seatwork assignments that informal communication between participants was exchanged. These interactions were often in quiet voices but audible to me as an observer.

Data Collection

Data Sources

Interviews, observations and student focus groups were conducted to gather data. Formal interviews and focus group discussions were tape recorded and transcribed to maintain accuracy in reporting and to provide a record of the participants’ own words in describing their experiences and the meanings they attributed to them (Erikson, 1986).
Interviews. Data collection involved a series of formal and informal interviews (Seidman, 1991). Initial interviews with students and the teacher were designed to establish a rapport with the participants and to explore their perceptions of the factors influencing their work with one another (Oakey, 1981). In particular, the initial interviews were focused on the participants' personal educational histories as they related to care. For the teacher, interview responses included his rationale for entering the teaching profession and his perceptions about how he felt he had been cared for in educational settings. For the students, the biographical information obtained in the initial interviews included their perceptions of the nature of relationships with former and current teachers.

Subsequent individual interviews were more personalized than initial interviews in that they were focused on observed interactions between students and teachers, comments the participants made in focus groups, previous interviews or informal conversations. These interviews provided further insights into the meanings participants assigned to their interactions
Six formal interviews were conducted with the teacher participant. Two to five formal interviews were conducted with the 25 students. These interviews ranged from five to thirty-five minutes; length and number of interviews were dependent on the availability of the student. All formal interviews were audio tape recorded and transcribed.

Focus Groups. All student participants were asked to join focus groups, gatherings of participants for discussion. The purpose of these focus groups was to further elicit student perceptions of caring teachers. Two focus groups of twelve and thirteen students were created; each met four times over the course of the study during the forty minute lunch period. Focus group discussions also were audio tape recorded and transcribed.

Observations. Consistent with the use of ethnographic methodology, observations were intended to provide an inside view into the participants' caring relationships with one another and with school personnel in general (Erikson, 1986). Beginning in the fall of 1994 I observed Mickey's classroom weekly for
an entire school year. All classes were observed every
day for the first two weeks of school. I then
conducted at least weekly observations of the two
classes on which the study focused. The observations
of two classes also enabled me to see the teacher's
working within the context of different student groups
and may have enhanced transferability or
contrastability (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Guba &
Lincoln, 1982).

I recorded detailed field notes during
observations. As soon as possible after observations I
reviewed my notes and wrote theoretical memos as a
means of capturing my holistic impressions of the
teacher and his relationships with the students
(Sanjeck, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss, 1987;
Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical memos served as a
means of extending my thinking about the research
through disciplined reflection. I used my notes from
observations and theoretical memos to develop more
focused interview questions over time and to gain
deeper insights into participant relationships and
their perceptions of their relationships. Every effort
was made to reflect on these notes and my overall
impressions by the evening after observations.

Shadowing. Shadowing students, which involved following students throughout their school day, allowed me to observe the student participants in other contexts. I chose a student to shadow on six different days. Because the specific student I shadowed shared schedules with other students in the study, I shadowed eighteen of the twenty-five students. Observing these students in other classroom contexts extended my understanding of the student participants.

Informal Communications. To gain different vantage points on the focus of the study, I interacted with other members of the SWMS community (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). These interactions included informal conversations with some of the campus administrators, counselors and special education personnel. These individuals had first-hand knowledge of Mickey's classroom. Their vantage points added to the confirmability and credibility of the study by informing my interpretations of the teacher's relationships with students. Also, the information from these conversations added to triangulation as another source of information (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).
Data Analysis

Using the constant comparative method (Strauss, 1987; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I analyzed the data from the interview transcripts and observation notes looking particularly for the participants' personal meanings that contributed to the development of caring relationships. I also analyzed my notes from observations and interviews to develop more focused interview questions and to gain deeper insights into participant relationships and their perceptions of caring relationships.

Initial analysis was coded using sentence-by-sentence open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As my data bank increased, I used axial coding to make connections between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This analysis continued throughout data collection and beyond as I searched for patterns in the participants' interpretations of care. The themes that were generated at the onset were refined and/or revised as new patterns emerged.

Limitations

Because the purpose of this study was to explore the meanings and interpretations of the participants'
caring relationships with one another, the study is necessarily limited by the participants' ability to report on the nature of their relationships. Though I never had the impression that anyone was being dishonest, the participants' honesty in reporting, or desire to please me, may have imposed limitations as well. Possibly my own limited ability to interpret the interactions and relationships of others and/or my own views about care, teaching, and middle level education further impacted the study.

The study may have been limited by having only a single researcher. A team of researchers could have enhanced several facets of measures for goodness of the study, including credibility, dependability and confirmability.

My presence as participant observer may have presented another limitation. The participants in the study may have been influenced by my presence in ways that altered their interactions with one another and their interpretations of those interactions.

Assumptions

The first assumption that undergirds this study is that caring relationships can be analyzed and
articulated by the participants in the relationships. Second, I assumed that their interpretations of the meanings and symbols of care can be communicated to others (in this case, me as the researcher). My third assumption was that actions people take are not based on external forces but on the meanings we derive from interactions with other people and the symbolic meanings we give to those interactions. This study was interested in the processes middle school students and their teacher used to determine the meanings of care.

My Role As a Researcher

My own interest in care as a research topic is revealing in terms of the value I place on interpersonal relationships as an important facet of classroom life. I taught public school at the middle level for thirteen years and have a deep and abiding affection for both the students and teachers with whom I shared my tenure. That I value care and believe in the importance of positive, warm and authentic teacher/student relationships clearly impacts my view of teachers and classrooms.

During the study, as participant-observer I adopted a friendly attitude on the middle school
campus. I had already met several faculty when I was a university supervisor or in classes at the university. I tried to remain open to anyone who volunteered as an informant.

My presence and the nature of the study itself influenced the participants. Students volunteered information about who, in their opinions, were the most caring teachers. The teacher said thinking about care made him think about his teaching and his relationships with students in different ways. He wondered whether he should tell them that he cared, for example. As we came to know one another through interviews and other interactions, students sometimes requested time with me to talk about things going on in their lives.

Criteria for Goodness of the Study

Credibility was enhanced by the year-long exposure to the investigation site; over 200 hours were spent on site. I observed all classes for the first two weeks of the school year. After that I conducted weekly observations of the target classes and stayed for team meetings, personal planning time, parent-teacher conferences, extracurricular activities and/or staff development sessions at least twice a month (Guba &
Lincoln, 1982; LeCompte & Goetz, 1993).

I attempted to enhance dependability by amply describing the context of the study so that other investigators could research care in similar contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Yin, 1984). Confirmability was heightened in this study through the development of theoretical memos (Strauss, 1987) that recorded my reflections and explained the way I arrived at conclusions.

Transferability was augmented through the use of thick description and participants’ voices (Strauss, 1987; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Triangulation through multiple data sources, including the students, teachers, administrators, and school and classroom materials, also enhanced transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

The teacher was provided copies of the interview transcriptions and a final draft of the study. I asked him to provide feedback in order to enhance my understanding and/or clarify any misconceptions. Mickey’s feedback was incorporated into this draft. This technique of member checking enhanced trustworthiness and credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).
Students were not accessible after the school year of the study and so their feedback was unavailable.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In this chapter I examine the teacher's and students' meanings of care and their perceptions of how caring relationships are established. I have carefully detailed the relationships between Mickey, the teacher, and selected students in order to demonstrate the nature of their relationships and to provide examples of specific themes that surfaced. The life stories of some of the students were tied, at times, to their interpretations of the meaning of care; these stories are shared in this chapter. Finally, the teacher's perceptions of the primary influences on his inclination to care are reported.

The Meanings and Construction of Care

As data were examined it became obvious that care had numerous meanings to the various participants. Themes that emerged included perceptions of care as control, equality, forgiveness, concern, and good
teaching. The sections which follow provide examples that support the many meanings of care expressed by the participants.

Care as Control

Some of the students likened caring to control. Control for these students meant that someone took responsibility for safety issues, for order and for caring enough to set limits on behavior.

Jack. Jack was a fourteen-year-old Asian student who maintained above average grades in middle school. Judging by his inclusion in voluntary student groupings for cooperative class work, Jack seemed to get along with his classmates.

I asked Jack in the initial interview if he had grown up in this school district. The story he told surprised me. Jack moved here with his family the year before from a major metropolitan city on the west coast, where he had witnessed the murder of an old man in his apartment complex. The murder, for Jack, was a meaningful life experience, an experience of such magnitude that it served as the impetus for his family to move to another city and influenced Jack’s sense of care. He said:
I just moved here from [city name]. The reason why I left was I couldn’t handle the earthquakes and crime.... [One day] my dad suggested that we go down to the recreation room and shoot a little pool 'cause they had pool tables in there. I was just about to shoot when I heard gun shots. I thought they were party poppers. I couldn’t tell the difference. Then my dad saw the black guy slump over. Some bullets hit him in the back. He slumped over and he died.

The Viet Nam veteran who shot the old man lived in the apartment above Jack’s family. He then turned the gun on himself and pulled the trigger. Jack said his need for safety and control following this incident were influential in his enrollment in martial arts classes. The ability to provide for his own safety was, for Jack, an expression of care for self. Jack said:

Certain classes you learn about safety, and if you don’t have control you don’t know how to take care of yourself. I’ve taken martial arts, a self-defense class. The [martial arts] class never got out of hand. Most of the people were always
paying attention. Respected the instructor. It’s not always the instructor that...you have to cooperate. I’ve learned to take care of myself in case something happens on the street. Like what happened in LA.

When I asked how he knew Mickey cared about his students, Jack was quick to respond by saying:

He tries to make them do something with their life and make something out of it. He’s not really one of those teachers who doesn’t really care and just listens and doesn’t have control over the situation. He has control... He takes control and he can make them listen. And kind of give them ideas on how to make something of their lives and make it better.

Jack’s need for safety and security, for someone to be in control, was reflected in his interpretations of how his teachers demonstrated care and how he cared for himself.

Rose. The tie between cooperation and control was shared in Rose’s interpretation of how teachers demonstrate care through controlling actions. Rose, whose primary language was Spanish, wore the oversized
clothes that were popular among the boys that the teachers associated with gangs. Rose noted that she was sent home several times the year before on a Required Parent Conference (RPC). The RPC was a district-wide student suspension. When students were issued an RPC, the parents or guardians were required to come into the school and discuss the student's behavior with teachers or counselors. Rose said:

There's some students that think that the uh teacher doesn't care about them because that they [sic] get them RPC. And they say they think that they don't care, but they do. They do care about them. ...Well sometimes the teacher they like tell them not to do that and they still do it and they just like they thinks [sic] that the teachers doesn't [sic] like them, cause they give the RPC for no reason. That's what they say. And I used to say that, "Oh, he don't [sic] he hates me and he's just giving me RPC for no reasons," but sometimes they have the point, that they have to give you the RPC. 'Cause like some kids like they bring the things to school that it's not appropriate to bring it to school and they go, "I
wonder why they gave me RPC?" [sic] And that's like, they got the point and that's why they have to give RPC 'cause it's not appropriate to bring it to school.

Although Rose had been RPC'd she no longer viewed that as a sign that teachers did not care about her, rather that they did care about her and the safety of the school as a whole. Control, in the form of RPCs as disciplinary actions, was interpreted by her as an act of care. Rose did not offer an explanation of her change in perception.

Care as Equality

There was a concerted effort at SWMS to include special education students in mainstream classes as much as possible. Special Education teachers and aides were assigned to teams where they worked with individual students on regular teachers' assignments. Care as equality, for Susan, meant that she was treated like a regular student. Care as equality, for Mickey, meant that he was able to discern what educational situations were most appropriate for his students and that he was able to deal fairly with all of his students.
Susan. Susan was a special education student with an array of emotional and learning disorders. Among these problems, Susan was diagnosed with Tourette’s Syndrome. The year before the study Susan had tried to drown herself in the restroom at school. An adult aide was now assigned to her throughout the day. Four different adults held the position as Susan’s aide at different times throughout the year of the study. According to all four, Susan could be extraordinarily self-centered and rude. They also agreed that Susan could be sweet and endearing.

Susan became easily frustrated. The special education team was working to help her become aware of her frustration levels. Several times throughout the school year Susan asked to be allowed to go home early because of her high frustration levels. She was allowed to do so when her mother could be reached. Her special education status provided information to teachers on the team about most appropriate measures to be taken when she had an outburst.

Near the beginning of the year Mickey said he assigned small groups in Susan’s class in order for her not to be shunned. I observed other students make
sneering sounds and turn their backs or otherwise avoid eye contact when Susan tried to find a work partner on her own.

Once, early in the first semester, Mickey thought the other students' snide remarks and snickers were excessive. Mickey sent Susan out of the room on an errand so that he could talk to the rest of class about her. One student voiced resentment that Susan was allowed to get away with things that others could not dream of getting away with. Mickey listened to several complaints before he told the students that the difference was that, "You can help yourselves and she can't." He said they should feel lucky that they were who they were and that they did not need the additional attention and latitude she received.

Later he let me know that although he had his own frustrations with Susan, he had no tolerance for students acting rude and hateful. "It doesn't do anyone any good to get away with that," he said.

A court order placed a full-time adult aide by her side. The court involvement in Susan's case came after her elementary school tried to exclude her from attending. Susan explained her perceptions of this
event in an interview:

Susan (S): I did have one school ..that filed due process. Do you know what that is?
Alder (A): Yes.
S: Because I have Tourette's Syndrome and they don't want that in their school. So they filed due process, hum, and anyway they didn't want to help me. I asked for the help, but they could care less. And that's the first time ever they filed a due process on a student; usually it goes the other way around. They wanted to put me back in ...(school name) that I just got out of.
A: I don't know what...(school name) is.
S: It's for uh, lower handicapped students who can't work on grade level.
A: But you can work on grade level.
S: Yeah, but they wanted me back at [school name]. They said, "We'll teach you after we've got the behavior in order." And we didn't know about the Tourette's syndrome until a couple of years ago. They were like, 'Well, we'll teach you after you get the behavior in order'. That would have been years....So it's like I could not have learned
anything for twelve years because of my problem, so I didn't learn. So my mom fought for me to go to my home school.

Susan's experiences of exclusion made her participation in a regular classroom and being treated as a "regular kid" particularly meaningful to her. She felt like Mickey understood her needs, adjusted work for her academically, and expected her to behave. Susan explained:

They (the middle school team teachers) treat me like a regular kid.... Yeah, (Mickey), uh, well, I don't like the yelling part (she laughs softly) but he yells at me like a regular kid.

Mickey worked with Susan for three years. One day when I entered the room he came over to say hello and let me know he was glad I had not come on the previous day. "I went off on Susan," he said and returned to monitoring student work. Before long he sounded agitated with her again because she was not following instructions. Susan's aide whispered to me, "Maybe now she'll listen. I've told her and told her, 'This is how they said to do it,' and she always says, 'I'll do it my way.'"
Mickey said his frustration with Susan lessened somewhat after he committed himself to a plan of action to assist her. He decided that in her case people tended to coddle her too much and that he would make it his business to hold her more accountable for her behavior. He did this through being firm in his expectations, even if the academic expectations were lowered to accommodate her needs. He set limits that were clear and held her accountable for living up to his expectations. One day he left his classroom, found Susan in her next class, and brought her back to clean up the mess she had left behind.

Susan did not seem shy about going to Mickey with questions. She teased and played with him on occasion. One day when it was time to move into groups, for example, she suggested that he and I be grouped with her.

Other inclusion students. Two other special education students, Alan and Nick, were diagnosed with emotional behavioral disorders and were part of the cooperative special education program that was more inclusionary than the previous year’s program. When, in separate incidents, the boys were taken off campus
in handcuffs, Mickey was furious and said, "None of that would have happened if they would have been placed where they belonged in the first place... These kids need smaller classrooms where they can get more personal attention."

Mickey said his desire to remove certain special education students from his class was not motivated by his unwillingness to work with them but by what he deemed in the best interest of the students. In Mickey's words:

They [the special education teachers] want Alan in there not so much because of academic success, but they want him in there, hopefully, to mimic positive behavior. But I finally went to special ed and said, "He's not mimicking positive behavior, the other is happening. They're starting to mimic his." ...I think they're going to set up some real goals for him. If he doesn't keep them, they're gonna pull him and make him earn his way back up. I've seen that work.

Nick was a somewhat larger problem for Mickey. Mickey thought Nick was capable of serious violence and felt threatened by that possibility. He said,
Ever since that time he kicked at Amy’s door. Did I tell you about that?....I called him out to talk to him about another matter and when he got to her door he kicked it open with such force that.... well I don’t know how to handle that kind of thing.... even when I worked in the inner city I never saw that. I try to come off the same with everybody, but with him....he is late almost everyday and I am kind of torn between a rock and a hard spot, because one side of me doesn’t want to push him because I know what he is capable of doing. So I have a tendency to kind of walk very gently, but I’m getting to the point where it is just obstinate behavior... I don’t want to give him preferential treatment...

Mickey expressed his desire to treat all of his students equally:

I mean I feel differently about different kids, but I don’t want to show it. I hope I can hide it. I guess it’s something you automatically do. I mean I would never say fuck in front of my mother. You know what I mean? You just would not even think about it. I mean ...sometimes it’s
difficult. And there are times if I find it is
difficult, and if I really am having a difficult
time with one kid, then I will sometimes remove
myself, if I see I am getting to that point.

Mickey also expressed a tendency to individualize when
he said, "I kind of give kids what I think they need."

Care as Forgiveness

One of the students, Mark, was confronted by the
team faculty about a cheating incident in the spring.
Over time, in his eyes, two of the teachers were unable
to forgive him and therefore, he believed, did not care
about him. Mark believed that the teachers who were
able to forgive him also cared about him.

Mark. Mark and Mickey shared a special
relationship that spanned three years and involvement
in school, Hebrew school, and Mark's family. According
to Mickey, he knew Mark "as a total person, better than
any of the other kids." Mark kept his dark brown hair
cropped short and wore oversized t-shirts and low-
riding bermuda shorts. He was shorter than many of his
male classmates. His brown eyes seemed to express his
emotional moods.

Mark and another student were caught cheating on a
science test. When the team teachers conferred about how to handle the situation, they decided the two students would be called into separate meetings and confronted. Whether Mark knew what was happening or not I never found out, but he must have known the seriousness of the situation when he came into the room and all of his academic teachers, a student teacher and I were sitting around waiting on him. He looked quite sober.

Lynn, the English teacher on the team, took the lead without anyone saying so. She began by saying that one thing she always admired about Mark was that he "shot straight from the hip." She asked him if there were anything he felt he ought to tell them, so everyone could clear the air. Mark denied any wrong doing for a minute or two. Amy, the science teacher, said it had come to the team teachers' attention that he and another student were cheating. He was quiet. Amy asked why he thought any of this mattered.

"Because it's wrong," he said. There was silence for another moment, and then he admitted that a friend wanted him to write down answers to the math test and let her see them. This was news to all of the
teachers. No one said so. Amy asked what else. Mark said the same thing happened in science.

Later in the conference Mickey said to Mark, "You know how I feel about you. There's always been a special rapport... You know that honesty is instilled in the temple."

Mark said, "I told everything."

"I know. And that was the right thing to do."

Two weeks later Mark looked upset and said he wanted to talk with me. I had already had a couple of interviews and several focus group meetings with Mark by this time. Mark believed that the two teachers in whose classes he cheated did not forgive him and saw him primarily as a cheater. He said:

I'm not pissed because they have a right to investigate, but, uh, whenever, uh, I can tell with [my science teacher] and [my math teacher] I can tell. Whenever they hear my name, that's the first thing they think about. But, I mean, I've known Mickey for a long time and I know that he doesn't do that. You know what I mean. I mean, he's not like that. And neither is [my English teacher]. Cause I talked to her. I said, "When
you hear my name is that the first thing you think about?" and she said no because she's done much worse and she understands.... I mean I have cheated.... and you feel like crap.... I ended up with a B on the test and she [science teacher] gave me a C. [My math teacher] hates me, I know he does. I asked him once, but he said, "No, no, no, no." But I know he does. I'm like the worst behaved kid in that class. And I'm not that bad, though, but it's just like, Algebra. It's like all the super goodie good kids and then there's me... You know, they tell us high school teachers won't even know our names... They (some middle school teachers) know our names, but they still don't care. You can see it in their eyes.

Mark's need for forgiveness became tied to his feeling cared for. He felt helpless to make things right in the eyes of those he had offended. Whatever the teachers in question had said to Mark did not convince him that the incident could be put behind him. Mark felt than Mickey understood and forgave his cheating "Because he's known me for a long time".

Other students. In the focus groups several other
students indicated forgiveness was part of care in terms of "cutting us slack" and "giving chances."

Marty said:

My most caring teachers do a lot of compromising around the kids. Compromising what they think, like you should get an S, [satisfactory conduct grade rather than an "E" for excellent] but they are nice [and give the "E"]. I don’t know if I’m using the word right, like, uh, give the benefit of the doubt to us? And the kids are all over them and you know they care. They cut students slack.

Brian said, "[A caring teacher] gives us more chances. He’s got kind of a long fuse."

Cathy expressed the same sentiment when she said, "[A caring teacher] gives second chances."

"They [caring teachers] give you fair chances, like more chances than you deserve," echoed Paul.

Forgiving teachers were seen by students as caring teachers. To some students forgiveness was a kind of grace for student mistakes. For other students, forgiveness meant a yielding of boundaries.

_Care as Concern_
Concern and care were linked in terms of being there to listen and talk over students’ problems, to take time with them. Care as concern also meant knowing the students well enough to be able to respond to them sensitively and knowing enough about their family lives to judge the appropriateness of confidentiality on an individual basis.

Care as talking and listening. Mickey and his students saw talking and listening as primary demonstrations of care. Students, in the focus groups and individual interviews, agreed that caring teachers were those they could talk to about their problems, ones who knew how to listen. Carl’s statement is an example of this; he said, "When I’m having problems I feel better when a teacher or somebody comes over and asks me, ‘What’s the matter?’ or can they help."

Students appreciated teachers who took the time to talk with them privately, whether this talk was encouraging better school work or better behavior, congratulatory or curious. One student, Tina, commented, "It kind of makes you feel good when they tell you you’re doing a good job." Dennis agreed, "They help me and take me outside the class and talk to
Ellen said, "When they write something on your paper it's good, but when they stop you in the hall and tell you [that] you did well, on a test or something, that's special."

Mickey also interpreted talking and listening to his students as expression of care. In a November interview he said:

I think one of the things that helps me assess kids' personal needs is that I listen. I listen to things going on out in the hall. I'm pretty cognizant of things going on around me. I think I show caring by, you know, I really want them to do their best, I really do. And I try to do pep talks, and if I see somebody that is upset then I take them out and try to talk to them...Just to let them know that yeah, I do care.

Care as knowing students. Several students noted the importance of teachers knowing them well, on a more personal basis than as simply students. In an individual interview, Gwen commented:

In the old days if something happens, the teacher would just bring out the paddle. Now, teachers know better. They ask questions. They
show concern for your personal life. They know you may be having problems with your parents, or drugs, or gangs, of something.

In his interview Carl added, "Teachers need to know us as more than students, more than just that." Tina said, "They [caring teachers] meet you on your own level." Betty stated:

[They should] start getting on a more personal level with students. They don’t know us very well. Sometimes all they care about is how well you’re doing in their class and they don’t really care about you. Sometimes. And maybe if they worked on that and know you more as a friend and a student along with that, that would help.

Several students thought it was important for teachers to know enough about their relationships with their families to inform the teachers’ judgements about when to involve families with student problems that came to their attention. After a lengthy focus group discussion about confidentiality, Gwen most clearly expressed the groups’ consensus when she said:

They should keep things confidential. I mean, if it’s something your parents ought to know, well,
they should know their students and the family well enough to know whether parents need to know.

Mickey also talked about the importance of knowing students and something about their families. On more than one occasion Mickey noted that he knew Mark better and more fully than any of his students. Mickey felt like "a member of his family" and had been to the family's home for dinner, at Mark's bar mitzvah, and for other family gatherings. Mickey had also taught Mark at the Hebrew school for over a year. Mark believed that Mickey understood and forgave his cheating "because he's known me for a long time."

Mickey used his knowledge of students and their families to inform his work with them. In an interview in April, Mickey said:

Take Keith for example. Here's a kid that came in in sixth grade hoping to follow in his brother's footsteps. His brother was one of those kids who never had to work for his A. Keith has to work for his grades. He and I used to have confrontations when he was in sixth grade. Look at him now. And I think last year's team and this year's team have really worked with him through
lots of positive reinforcement, pats on the back and lots of encouragement to help him build his self-confidence and I think we helped build that in him. He was really floundering.... His mother commented on how appreciative she is for what we've done for him. He really takes pride in himself and his football and so forth.

Other examples of Mickey using his knowledge of students' background in his care for students were his relationships with Benny and Jose. Mickey had been director of a special program for Hispanic students at his old school. One of his current Hispanic students had friends in that program and knew Mickey by reputation. Mickey reported:

I know Benny talked about a lot of gang activity, but to me he was all talk. So there were several occasions in 6th grade when I would take up for him with the other teachers who thought, well, you know. So we would talk....He knows I care.

I observed one day in October as Jose, a first generation Mexican immigrant, shared a story in class about his father coming to America, working two jobs, and sending most of his money home to Jose's
grandfather. The pride in his family was apparent as he told of his father's devotion and hardships and eventual rise to managerial positions. In the next interview I asked Mickey his thoughts on that day. He said:

Jose is an example of someone that I really, I really try to speak to his ethnic background. Because I know, coming from southern California and coming here, I know a prejudice for Mexican background goes on. I know you're going to get an awful lot of it.... I try to tune in to that because I want him to feel proud of his background. You know, talking about Mexico, I really did try to bring him in a lot whenever he wanted to share something about Mexico.

In an informal moment Mickey said,

I think one of the advantages I have over other people is that the kids..I've always had a very good rapport with the kids and they open up. So I know them, I know where they're coming from.

Unfortunately, for Mickey, knowing about students and their families was not always enough to enable him to make a difference in students' lives. Care and the
demonstration of care were sometimes in conflict for this teacher with his interpretation of the limitations of the role of teachers in students' lives. In speaking of one student, Ben, with whom he had worked for three years, Mickey had lost faith in his ability to make an impact. Mickey said:

I think of (Ben) as an intelligent kid who had straight A's all the way through....and now, because of what I would consider negative or bad influences, he's now getting an F with me. Knowing how he was and seeing how he is now, in a way it hurts me to see him going in a negative direction. I know that he is and I know where he's coming from. And I've tried, I've tried talking to him.... He's following in his brother's footsteps [his brother is imprisoned on a drive-by shooting charge.] Now he doesn't care and it bothers me....I want to intervene...I want to do something. But, I'm not sure. As a teacher I can only go so far. I can't overstep my bounds into his home and personal life....Then all the talking in the world isn't going to change it....Yeah. I care about that kid. Those are the
ones I tend to be drawn to. The troubled ones.

Though he believed in the power of talking with students as a means of helping them, Mickey did not believe that he could influence all students at all times. Drawn to the students who seemed, to him, most troubled and in need of intervention, Mickey was disheartened, at times, due to his perceived inability to make a difference for them.

**Care as "Good Teaching"**

The concept of "good teaching" in this section is based solely on the students' views of good teaching. One recurring perception that indicated a teacher cared was that the caring teacher taught to understanding, thoroughly explaining material to the students. When talking about a teacher he felt cared, Brian said, "She answers every question I ask."

Marty elaborated:

Like if it's for a test or something and they just say, "Do you understand?" then I don't think they care. But if they give you the answer and wait till they know you understand, then they care.

Keith said, "I like [teacher's name] because she talks
all the details about something before she goes on."

According to the students, caring teachers made learning fun and interesting and took time to help students. Student comments included Gwen's summation of one of her teachers:

[The math teacher] does his best to make it interesting. He goes over it with you. Every time I needed help he was there for me... Plans more what we're going to do instead of having videos all the time.

Jose said, "What I like about teachers is they tell me what I'm doing wrong... what I'm missing. They help me." Marty stated, "Other geography teachers give pages of notes. [Mickey's] more creative. I like his games. The winning team gets an A, the losers get a B."

Cathy commented, "[Teacher's name] changes the assignments to suit our styles. Like if we're having a bad day she doesn't give us a zero, but says, 'Well, could this be better?" Tina elaborated:

You know they care about what you think because they'll like do stuff that you want to do. They find fun things for the class to do, even in the
way they teach. It's like they understand what you like to do and what you need and stuff.

Carl said:
You can tell if teachers care by the way they teach. Like if they make it fun and they don't just (say) read the chapter by yourself and take notes and they don't... They like, uh, just left you on your own... Like tell you what chapter to do and you do it... The caring ones help you more. They do it with you so you know what's going on instead of just letting you go on by yourself. It doesn't have to be one on one, it can be with the whole class.

Students in one focus group agreed that when teachers reminded students of homework and nagged to get it turned in, it was a sign of care. "They like, notice and say something," said Marty. "They remind you of things, like projects that are due and homework," remarked Carl. Keith said, "[Teacher's name] is more caring because he pushes to get the work done and wants you to get an A." Paul added, "If I don't want to do it, it's like being nagged, but I know they just, you know, don't want us to forget." Tina
suggested:

You want to show them that, uh, "I am who you think I am." When you care for your teachers and they care for you it hurts them, it hurts you to see that you're hurting them, that you're not doing well and that, you know, they are saying, "What are you doing? You're supposed to pay attention."

In addition, academic confidentiality was important to these students. Calling special attention to them by name in front of the class was seen as invasive when it was apparent that it meant they had misunderstood something that needed attention. Mark complained about one teacher who made his grade public knowledge, "I had the worst grade of the whole class and [the teacher] said so out loud." Marty and Benny shared the same concerns. Marty said, "He'll show the whole class [a problem] and then he'll say, 'Isn't that right Marty?' 'Cause he knows. I think he sees it as a joke. I don't think any of the kids take it like that." Benny said, "[The teacher] says something right in front of everybody instead of me, just me, knowing I got it wrong."
Students interpreted teaching to understanding, respecting academic confidentiality, encouragement, urging the completion of assignments and making assignments fun, interesting and adaptable to the style of the learner as caring.

Teaching as Caring

A couple of students expressed the notion that teaching itself was synonymous with caring. This was a special category because for these two students anyone who taught must be caring, whether or not the teachers actually did any of the "good teaching" that symbolized care as expressed in the previous section. Though they had teachers they did not like, they assumed that these teachers also cared. Marty stated:

I can't imagine anyone wanting to get into this field without caring because, I guess, what would be the point of your job, really, because if you don't care if the kids do well then you don't care if they learn anything... If the teachers don't care, they [students] won't learn and if they don't learn, it defeats the purpose of teaching altogether.

Gwen said, "They have to [care]. I mean, if you didn't
like kids, why would you teach? That would be kind of stupid!"

The Dilemma of Care: Care as Coddling or Tough Love

Mickey's desire to help students succeed in a high school he perceived as uncaring created a kind of dilemma within himself, wherein he often struggled with what he called "coddling" or "mothering" versus "tough love," which he defined as limit-setting and strictness. He said:

I think part of the responsibility of teaching is to prepare these kids. It's part of my responsibility, not just subject matter, but it's to prepare them for high school where they have to be accountable, where they're not going to have people constantly reminding them of things that are due....I think the only mistake in the middle school is that there is a lot of coddling. I think that in 6th grade there should be coddling. In 7th it should be eased up a little bit more. By 8th grade....The problem is when they get to high school I've heard, and I don't know how true it is, but I've heard that some of our kids start to flounder. I mean, it's real tough for them to
pick up the pace. Because they’ve been so coddled.

Jerry. The dilemma of coddling versus tough love was sometimes played out in the ways adults sought to care for students. Jerry was an example of this conflict. Jerry’s mother was in the process of obtaining special status for her child so that he could not legally fail his classes. This possibility frustrated Mickey, who considered it to be the opposite solution to that student’s problems. Mickey thought that limit-setting was the best way to teach this student responsibility. This conviction was shared by the rest of the team teachers and the special education personnel but not by the student’s mother.

For the first three quarters, Jerry often appeared sullen and unclean. When I viewed videos that the English teacher had made of group presentations in her room, Jerry seemed to be busier combing his hair than contributing to the group. Jerry’s off-task behavior, work that was less than his capability, his lack of social skills and his mother’s phone calls were discussed frequently during team meetings. Various team teachers expressed everything from anger to
genuine concern for his growth and well-being. Hours were spent in team consultation about what approaches were in his best interest. Yet for Jerry, teachers were just people who taught him. The following excerpt from an interview transcript showed a point of view that none of the other students expressed:

Jerry (J): I just see them as people who teach us, to help us learn. I don’t, I don’t really look at them too much as uh close friends or something like that. I just see them as someone who, teach me, and then I go home. I don’t talk to my parents, either. Or my mom, cause they’re divorced, about my problems. I just talk to a close friend, or maybe their parents if I’m good friends with their parents.

Alder (A): And yet it looked to me when I met your mom that you really like her.

J: Yeah. I do.

A: But you just don’t feel you can go to her with your problems?

J: Un uh. She’s just too, on the strict side. She doesn’t understand me really. She doesn’t see my problems as the way I like her to see them.
She sees it as something negative, something I did wrong. Or something like that.

A: Do you feel that most adults see you in the wrong?

J: No. Not at all. A lot of them, I know that. Mostly, uh, girls.

A: So you feel that most of your responses to things are just what any guy would do?

J: Yeah.

Interestingly, Jerry credited one of the women teachers on the team with dealing most evenhandedly with him this school year:

Jerry (J): [The teacher], she’s cool. She has kids of her own, you know. I could talk to her. If I had a problem like a home homework problem, I’d go to them (teachers), but not like a serious problem, a problem out of school.

Alder: Does it matter to you much whether a teacher cares?

J: Yeah, it matters to me, but they’d have to tell me for me to know.

Interviews revealed that Jerry did not see teachers as someone to talk with about anything besides
school work. When asked whether he had ever had a teacher who cared, he said he didn't know.

Mickey and other teachers spent hours discussing Jerry. His off-task behavior was diagnosed as attention deficit disorder by the family physician. One of the doctor's directives was to place Jerry in the front row so that he would be less distracted. Mickey felt that this just gave him one more thing to nag Jerry about because Jerry, like most students, came in each day and sat where he pleased. "It's not my job to deal with kids about where they sit," said Mickey. I observed Mickey remind Jerry to change seats on several occasions, however.

Jerry's mother repeatedly set and missed appointments with the team and other appointments with the special education personnel. In a team meeting one of the other teachers said, "She's called up here and bitched at least five times." "You mean she's voiced concern?" asked Mickey. "Is that what you call it?" the other teacher asked. They both laughed. I asked how I was supposed to report on their language of care. They agreed that if they didn't care, they would not deal with any of these people at all.
Several times early in the school year, Mickey voiced an irritation with Jerry. In the exit interview I asked Mickey to comment on each student in the study. About Jerry he commented, "I ended up really liking him. I realized that a lot of my irritation with him was really an irritation with his mother. I was able to separate."

Mickey’s reexamination of his feelings about Jerry symbolizes a level of concern for his relationships with and feelings for his students. Though some of Mickey’s notions of care may have differed from other people’s ideas, he was selected for this study based, in part, on the expert opinions of people who knew his work with young adolescents. The next section reports on how Mickey perceives the influences that have supported his inclination to care.

Influences on Mickey’s Inclination to Care

Because I purposively selected Mickey as a teacher with a reputation for caring, biographical antecedents that influenced his manner with students were sought in order to more fully understand how he was able to adopt and maintain caring relationships with students. I categorized influences on Mickey’s inclination to care
into two groups. One set included experiences that occurred before he began teaching; the second included experiences after he started teaching.

Influences Prior to Teaching

Service experiences. Two service experiences were cited by Mickey as helping to instill him with a strong sense of compassion and caring. One was his work with deaf children when he was a high school senior. The other was volunteer work with the youth group of his temple as a young adult. Mickey reported:

When I was in high school I worked with deaf kids. Back then it was different. I had more than enough credits, but I had to complete my senior year. So for part of the day I went to an elementary school and worked with deaf children. This school was lip reading and some sign reading. I was an aide, I guess. I learned that because of the nature of their disability that they needed special attention, caring, nurturing. I used to see the way that some of the other kids treated them, and it used to really anger me. And maybe I have a special attachment to that because I am deaf in one ear, and I can read lips.
When I first moved here I worked with the temple youth group. I would have been 27. I was their advisor, so I would plan, like we would do service projects and community work. It was not to instill Jewish values in the kids but a time for the kids to learn more about the Jewish culture, Israeli dances, meeting other kids around the country and hosting them when they come to town. Kind of a brotherhood, a sense of cohesiveness among Jewish youth, boys and girls.

The sense of group cohesion that Mickey encouraged as a leader for the temple youth group was also apparent in his classroom as he led students through their studies of various world cultures. It was not unusual for students to work in groups and to include dance, food or music as part of their reports on other nations. The sensitivity Mickey said he gained from his work with deaf children was observed in the relationships he tried to foster between some of the special education inclusion students and his regular students.

Religion. Mickey credited his religious upbringing with some of his predisposition to care.
The sense of community that was exercised by other temple members and what Mickey interpreted as a Jewish propensity to focus on the good in people held special meaning for him. He stated in an interview:

I think that Judaism is a very nurturing religion. I was kind of adopted by a Jewish family who made sure that if my mother couldn't take me to temple, they got me there. They kind of pseudo adopted me to make sure I got those values, I guess. I mean, my mother would take me, but there were times. And there were times when my mother would take me and they would bring me home....a strong sense of family, a strong sense of community, and Judaism, unlike Christianity, believes that everyone is born good. Therefore, we don't baptize. We look for the good in people. It's a basic Jewish belief, that it's the good in you, not the bad, and we also believe that God focuses on the good in you and not the bad. So this influences me to try to focus on the good rather than the negative.

Mickey's ability to focus on the good instead of the bad is seen in his relationship with Mark after the cheating incident. Mickey immediately focused on
Mark's admission of error as "the right thing to do."

**Influences While Teaching**

**The Students.** Though he had experience as an interpreter and English tutor for the children of a family of Swedish immigrants, Mickey had no awareness of any special lifetime desire to work with adolescents. The students themselves taught Mickey to care about youngsters. He said:

I didn't go into [middle level teaching] because I had this great love for kids or because I thought I could make a difference in the world. It was mainly by accident. Strange, huh! The classroom made me appreciate kids more. Before I would have been more negative to kids, probably. Now I can see kids as individuals.

Mickey's ability to view students as individuals was evident in his ability to talk about their special needs and the various influences he saw affecting them. Mickey utilized all that he knew about his students when making decisions that impacted them personally.

**The Team.** Mickey recognized his teaching team of three colleagues as helping him maintain a caring attitude toward students. On several occasions team
teachers would see one another between classes and agree not to meet as a team because they had too much other pressing business. Invariably they would eventually drift together in one classroom during their planning time anyway.

Mickey spoke highly of the team’s sense of care when he said in the May interview:

I think our team as a whole was a very caring team. I think we tried to hone in on certain problems with certain kids. And I think, like with Annie, when she was going through those problems at home with her stepmother, I mean, we really did help prevent her from running away from home. I mean, we sat down with her during our team planning. We really gave her, [a team member] especially, gave her some tools to take home with her and patch up her relationship with her stepmother... She came back and thanked us. I think we all care differently. [A team member] tends to be more mothering, [another team member] tends to be real tough love. [The third team member] and I are somewhere in between. But we all care and show it in different ways. But even
the fact that we meet as a team so often, that we talk about our kids and how to help them, doesn't that mean we care? .... That was one situation, although I've never had problems with my step parents, I kind of used my uncle. I knew what she meant with the constant put downs and the insults. When [Annie] was talking about it I could not only feel the hurt, I could feel it coming back to me, when I had to listen to that [kind of thing].

The support this team gave one another and their students was apparent to me at each day's observation. Students would approach one or the other of the faculty teammates with concerns. The team would bring the student concerns to the other members for consultations. Rose, for example, went to her teacher advisor and told him that her sister's boyfriend was coming on to her. The male teacher advisor thought this situation would be better handled by one of the women team members. The team as a whole agreed, and the female English teacher took time to talk with Rose.

Principal. Mickey said he thought a principal could make a big difference in his motivation to care. He cited several things a formal principal had done
that Mickey interpreted as caring:

He used to leave us little notes in our boxes that said things like, 'Good job', or "Caught some of your lesson from the hall today. Keep it up!" Or he'd leave little candies. Every pay day he would bring me, all of us, our checks, shake our hands. It really made a big difference on morale. And when he put a committee together, you had the feeling it wasn't just for show, that he was really listening.

Mickey believed his own propensity to care was influenced by his religion and service experiences prior to teaching. The students themselves, his teammates, and his principal, according to Mickey, influenced his predisposition to care after he began to teach.

Summary of Findings

A recapitulation in my own words of the array of personal meanings and interpretations of care shared with me by the participants in this study runs the risk of trivializing intimate life stories. Nevertheless, so much was shared that a summary seems necessary in order to promote comprehension and facilitate larger,
though perhaps less personal, meanings we might derive from their stories.

For some of the students, meanings of care were tied, in part, to their meaningful life experiences. Jack linked care to control when out-of-control events changed his life; for him, control became a significant aspect of care. Rose also saw setting limits and controlling student behavior by adults as a way of demonstrating that they cared for student safety.

Susan’s ordeals within an educational context that excluded her from contact with typical students heightened her sensitivity to being treated like a "regular kid." For her, equal treatment was perceived as caring, even when it meant she was yelled at. For other students involved in the special education program, the issue of equality was explored by Mickey, who sought to treat his students equally. At the same time, Mickey interpreted some of their behaviors as too extreme to allow for equivalent responses from him. The ability to treat them differentially was, in Mickey’s mind, also a way to treat them with care.

There was some agreement among the students that caring teachers were forgiving. Often the concept of
forgiveness was used in terms of teachers forgiving a late paper or too much talking; "cutting slack" was associated with forgiveness in this context. Mark's story about cheating and feeling unforgiven by the offended teachers demonstrated his need for a deeper sense of forgiveness. His perception of a lack of clemency shaded his perceptions of some teachers and made him question their caring.

Mickey and his students generally agreed that caring meant concern for the other. Both Mickey and his students understood this concern to be demonstrated by taking the time to talk and to listen, getting to know the students as whole people, beyond the scope of their roles as students. This knowledge of the students and their families symbolized for Mickey and his students a way to inform decisions teachers make about students and to help teachers see events from the students' perspective.

A couple of students thought all teachers must care; why anyone would teach without caring seemed to mystify them. Many students gave voice to the notion that care and good teaching were related. Their ideas of what constituted care included teachers who
respected academic confidentiality, teachers who were helpful and taught to understanding, teachers who created interesting lessons, and teachers who "nagged," which they interpreted as a sign teachers had their well-being, their learning, and their futures in mind.

Mickey grappled with making appropriate choices along his tough love versus coddling continuum. Jerry's story was told, in part, because Mickey recognized the different conclusions about caring for Jerry that Mickey and Jerry's mother held. Meanwhile, Jerry's statement that if teachers cared about him they would have to say so for him to know, remained one of the most poignant statements of the study because in the same breath he said it was important to him that teachers care. Indeed, Jerry did not even have care as an expectation, though he felt it was significant enough to matter to him.

Finally, Mickey attributed his predisposition to care to two sets of factors. One set consisted of relationships and events prior to entering teaching, which included his religion, and his service experiences as a tutor for deaf elementary children and with adolescents in his temple. After he entered
teaching, the set was comprised of relationships with students, team members and his principal.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purposes of this study was to explore how caring relationships were created by a middle level teacher and his students and how these individuals interpreted the meaning of care. The three guiding questions of the study sought to uncover the meanings of care for the teacher and his students, how caring relationships between them were created, and what influences supported the teacher's inclination to care.

This chapter begins with a review of the findings. The summary is followed by a discussion of the findings and their implications for educators.

Review of the Findings

The scope of the meanings of care in this study ranged from two students who assumed that all teachers cared to one who said he would not know a teacher cared unless he was told so explicitly. Between these extremes there was general agreement that care by
teachers meant talking and listening, paying attention, knowing students well enough to make learning interesting and to know how and when to involve their families. Maintaining student confidentiality and not embarrassing students were also perceived to be signs of care.

Beyond these general attributes of care there emerged an interesting relationship between the unique personal needs and experiences of students and their personal perceptions of care. Mark developed a perception of care that was closely tied to his need to be forgiven for cheating. Jack, after a person he knew was murdered, tied his notion of care to his needs for safety and a sense that someone was in control of any situation. Susan's special education needs heightened her need to feel normal; her interpretation of care became likened to being treated like the other students. Even being yelled at like the other students symbolized, to Susan, being cared for.

Mickey, the teacher, attributed his inclination to care to his religion, and service experiences prior to teaching. He further attributed his predisposition to care to teaching itself, working with students, his
relationship to his team, and the actions of a principal. Personal relationships that he interpreted as encouraging and appreciative symbolized care and support to Mickey and heartened his own inclinations to sustain caring relationships with his students.

Though there are some clear distinctions between the meanings of care for the study participants and how caring relationships are created by them, there is some overlap as well. Care is often defined by these students and this teacher as an active verb; listening, talking, controlling, treating students equally, knowing students, and forgiving were, for the participants, both descriptions of the meanings of care and the actions caring teachers took. Thus, the creation of caring relationships between middle school students and their teacher and the meanings of care for the students and their teacher were intertwined.

Discussion and Implications of the Findings

Several implications emerged from the findings of this study. Though not all are previously unrecognized, each of the implications indicates an aspect of the process of creating caring relationships that may further assist practitioners in the
establishment and maintenance of caring relationships with students.

Implications for Teachers and Teacher Educators

Providing personalized leadership

Mark's cheating incident provided an example of how teachers can help students by providing what I call personalized leadership - interactions that provide positive direction and explicit guidance. Personalized leadership differs from Noddings' notion of confirmation in that confirmation is concerned with attributing the highest possible motive to a student's actions (Noddings, 1988). Noddings (1988) uses the example of a student cheating in order to please his parents with a higher grade. Noddings suggests teachers focus, when dealing with cheating incidents, on the higher motive of wanting to please parents.

Personalized leadership does not necessarily employ confirmation but is, rather, concerned with moving on after a student is asked to take responsibility for less than honorable acts, such as cheating, lying, or stealing. Providing personalized leadership is concerned with enabling students to incorporate their mistakes into an ethical view of self
that they can live with honorably whether or not a higher motive for the act can be discerned.

Personalized leadership, in Mark's case, was provided by two of the team teachers who gave him direction, a way for him to look at the incident. One of the teachers told Mark that she had done worse, and in this way Mark was able to believe that she forgave his cheating; he reasoned that if she forgave herself, she must forgive him. Mickey explicitly underscored that Mark's confession was "the right thing to do."

Although there was no absolution from the act of cheating, doing "the right thing" was the new focus for their relationship. These teacher statements helped Mark interpret these teachers as welcoming him back into the fold of the caring community (Noddings, 1988). They provided a kind of closure, a way of interpreting or framing the whole story and its meaning and value to Mark. They influenced how Mark interpreted his actions through personalized leadership.

The other two teachers on the team may or may not actually have forgiven Mark for the cheating incident. The math teacher's denial that he held it against Mark, however, was not enough to validate the teacher's
forgiveness in Mark's eyes. "No, no, no" provided no
direction for Mark, no guidance as to how the math
teacher actually viewed him, no hint as to where they
stood in relationship to one another. "No" did not
provide clues to Mark as to how the math teacher or
Mark were to interpret one another in a way that got
past the day Mark was confronted for cheating. The
science teacher and Mark had no reported conversation
on the issue beyond that day. The lowered grade from
the science teacher did not provide closure for Mark
but, rather, evidence for him that she thought poorly
of him. What was missing from the math and science
teachers was the personalized leadership that would
have helped Mark put positive closure on the
experience.

The literature on early adolescence describes the
struggle this age group encounters with developing a
sense of self (Wiles and Bondi, 1993; Slavin, 1991).
Kohn (1991) and Noddings (1988) discuss at length the
importance of attributing to the students the
characteristics that enhance the development of a sense
of self as a caring, moral person. Providing explicit
leadership for students to help them come to terms with
themselves and develop "an attainable image of themselves that is lovelier than that manifested in present acts" (Noddings, 1988, p. 193) is in itself an act of modeling care. In the study, Tina clearly stated the importance for her of being the person the teacher believed her to be when she talked about the importance of being the "I am who you think I am" for teachers she cared about. The "I am" that teachers present to students can profoundly impact students' self-identities. Modeling care provides the experiential base necessary for students to set being a caring person as an attainable ethical ideal for themselves.

According to Charon (1992), symbolic interactionism views the self as defined through its interpretations of others' perceptions. "What we reveal to the student about himself as an ethical and intellectual being has the power to nurture the ethical ideal or to destroy it" (Noddings, 1988, p. 193). The first implication from this study is that teachers who care about nurturing the student's ethical ideal must find ways to provide personalized leadership; they must find ways to help students frame their experiences so
that they allow for the development of realistic and positive self-identities. Teacher educators need to find ways to help teachers understand the importance of and become adept at providing personalized leadership with students.

Knowing students

Communication, talking with and listening to students, is vital in the process of getting to know students, especially if teachers are to know them as "more than just students." Students in this study expressed the importance they placed on communication and personal contact with teachers. These students believed that caring teachers knew their students well and that knowing them beyond their roles as students was a critical element.

Further, individual students come to teachers with individual needs and personal conceptions of what it means to be cared for. In order for teachers to reach students on personal levels, it is essential that individual students and their teachers be given opportunities to interact. The idea of talk as the currency of care (Noblit, et al, 1995) is extended in this study. Talking with teachers and being heard by
them were valued commodities to the students in this study. The second implication of this study is clear; it is imperative that teachers get to know their students in order for the nuances of caring for them as individuals to be recognized and accepted.

**Taking the role of the other.** Taking the role of the other is a phrase associated with symbolic interactionism (Charon, 1992). In symbolic interactionism, being able to take the role of the other enables us to interpret their actions and make decisions about our next action based on those interpretations. Taking the role of the other is also associated with how we interpret another’s perceptions of us and is instrumental in shaping our view of ourselves.

Taking the role of the other has counterparts in the literature on care in Nodding’s term receptivity (1988), Mayeroff’s empathy (1971), Kohn’s taking the other’s perspective (1991), and Gilligan’s co-feeling (1988). Kohn (1991) explicitly linked taking the perspective of others to listening to others. In this study, Mickey said listening kept him abreast of what was going on with his students. He talked about
students opening up to him. When discussing Annie's problems with her stepmother, Mickey noted that although he had not experienced precisely what she said she was going through, he could feel her hurt. This was a kind of empathy or co-feeling (Gilligan, 1988; Mayeroff, 1971). Time and again, Mickey demonstrated knowing his students and working to "give kids what I think they need." His assessment of what they needed was accomplished, at least in part, by taking the role of the other. Taking the role of the other was accomplished, at least in part, by actively listening to students and then acting on how he interpreted what he heard. Listening to our students and knowing them well enhances our ability to create relationships that are caring with them.

The Personal Nature of Care. Given the broad interpretations of care offered by the students in this study, it is entirely possible for different students to interpret similar action or inaction by a teacher as either caring or non-caring. If, for example, one student's interpretation of care would be for a teacher to "cut slack" with misbehaving students, another student, who likens care to control, could interpret
the loosening of reins as a loss of teacher control and, for that student, a non-caring act. Perhaps individual interpretations are influenced by what Charon (1992) called streams of action, the students’ interpretations of teacher actions/inactions over time and the net influences of those actions/inactions on student behavior over time. Further study of the subtleties of student/teacher interactions and how students and teachers interpret those interactions could prove enlightening. What remains clear is that the personal nature of care lends even greater credence to the implication that teachers must get to know their students on an individual basis. Teacher educators need to make the importance of knowing students as whole people clear to teachers.

Care as Attentive Pedagogy

Good teaching in this study was solely determined by what the student participants deemed as good teaching. Their views, however, did parallel aspects of effective teaching research and responsive teaching designs (Good & Brophy, 1994; Slavin, 1991; Stevenson, 1992); teaching to understanding, providing helpful assistance, monitoring students’ work, providing
specific feedback, incorporating cooperative learning tasks, and making learning fun by providing a variety of activities are positive teaching techniques according to student participants and the literature.

Each of these teacher behaviors involves paying attention to students. Teaching to understanding entails listening to student questions and responding to them in such a way as to ascertain the effectiveness of the communication. Providing specific feedback and helpfulness requires that teachers give students and student work careful attention.

The successful implementation of cooperative learning strategies with middle level students necessitates a level of understanding about students by the teacher that suggests they are known and respected for who they are (Cohen, 1994; Sharan & Sharan, 1992). This understanding is reflected in decisions teachers make about how students are grouped.

Providing a variety of teaching techniques, at the least, implies the teacher’s tacit knowledge of and respect for middle level student instructional needs. The attentiveness and respect implicit in these teacher actions were interpreted as caring by the students in
this study. Therefore, a third implication of this study is that teachers who wish to be perceived as caring must teach and model effective teaching strategies and increase responsive teaching repertoires. Such actions, which make learning attentive, relevant, interesting, and fun, hopefully would be perceived by the students as caring acts.

Dialogue: The Context and Content of Care

Teachers need to recognize that at the same time they are interpreting their students' actions and inactions, students are doing the same thing to them. Actions, inactions, words, and deeds are interpreted by individual students in a multitude of ways. Some students come into the classroom with the assumption that all teachers care. Others, like Jerry, may come into classrooms with the assumption that none do. If caring for students is valued by teachers, perhaps it is time to begin to talk openly with students about that care and what it means to all concerned. Such dialogue could bridge a new understanding between middle school students and their teachers.

Talking openly about what care means, what students perceive as caring, what the teacher perceives as
demonstrations of care, could heighten student and teacher awareness; new consciousness could compel new conscientiousness in how students and teachers relate to one another. The fourth implication is for teachers and, implicitly, teacher educators to initiate explicit dialogue about care with their students.

Implications for Educational Leadership, Policy, and School Reform Movements

When discussing his predisposition to care, Mickey was clear that the actions of his team and principal that he interpreted as caring were vital aspects of his own continuing propensity to care. Transforming schools into places where students feel cared for and certain that teachers care should be a primary goal of any school reform movement. Certainly, it is a goal clearly articulated in Turning Points (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). This study offers two specific implications toward that end for educational leaders, policy makers, and educational reform movements.

Team support. In this case, the team was supportive because team members provided one another with a sounding board and fresh perspectives on
students. Individual team members interacted with students differently and were perceived by students in different ways; different students noted different teachers on the team as the most caring members of the students. No one teacher on the team was overwhelmed with students needing care. Because the team of teachers interacted with one another about students, teachers knew more about the students in their charge than they may have known otherwise. In this way, teamwork helped Mickey care for his students and helped Mickey's students find teachers who they perceived as caring.

Inherent in Mickey's self-assessment of his inclinations to care was a view of care as relationship with others. Mickey voiced a need to interact with and feel appreciated by those people with whom he shared his work. The need to lessen teacher isolation and increase collegial opportunities for teachers has long been clear and is given renewed support with this study (Cohen, 1983).

The fifth implication of this study is that policy makers and administrators who want to bolster caring environments need to promote teaming of teachers in
middle level schools and provide time for teachers to meet. Teams of teachers and students and common planning time provide teachers with opportunities to develop collegial relationships with one another. The information and concern shared with other colleagues may facilitate the development of caring relationships with students.

Administrative support. A principal’s actions - leaving notes, shaking hands, congratulating teachers on jobs well done, and listening to teachers’ ideas - were interpreted by Mickey as caring, supportive, and encouraging. This encouragement helped Mickey maintain his predisposition to care for his students. Support systems are an important aspect of creating and maintaining caring relationships with students. For Mickey, encouragement from administrators mattered. It seems appropriate that programs to prepare administrators should include an awareness of these facets of creating caring middle level schools.

The sixth implication of this study suggests that educational leaders, policy makers and school reform movements need to rededicate efforts to ensure that principals understand the importance of supporting
caring relationships between students and teachers by recognizing the importance of the encouragement and other personal care they take with their faculty and staff. Clearly, effective schools research and school reform research recognize the importance of the principal’s role in school climate and change (Good & Brophy, 1991). The principal’s role in supporting caring relationships between students and teachers clearly impacts school climate, and the importance of care in schools should be emphasized in all efforts toward school reform.

Beyond the importance of teaming and administrative support, effective schools, quality schools, accelerated schools, middle level and other school reform efforts must acknowledge the import of care in schools as both a means to ends and an end in itself. The experience of caring relationships with adults can determine whether students are able to lead caring relationships as adults (Kohn, 1991). The implication for school reform movements whose mission statements include references to influencing the creation of an ethical, caring citizenry is for them to incorporate findings from this and other research on
care in their staff development and other action plans.

**Implications for Young Adolescents**

If care is a basic human need, the absence of caring relationships could be a major contributing factor to the rise of teenage violence, suicides, and pregnancies. The impulse to find caring relationships could be a motivation for students who do not perceive caring relationships at home or at school to turn to peer street gangs or to a child of their own for a sense of care and belonging. In addition, failure to connect with others and perceive caring relationships in their lives could reinforce the despair that leads to taking one's own life. The impact of a nation of teachers who are committed to find ways to connect with their students in caring ways - to dialogically discuss, for example, the meaning of care and its implications for the students' relationships with themselves, their friends, families, teachers and their futures - could have profound ramifications on the lives of adolescents. Perhaps the establishment and sustenance of caring relationships between our nations' teachers and their students could turn the tide of the counterproductive kinds of care and belonging that
students find in gang membership. The final implication of this study is that putting the other implications of this study broadly into practice almost certainly would have profoundly positive consequences on the lives of young adolescents.

Toward a Grounded Theory of Care

Several commonalities emerge between this study and other research on care in schools. One significant feature is that caring relationships with teachers is important to students (Dillon, 1989; Edmonds, 1992). Whether students tend to work harder for teachers they perceive as caring (Dillon, 1989; Edmonds, 1992) or not, they tend to see care as an important teacher quality. A second common notion about care in schools is that caring teachers are considered by their students to be helpful and interested in their academic success. (Dillon, 1989; Bosworth, 1995). The idea of being helpful (Dillon, 19889; Bosworth, 1995) relates closely to the students in this study who saw teachers as caring when they answered questions fully, worked along with them, and generally taught to understanding.

Just as students in this study saw care in teachers who they believed knew them as whole people,
who took the time to talk with them and to listen, students across studies see caring teachers as those who are interested in them personally (Dillon, 1989; Bosworth, 1995; Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995). Results in this study further refined the rationale for the importance of knowing them to include the teacher's ability to be sensitive to issues of confidentiality with parents and classmates.

The relevance of reciprocal dialogue is the third common feature of care in schools across this and other studies (Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995; Webb, et al, 1993). Reciprocal dialogue entails active listening to one another as equal moral agents; it implies respect and empowerment. Students value talking with teachers and being heard by them.

Students in this study linked caring to control and safety. The necessities of a safe and orderly environment and creating relationships of warmth and trust with students were recognized by the effective schools research of the eighties (Cohen, 1983). This study supports those assertions.

Further Study

Several possibilities exist for future
investigation. Replicating this study in other middle level settings could broaden our understanding of the meaning of care to middle level students and about the creation of relationships.

A replication of this study in urban schools could further our understanding about whether there are differences in the meaning and creation of caring relationships in that context. Urban students' experiences with increased violence and poverty may change the kinds of interactions they need to determine whether, in their minds, a teacher is caring. Further, variances in cultural patterns could effect the students' interpretations of care.

A similar study that focuses on the entire team rather than a single teacher might provide information about the role of teams in creating caring relationships in middle level education. Studies on teams could extend earlier work on teaming as it relates to reducing teacher isolation (Ahar, Johnston, & Markle, 1988) and teaching mentoring (Powell & Mills, 1992).

Because it is often difficult for an observer to hear and/or understand the private interactions between
teachers and students, it might be helpful to design action research projects carried on by the classroom teacher to explore further the issues inherent in caring classroom relationships.

From this study emerged the concept of personalized leadership. Further study is needed on the development and impact of personalized leadership. If, in fact, personalized leadership helps students form a view of themselves that is more in line with their ethical ideals, such research would inform classroom and teacher educators' practice. If, indeed, we expect classroom teachers to build caring relationships with their students, personalized leadership is a concept that would be useful in that process.

Conclusion

Middle level students' views on care presented here lend credence to the intuitive notions held by many teachers that care is an important component of the relationship between them and young adolescents. Care was even seen as valuable to the student who had never known a teacher to care.

Educational leaders, policy makers, and school
reformers need to be aware of the impact that middle level teaching teams and encouraging administrators can have in providing teachers with support systems that enable them to maintain caring relationships with their students. Truly transformative education that addresses the needs of young adolescents must attend to the notion of creating caring relationships between teachers and students.

The implications of this study provide essential keys for teachers who recognize the importance of creating caring relationships with students but have heretofore had no direction about how to begin or what care means to students. By talking together about the concept of care, students and teachers can come to understand what is interpreted as caring and, in so doing, may better address their own needs as well as one another's needs. If teachers enter the profession as caring people and are not perceived as such by students, this dialogue can only serve to enlighten all parties. Initiating explicit and open dialogue with students about care may be a first step in the establishment and conservation of caring student-teacher relationships. Providing personalized
leadership, knowing students, and employing pedagogy that is responsive to student needs and interests are integral aspects of creating caring relationships with students.

Truly transformative education begins with the shared meanings we establish with one another through our interactions. Helping teachers and students to become more adept at caring could be a powerful antecedent to transforming our schools into more supportive communities of learners.
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW
TO: Nora Alder
FROM: Dr. William Schulze, Director, Office of Research Administration
DATE: 22 March 1994

RE: Status of Human Subject Protocol entitled: "Construction of Caring Relationships in Middle School Classroom"

This memorandum is official notification that the protocol for the project reference above has been approved. This approval is for a one year duration. At the end of the year, you must notify this office if the project will be continued.

If you have any questions or require any assistance, please give us a call.
APPENDIX B

HUMAN SUBJECTS CONSENT FORMS
CONSENT FORM

Title: The Construction of Caring Relationships in a Middle School Classroom
Investigator: Nora Alder, Department of ICS, UNLV
Phone: 893-6876

You are invited to participate in a research study that is investigating how caring relationships are created and maintained between a middle school teacher and her students. The purpose of this study is to describe these caring relationships and their meanings for those involved in them.

Because you have a reputation for developing caring relationships with your students you are being asked to participate in this study.

I anticipate that the people interested in this research will be teacher educators and future teachers. The study is designed to help teachers understand how caring relationships are created and maintained by middle school students and their teachers.

If you decide to volunteer, I will interview you privately several times during the semester. The formal interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. You will be provided a copy of the interviews, as well as an opportunity to read the first draft of the study. In addition, ongoing observations of your classes will be conducted throughout the 1994-1995 school year.

Real names will not be used in reporting the results of this study. The names of the school, district, and city will also be changed.

You may refuse to participate at any time. If the study changes, or the use of the data alters, you will be so informed and your consent reobtained.

Date--------

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Signature of Participant

Date--------
Title: The Construction of Caring Relationships in a Middle School Classroom

Investigator: Nora Alder, Department of Instructional and Curricular Studies, UNLV
Phone: 893-6876

Your son/daughter is being asked to participate in a research project. I hope to learn how a middle school teacher and students create and maintain caring relationships.

Because your son/daughter is a minor it is necessary to secure your permission for participating in this study.

I anticipate that the people interested in reading this study will be teacher educators and future teachers. The study is designed to help teachers understand how caring relationships are created and maintained by middle school teachers and their students.

If you decide to allow your child to participate, I will interview him/her privately or in a student focus group. These discussions will be conducted outside of the regular school day. These interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy in reporting.

Real names of the students and the teacher will not be used. The names of the school, the district and the city will also be changed.

You may withdraw permission to participate at any time by informing me or the participating teacher. You may refuse permission to participate and your son/daughter would receive if participating in the study. If the study changes, or the use of the data alters, you will be so informed and your consent reobtained.

Date---------------------
Signature
Date---------------------
STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Title: The Construction of Caring Relationships in a Middle School Classroom
Investigator: Nora Alder, Department of Instructional and Curricular Studies, UNLV
Phone: 893-6876

You are being asked to participate in a research study. I hope to learn how a middle school teacher and her students create and maintain caring relationships. I am also interested in what care means to you.

Because you are a student in the participating teachers' classes you have been selected to participate in this study.

I anticipate that the people interested in reading this study will be teacher educators and future teachers. The study is designed to help teachers understand how caring relationships are created and maintained by middle school teachers and their students.

If you decide to volunteer, I will interview you on care privately or in a student focus group. These discussions will be conducted outside of your regular school day. These interviews will be tape recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting.

Real names of students and the teacher will not be used in reporting the results of this study. The names of the school, the school district, and the city will also be changed.

You may refuse to participate and still receive the care that you would receive if you were not in the study. You may change your mind about the study and quit after the study has started. If you do change your mind about participating in the study you must inform me or your teacher. If the study changes, or the use of the data alters, you will be so informed and your consent reobtained.

Because you are a student your parent or legal guardian must sign this document. I am asking for your signature as well.

Date:----------

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Signature of Student Participant

Date:----------

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Signature of Investigator
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