

#CritEdPol: Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies at Swarthmore College

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Article 4

June 2017

The Case for Care: Multiyear teachers are the future of mobilizing care in education

Daisy Culkins

Skidmore College, dculkins@skidmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/critedpol>

 Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Culkins, Daisy (2017) "The Case for Care: Multiyear teachers are the future of mobilizing care in education," *#CritEdPol: Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies at Swarthmore College*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/critedpol/vol2/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in #CritEdPol: Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies at Swarthmore College by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact emayorg1@swarthmore.edu.



The Case for Care: Multiyear teachers are the future of mobilizing care in education

Daisy Culkins

Skidmore College

Abstract

Care is essential to the healthy development of children. If care is not provided within the child's home, the second most influential sphere within a child's life where care can be enacted is the school. Community psychology and motivational psychology shed light into how teachers can use care to understand the child as a part of their community and use this understanding to enhance the child's ability to learn. Education researchers have studied caring teachers to define what care looks like in practice: getting to know students personally, listening to the wants and needs of the child, their parents and the community, and using that information to aid the student in their studies. A multitude of studies have shown that these practices have measurable positive effects on students. When a teacher displays traits that their students define as caring, student achievement increases. Therefore, care is a clearly definable and measureable educational strategy that raises student achievement and should be institutionalized through education policy. Small schools and small class sizes are both effective methods of promoting care in education. However, multiyear teachers (looping) have been shown to increase student enthusiasm, parent involvement, teacher productivity and student achievement and can be implemented with no extra cost to the school. Looping is an academically effective and cost-effective way of mobilizing care in public education as supported by psychology and education research.

Keywords: looping, psychology, education, care, policy

Introduction

The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines care as “the process of providing for the needs of someone or something” (Cambridge University Press, 2017). The National Education Association (NEA) expands upon that definition by illustrating what care looks like in education, “a caring teacher is one who listens to students, takes student and parent feedback earnestly, builds trusting relationships with families and is familiar with their students’ interests and talents” (NEA, 2015). Though each field and each author defines care in his or her own way, I will use the NEA definition throughout the paper to provide a concrete example of what care looks like in education so that it can be emulated and mobilized.

Although care itself is not new concept, it was not applied to the fields of psychology and education until the 1980s. When the psychologist Abraham Maslow developed his hierarchy of basic human needs in the 1940s, he included love and belonging as the third basic human need (Maslow, 1943). Though he never explicitly labeled it as care, his concept of love and belonging shares similarities with the NEA definition; by building trusting relationships with students and parents, teachers make their students feel like they belong and therefore students feel cared for. In more modern psychological theory, care is applied to education through community and motivational psychology. Community psychology defines care in education as teachers who form personal bonds with students and their families so as to better understand student behavior and performance in the classroom (Orford, 2008). These caring relationships allow teachers to understand a child’s personal motivators and use this understanding to push each child to succeed (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). This definition of care once again connects to the NEA definition and emphasizes why being “familiar with students’ interests and talents” is essential to care in education.

In the latter half of the 20th century education philosophers began applying the term care to their studies on effective teaching. John Dewey is famous for his theories on child-centered education, a term that often used synonymously with care in education. Although Dewey did not use the term care explicitly, he believed that the most effective form of schooling would focus on the child, their family, their community and their interests (Dewey, 1916). This relates to the NEA definition of care, which states that relationships with the child’s family and knowledge of student interests are essential to a caring relationship between teacher and student. Nel Noddings published

several books in the 1990s and introduced care as an essential component of education. Noddings defined care as a reciprocal relationship between teacher and student (Noddings, 1992). In order for care to exist, the teacher must express care and the student must recognize the teacher's behavior as care and feel cared for. Noddings provides a foundation for the NEA definition by emphasizing that care is relational, a teacher must express care in the ways defined by the NEA, but in order for it to truly be considered care, the student must feel cared for (Noddings, 1992). Angela Valenzuela, another prominent modern education theorist, also validates both the NEA and Noddings' definition of care. She distinguishes between aesthetic care (knowledge and interest in concepts—care about things and ideas) and authentic care (relations of reciprocity—care about relationships) (Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela, like Noddings and the NEA, advocates for the latter, she believes that care about relationships is what makes good teachers and ultimately successful students.

While care is a relatively new term, the concept of care as essential to healthy child development and effective education has been around for centuries. Though it has been defined in many different ways, I will use the NEA's definition throughout this paper as a broad description of care in education. The NEA defines a caring teacher as, "one who listens to students, takes student and parent feedback earnestly, builds trusting relationships with families and is familiar with their students' interests and talents" (NEA, 2015). The foundational ideas of care in psychology and education can be combined to create educational interventions and policies, thus improving both student and teacher performance and mobilizing care.

The Psychology of Care

Care as a basic need

In the 1940s Abraham Maslow developed his hierarchy of needs as a theory of human motivation. One of his five main categories was "love and belonging" or the need to fit in and feel accepted by various social groups. He placed this need just above physiological and safety needs, emphasizing that although humans need food, water, shelter and safety from predators to survive, they also need love and care in order to live healthy meaningful lives (Maslow, 1943).

This theory is consistent with many modern studies that cite abuse and neglect as a major predictor of many psychological problems. In one study,

both men and women who were abused or neglected as children were more likely to be diagnosed with dysthymia (persistent depressive disorder) and antisocial personality disorder later in life (Horwitz, Widom, McLaughlin & White, 2001). In another study, even when controlled for parental education and parental psychiatric disorders, people with documented childhood abuse or neglect were still four times as likely to be diagnosed with a personality disorder. In addition, ten out of twelve personality disorders listed in the DSM were linked to childhood abuse and neglect (Johnson, Cohen, Brown, Smailes & Bernstein, 1999). These findings within the psychological community present considerable evidence for the need to mobilize care in order to ensure the development of healthy productive citizens.

Major steps were taken towards this effort by the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which all members of the UN, except for Somalia, adopted in 2006. At this convention, top psychologists from around the world established the basic needs of children. These needs include the right to an education and the right to care and be cared for (Melton, 2011). This convention solidified care as a basic right that countries around the world must work to protect.

While the obvious place to influence care in a child's life is within their home, it is often difficult to intervene in the private family sphere. Many types of home interventions exist as a method for increasing levels of care within a child's life; however, few have been thoroughly researched and proven effective. One example of a common, yet under-researched intervention is parent education. Of its many forms, only a few types of parent education have been tested and those that have show a negligible effect on abuse and neglect or its risk factors (Barth, 2009). Another method, home visitation, has commonly been heralded as the most effective method of care intervention within the family unit; however, few studies have shown a measurable positive effect. One study by Eckenrode et al. (2000) tracked 400 socially disadvantaged women beginning with the pregnancy of their first child and ending with a follow up 15 years later. Some received prenatal care, some received routine care plus nurse home visits during pregnancy and some received routine care plus nurse home visits until the child's second birthday. In this study, home visitation was defined as nurses promoting health-related behaviors, caring behavior towards children and maternal life-course development. The study concluded that the only group of participants for which abuse and neglect towards the child was significantly reduced was the small subsection of women who received care until the child's second birthday and experienced minimal reports of domestic violence (this was a small portion

of the total study population as child abuse and domestic violence are often closely linked). This study demonstrated that while extensive home visitation can be helpful in decreasing abuse and neglect, the benefits were only reaped by a small portion of the target group, meaning it is not an effective intervention for the majority of the population in need (Eckenrode et al., 2000). The most obvious place to influence the level of care a child receives is within their home; however, this is often the most difficult place to create significant change.

Following the home, a child spends the second largest part of their young life in school. Unlike the private family sphere, public education is a much more accessible form of intervention. For this reason there are many fields of psychology that have been applied to improving children's public schooling experience. Both community psychology and motivational psychology provide examples of how care can and should be mobilized within schools.

Subfields of Psychology

Community and motivational psychology are two fields that shed light onto the ways in which we can understand and relate to children in the classroom setting. Community psychology is the idea that we should view people within their social context. A person's actions, words and performance are a representation of the community that has shaped them rather than their individual choices and merit (Orford, 2008). Motivational psychology is the study of the driving factors that influence human behavior. Founded on psychological theory, both these fields offer research that helps us understand the factors that create success in the classroom.

Community psychology is the idea that peoples' behavior is a product of their environment. Peoples' environment shapes how they act, speak and perform. Community psychology emphasizes the idea that we must reserve our judgment of the individual until we understand the factors that have contributed to their behavior (Orford, 2008). In modern public schools, there is no requirement that teachers understand their students' backgrounds nor is it incentivized by standardized testing. Therefore, understanding individuals as whole people, as community psychology promotes, necessitates a level of care that is not currently considered standard in the majority of public schools. When community psychology is applied to education, care is defined by teachers who form personal bonds with students and their families so as to better understand student behavior and performance in the classroom (Orford, 2008). This community psychology perspective of care helps us to

understand the specific dimensions of care and how they are associated with successful students.

In the classroom, considering a situation from the perspective of community psychology allows teachers to grasp the full picture of a student's life rather than just a particular problem in the classroom. When trying to influence a negative behavior it is helpful to understand it within the context of a person's environment (Orford, 2008). If a child continuously fails to complete their homework, their teacher may make many assumptions based on this behavior. The teacher may assume the child doesn't care about school, the child does not understand the material or the child is not smart. While any of these things could potentially be true, if the teacher views the child from the perspective of community psychology, he or she could also hypothesize that the child does not have time to complete the homework outside of school, the child does not have the resources at home (pens/pencils, computer, calculator, etc.) or the child's parents inhibit the child from completing their homework. Rather than attributing everything a child does to their personal merit, the community psychology approach takes into account environmental factors. If teachers demonstrate care by taking the time to understand their students as whole people they will have a much better comprehension of the factors that influence their students' performance (Orford, 2008). Since a teacher's goal is to increase student performance, understanding why certain methods are effective is in everyone's best interest.

More specifically, a study by Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan and Ochoa (2002) examined the qualities of teachers that parents of students identified as care and how these factors influenced their involvement in their child's education. They found four factors of care that impacted parental involvement: (1) communication between schools and parents, (2) sensitivity of school personnel to parents, (3) familiarity of parents with the school and of teachers and administrators with the parents and their cultural and physical environment; and (4) mutual support of school and parents for each other. Each of these factors exemplifies care as defined by community psychology. The authors found that when sensitivity and support factors were present, they significantly correlated with parental involvement, both at school and at home (Ritblatt et al., 2002). This shows that when teachers and the school as a whole practice the principles of care as defined by community psychology, students and their families reap the benefits.

Viewing students from a care perspective of community psychology would make learning a more enjoyable process for teachers, students and their fam-

ilies. It would allow teachers to set realistic expectations and students to be rewarded and punished on the basis of their merit, instead of factors outside of their control. It would also foster an environment of trust and mutual understanding between families and schools that would push both groups to be more involved and interconnected. Care should be mobilized in education through ideas and concepts rooted in community psychology so that students, teachers and families can work together to create a successful learning environment.

Motivational psychology is the study of the driving factors that influence human behavior. In the field of education, motivational psychology can be used to understand the environmental factors that create motivated students, essentially taking the theory of care in community psychology and applying it directly to improving student learning. Individual students are motivated to learn for many different reasons (family pressure, desire for good grades, avoiding administrative punishment, interest in a particular subject). Teachers who apply the concepts of community psychology and form personal bonds with students are able to tap into these unique motivators and set each student up for success. These theories have been applied and many studies have found that developing caring relations with a teacher or mentor increases internal motivation in students across the board (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke & Akey, 2004; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Care should be mobilized in education through motivational psychology because of its ability to increase student performance.

In a classroom setting, students reported higher levels of motivation when they saw their teacher as supportive and caring. Teacher support was defined as caring, friendliness, understanding, dedication and dependability or the extent to which teachers value and establish personal relationships with their students (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). This definition emphasizes that supportive, effective teachers are defined by the principles of community psychology; a teacher who knows their students personally is able to truly care for them and thus motivate them. In this study, students who saw their teachers as supportive reported higher levels of interest and enjoyment of schoolwork. They also had higher academic expectations of themselves. In addition, when students had confidence that their teacher would support and help them with challenging academic material, their anxiety about schoolwork decreased along with their disruptive behavior in the classroom. Alternatively, when students viewed their teacher as “promoting performance goals”

their motivation and engagement decreased. They also felt more competitive towards fellow students and were less likely to share ideas and thus their grasp of the material was not as strong as those students who openly discussed material with their classmates (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). These findings illustrate the impact of care on the motivation and performance of students; a caring teacher improves all aspects of student performance, from increased internal motivation, to improved classroom behavior, to a deeper grasp of material. Therefore, motivational psychology and thus care should be publicized and mobilized as a strategy for improving student achievement.

Teachers influence the cognitive strategies used by students, which in turn influences their achievement. Meaningful processing is a cognitive strategy that involves connecting new concepts with existing knowledge. Using this strategy has been shown to result in better performance on various achievement measures (Garcia & Pintrich, 1991). Students employ this strategy when the perceived instrumentality, or how useful students believe the information will be in attaining future goals, is high. Therefore, teachers must care for their students (employing the principles of community psychology) in order to present the material in such a way that its perceived instrumentality is high (Greene et al., 2004). For example, a lesson on the weather system could have high perceived instrumentality because a student wants to be a weatherman, wants to earn a good grade in the class or wants to better understand how to predict weather systems because their family owns a farm. In order for the teacher to get each student to tap into meaningful processing and gain a deep understanding of the material, the teacher must first understand what motivates each student. This concept ties back to the idea of community psychology, the more a teacher understands a particular student as a person, the more they can tailor the material to meet their interests and thus motivate them to engage and learn.

A teacher's behavior has a tremendous impact on a student and vice versa. Research shows that teachers often emulate the level of engagement they perceive from their students. An engaged student is more likely to receive positive teacher behaviors such as involvement, affection and autonomy support. However, an unengaged student is more likely to experience a teacher who ignores or punishes them. While this is a natural human reaction (e.g., the student is passive, the teacher feels un-liked or incompetent and thus wants to spend less time around the student who induces that feeling), it is one that teachers must actively combat. If an unengaged student experiences a teacher who withdraws support and compassion, that student will further

withdraw (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). As we see in many of these studies, an unmotivated student who does not feel cared for is at distinct disadvantage in attempting to reap the full benefits of public education. This is why care must become common practice for educators. Teachers must be aware that their impact on students can be both positive and negative. What may feel like a natural reaction could have detrimental impacts on a student's ability to learn and engage in the classroom. Teachers should be conscious of their interactions with students because even some that feel like natural reactions could be detrimental. Therefore teachers must use behavior and strategies rooted in an ethic of care to ensure that students are not inadvertently isolated, regardless of what they bring to the classroom. Community psychology encourages teachers to form personal bonds with students; these bonds allow teachers to demonstrate care by personalizing instruction to motivate each student, and ultimately improve student performance.

Conclusion

Care is a basic need. As such, it must be protected and promoted. While this has proven difficult to influence in the private family sphere, care is much more easily affected within the realm of public education policy. The research is clear: when students feel cared for, they perform better. The field of psychology offers community and motivational psychology as opportunities for change in public schools. Community psychology defines care in education as teachers who form personal bonds with students and their families so as to better understand student behavior and performance in the classroom. When teachers know their students as part of their environments they are better able to tap into their personal motivators and push them to succeed. When combined, community and motivational psychology provide teachers with a strategy for care that gives each of their students the best opportunity for success. Care must be mobilized in education to illustrate just how influential teachers are to their students and how they can make that influence a positive one.

Care in Education

Psychology research presents care as a basic need for healthy development. Therefore, we must examine different perspectives of care to form a definition of what care looks like, both in theory and practice, and how it can be applied to education. Theoretical, empirical and practical definitions explore the

ways in which care can be expressed and mobilized to create caring schools for all.

Theoretical Definition

“The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning.”

–John Dewey, *Experience and Education*

John Dewey is best known for his child-centered theory of education. He believed the classroom was an extension of the outside world. Although he rarely addressed care directly, his theories on education include many components that we use to define care today. Dewey believed that in order for education to be effective, students must be invested, and in order to make students invested, the curriculum must be relevant to them. This echoes the ideas of community and motivational psychology; a teacher must understand a child’s community in order to effectively motivate them. To accomplish this, teachers must care about their students enough to develop a curriculum centered on their interests. Similar to modern community psychologists, Dewey believed that the most useful form of schooling would focus on the child, their families, their community and their interests. Many misinterpret this theory to mean that Dewey wanted to abandon a traditional curriculum and allow the child to learn whatever they wanted. In fact, Dewey was a strong proponent of a traditional curriculum; however, he believed it must be taught such a way that it was relevant and interesting to the child. To this end, Dewey promoted hands-on and experimental learning; he believed children enjoyed learning more when they were part of the process rather than a patient observer. While teachers can pester and prod children on the importance of learning, Dewey believed that teachers need to make learning relevant and interesting to the students, which means caring enough about the child to learn what is important to them (Dewey, 1916).

“Caring is the bedrock of all successful education.”

–Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*

Nel Noddings is a prominent education philosopher best known for her work on the ethics of care. In 1992, she wrote *The Challenge to Care in*

Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education and expressed her belief that care is the core of successful education. Noddings believes that learning to interact effectively is the single most important lesson to be learned from education. While all teachers want their students to learn a certain set of content and gain a certain set of skills, this alone is not enough, nor will it be accomplished without the help of care (Noddings, 1992).

One of Noddings's most prominent theories is that care is relational. The teacher must express care and the student must recognize the teacher's behavior as care and feel cared for. This is the foundation of moral education. Noddings presents the idea of moral interdependence, meaning that how "good" or "bad" a student acts is dependent on how they are treated. She warns that when a student and teacher are first interacting, previous teachers and other adults influence the student's behavior. However, if the teacher demonstrates care regardless of the student's behavior, the student will eventually reciprocate (Noddings, 1992). This concept of reciprocal care reiterates Skinner and Belmont's (1993) motivational psychology research that teachers must move beyond first appearances and care for the student in order to obtain the best results. It is not a natural reaction to exhibit care to someone who is disengaged, distracted, rude or otherwise uncaring; however, teachers must take the first step and begin the cycle of reciprocal care (Noddings, 1992). Noddings's theory of reciprocal care helps teachers to understand how their demonstration of care impacts their students' behavior and how they can adjust their own actions to best support their students.

"Many students ask to be cared for before they care about."

—Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*

Angela Valenzuela's theory on aesthetic versus authentic care explores care as the key to motivation. Drawing on the likes of Dewey and Noddings, Valenzuela (1999) developed her theory by observing Mexican immigrants and Mexican American students in Texas and the lack of meaningful connections between teachers and students. While the students often expressed authentic care (relations of reciprocity—care about relationships), the teachers expressed and demanded aesthetic care (knowledge and interest in concepts—care about things and ideas). This mismatch of care often meant that neither teachers nor students exhibit care towards the other because they do not believe they are receiving it. Without care school is neither enjoyable nor

worthwhile for students, and engagement, participation and effective learning suffer (Valenzuela, 1999). One reason teachers are so focused on aesthetic care is the pressure for test scores. While the No Child Left Behind Act was designed to set equal and high standards for all students, as Valenzuela explains in an interview in 2005, these standards often have the opposite effect. Often in low performing districts teachers will quietly allow their worst students to fail and dropout instead demonstrating care for all students by putting the extra time and effort in to boost their scores. While No Child Left Behind made low student achievement visible, visibility alone does not fix the problem. Instead, it often forces teachers to prioritize their own needs before the needs of their students. As Valenzuela describes, teachers begin to see failing students as low scores that threaten their jobs, rather than children in desperate need of a caring adult and an education. Instead of setting impossible standards, Valenzuela believes in publicizing methods to actually improve teaching, such as authentic caring instead of aesthetic caring and teaching to the student rather than the test. If the NCLB had promoted ways to enhance student performance rather than standards and cutthroat consequences, it would have been more effective in improving American education (Black & Valenzuela, 2005). Valenzuela presents the theory of aesthetic versus authentic care to illustrate the potential disconnection in care between teachers and students and the disastrous potential effects.

Empirical Definition

Why is care important in a school setting?

Care is essential to the classroom because it helps children learn not only the subject matter but also how to interact with peers and adults. If teachers model and reward care students will learn that caring relations are the ideal way to interact with others, much like they learn to fold a piece of paper to make a snowflake by watching their teacher model it. Reciprocal care on the part of both teachers and students creates a positive classroom environment where students feel encouraged to learn and take risks (NEA, 2015). These positive relationships foster academic and psychological development (Liu, 1997). As mentioned by Dewey (1916) and Valenzuela (1999), care is essential for active engagement; therefore, care is essential for effective teaching and learning. In order to get the best out of their students, teachers must take the time to center the curriculum on examples that are relevant and engaging. Especially in the US today where the population of racial and ethnic minority groups are quickly growing and teachers are still majority white and

female, it is more important than ever to put the child at the center of his or her education to ensure that it is understandable and applicable (Lumpkin, 2007).

What does care look like?

Just as care is difficult to define, it is also difficult to express. At a basic level, a caring teacher must have good will and intention towards his or her students. However, as Noddings points out, care is reciprocal; therefore, both teacher and student must interpret the teacher's actions as caring (Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Noddings, 1992). The National Education Association (NEA) defines a caring teacher as one who listens to students, takes student and parent feedback earnestly, builds trusting relationships with families and is familiar with their students' interests and talents (NEA, 2015). Weimer (2015) adds that using students' names, acknowledging their contributions, and being flexible and understanding are all markers of a caring teacher. A study by Garza, Alejandro, Blythe and Fite (2014) explored the definition of care by studying the habits of teachers labeled "caring" by faculty, students and fellow teachers. They discovered four common themes of caring: fostering a sense of belonging, getting to know students personally, supporting academic success and attending to physiological needs (Garza et al., 2014). While these things are easier said than done, it is useful for teachers to be aware of those behaviors that others typically define as care so they can more easily incorporate them into their own classrooms.

Does care actually make a difference?

The Pygmalion effect (i.e. self-fulfilling prophecy) predicts that if teachers believe in and care for their students, the students in turn believe in themselves and put forth greater effort (Lumpkin, 2007). This idea reiterates the concepts of community and motivational psychology, if teachers demonstrate care by getting to know their students, they will in turn develop the tools they need to push them towards success. A longitudinal study by Pedersen, Faucher and Eaton (1978) found that a group of poor inner-city children who all had one particularly caring teacher had a higher academic self-concept and achievement. The students who had this teacher continued to out perform their peers throughout their lives. While not labeled in the study as care, the Pygmalion effect illustrated by this teacher connects to Noddings' definition of care as reciprocal. The researchers measured this teacher's influence to be .32 (a moderate correlation between this teacher and the future success

of her pupils) compared to .11 for father's occupation and .05 for personal characteristics (both considered weak correlations) (Pederson et al., 1978). While this may be a unique case, it illustrates that caring teachers make measurable academic improvements in those they teach.

A study of student interviews and surveys by Teven and McCroskey (1997) also demonstrates that caring teachers do not go unnoticed by their students. These authors defined caring as being empathetic, understanding and responsive. When students believed that their teacher possessed these qualities they also perceived their teacher as caring. Teachers who were perceived as caring by students were also evaluated more positively. Students who perceived their teachers as caring also evaluated the content more positively and reported that they learned more in the course (Teven & McCroskey, 1997).

Although it may be easier to study standardized test scores than levels of care, care is not an immeasurable, insignificant trait that teachers can choose to adopt or ignore. Care has been defined and measured by many and has proven to be a key component for student success. In the US today, care is commonly heralded as the mark of a great teacher rather than a standard all must live up to. If we know that care increases student performance then we must make it a goal rather than a byproduct of education so that all students can reap the benefits.

Scaling up

What happens when care becomes a goal?

Since care can be measured and defined, the next question is if and how it can be replicated and scaled up. So what happens when care becomes the goal of public education? Although we have not yet reached that phase on a national level, a group of small public schools in New York City took on the challenge beginning in 1974. Deborah Meier (1995) writes of her experience founding and directing Central Park East in her book *The Power of their Ideas*. Her first school was founded as branch of a public school in Harlem by a group of teachers who were fed up with the bureaucracy of traditional public schools and wanted to experiment with their own teaching ideals.

Central Park East began as a school serving only kindergarten through third grade. The school consisted of mainly African American and Latino students. There were no academic qualifications for entrance; families were often referred by social workers or Head Start, or came because they were struggling in a traditional public school. Later Meier (1995) learned that many parents came because the staff seemed "caring, open, friendly, (and)

committed” (23). The founders were dedicated to creating a family-centered school where children felt safe to take risks, try and fail, and express themselves. Meier believed this was only possible if the children’s families trusted the school and its teachers. This was accomplished by frequent family meetings which helped to form respect, trust and understanding. The school also utilized small classes so that teachers could get to know their students and have the time to work with each one individually (Meier, 1995).

The experiment was a success. One tiny school quickly grew to four schools and within each school four grade levels grew to seven. From the first seven graduating classes, 85% received a diploma and 11% received their GED; extremely impressive statistics compared to only 50% of students in New York City as a whole that either receive a diploma or get their GED. They then expanded even farther into high school where the value of care is much more highly contested, but in 1991 less than 5% of students dropped out between 9th and 12th grade and 90% went on to college and stayed there. These revolutionary statistics found in the Central Park East network were on par with NYC private schools of the time, but were unheard of among low-income students of color in public schools (Meier, 1995).

Meier and fellow founders built the schools around the idea that the progressive, child-centered, care-focused education that worked for wealthy private school children could work for everyone and the results speak for themselves. Not only is it clear that one caring teacher makes a difference in their students’ lives, but when care is mobilize, it can make a massive difference. Therefore, we must find a way to replicate the success of the Central Park East schools and mobilize care in such a way that it is applicable to all public schools, not just those with teachers willing to build a new school from the ground up.

Policy Recommendations

There are two essential components that embody care in education: knowledge of the student and student centered learning. The first component must be present in order to accomplish the second; if teachers do not know their students as whole people then they cannot shape their lessons around their students’ interests, communities or future goals. Therefore the question becomes, how can we mobilize and implement care in schools?

Recent education policy has persuaded schools to teach certain subjects and skills by testing for them and basing rankings and funding upon those

scores. While this type of incentive could be a potential method of mobilizing care, care is more difficult to test than math or reading comprehension. In addition, testing care might push teachers to behave in certain ways to achieve high scores, which could undermine their ability to authentically care for their students. Instead of testing for outcomes, we should provide the tools teachers need to achieve these outcomes.

Care has been shown to boost student achievement (Noddings, 1992; NEA, 2015; Lumpkin, 2007). Therefore, we should reward schools that promote care as a method to this end. There are many ways school structure can be shifted to center around the caring relationships between students and teachers. Three of the most common, effective solutions are small schools, small class sizes and looping. Mobilizing care in these ways gives teachers tools rather than assessments and ultimately provides the best chance of success for the students, their teachers and the US education system as a whole.

Small Schools, Small Classes

Many of the factors that comprise care, especially knowledge of the student as a whole person, are only possible in intimate settings where teachers have the time to talk to each individual student on a consistent basis. The small schools movement is founded on the idea that children are more likely to succeed in small schools where they are more apt to form personal connections with teachers, faculty and each other. Meier (1995) credits much of the success of Central Park East to its small size; she believes her family-centered approach would not have been possible on a larger scale. While the research has presented similar results, students in small schools excel both academically and socially; completely redistricting, building new schools and hiring new teachers requires an initial investment that far exceeds any other school reform that has been able to pass through Congress (Toch, 2003). Therefore, it is unlikely that the small schools movement is a realistic option for institutionalizing care in all American public schools.

Small class size is a less involved way of creating similar results. Much research has been done on the topic and the theory holds true: students in smaller class sizes perform better overall on standardized achievement tests (Glass & Smith, 1979; Nye, Hedges & Konstantopoulos, 2000; Molnar et al., 2001; Mathis, 2016; Toch, 2003). Glass and Smith (1979) conducted a meta-analysis on the effect of class size on achievement. They examined a total of 77 studies over 70 years, including 900,000 students in over a dozen countries.

They discovered that class size made a measurable difference. The difference in achievement between a class of 10 and a class of 20 was often more than ten percentage points. They also noticed that there was a tipping point around a class of 15 students where student performance began to increase (Glass & Smith, 1979).

Nye, Hedges and Konstantopoulos (2000) conducted project STAR, one of the first large scale, randomized experiments about the effect of reduced class size. In the study, students were randomly assigned students to small classes (13-18 students) or large classes (22-28 students) and measured the differences at the end of the year, from kindergarten to 3rd grade. They found that students in the smaller classes performed substantially better by the end of second grade than their large class counterparts with higher standardized test scores, better grades and fewer discipline problems. In a later follow-up, these students were also more likely to graduate in four years and more likely to go to college. These positive effects were twice as large for poor and minority students (Nye, Hedges & Konstantopoulos, 2000). Thus this study shows that small class size not only significantly improves achievement, but also works to close the achievement gap for typically low-performing demographics.

Molnar et al. (2001) found similar results in a five-year evaluation of the Wisconsin SAGE program. Just like Glass and Smith (1979), they found that class sizes of 15 or less had substantial and significant effects on student performance. Teachers in the program also reported a better classroom climate and fewer discipline problems. Despite the clear success of this program, Wisconsin was forced to concentrate the program only in lower grades with minority students because it was too costly to be applied to the rest of the school (Molnar et al., 2001).

Finally, Mathis (2016) cites some of the major debates about the effectiveness of shrinking class size. For example, some critics claim that hiring extra teachers to decrease class size may also end up decreasing teacher quality. In California, some schools dispute this argument and claim that teacher quality actually increases because the favorable classroom environment fosters teacher retention. It is unclear whether or not the benefits of small class size continue over the long term; some studies have shown long-term benefits, some have shown no measurable change. While the impact on teacher quality and long-term effects are not yet clear, hiring more teachers and staff in schools nationwide is certainly not an inexpensive way to mobilize care in education (Mathis, 2016).

Ideally, all schools would be redistricted and new schools built so that every child could go to a small school where they would be taught and cared for in a community where they felt at home. These children would reap the benefits of caring relationships with peers, teachers and staff and their achievement would improve as a result. While we know small schools work, it is simply not realistic or cost-effective to restructure the majority of schools in the US to fit the small schools model (Toch, 2003). Even reducing class size in existing schools is an extremely costly way to institutionalize care. Instead we must examine policy options that work within our means to create systems of care and achievement that don't break the bank.

Multiyear Teachers (Looping)

A more feasible way to mobilize care in schools is multiyear teachers, otherwise known as looping. Multiyear teachers loop through two or more grades with the same set of students. This practice provides greater opportunities for caring relations to occur. As a result of extended contact between students and a particular teacher, that teacher naturally learns more about the child both as a student and a person. Therefore, teachers are better able to understand how their students learn and target their strengths and weaknesses. This practice is similar to small schools and small class size in that it alters the school structure to create an environment where care is likely to occur. However, the practice of looping does not require new buildings, teachers or staff, simply restructuring and retraining of existing systems. Furthermore, looping has been studied extensively and yields countless benefits in addition to gains in student achievement (Little & Dacus, 1999; Burke, 1997; Cistone & Shneyderman, 2004).

Both teachers and students reap the benefits of a multiyear system. Without the prospect of a new teacher and new group of students every year, student anxiety decreases (Little & Dacus, 1999; Burke, 1997). Studies show that there is a statistically significant increase in student attendance between the first year with a teacher and the second year (Cistone & Shneyderman, 2004). In addition, these authors found that looped students were 3.5 times as likely to move on to the next grade level. Students are also less likely to report that they didn't like school or thought it was boring (Milburn, 1981). In a series of multiyear teacher interviews, 69% said their students were more willing to participate voluntarily and 85% said that their students were better able to see themselves as important members of a group and have pride in their group, their school and themselves (George, Spreul & Moorefield,

1987). From these studies, we can conclude that looping increases student interest and involvement at school.

A parent's involvement also undergoes positive changes when their children are part of a multiyear classroom. Parents of looped children note that their kids seemed more stable both socially and psychologically (Little & Dacus, 1999). 84% of teachers reported more positive relationships with parents (George et al., 1987). In Project F.A.S.T. in Cleveland, parents also reported feeling more respected by teachers, having more confidence in teachers and administrators and being more likely to seek the school's assistance (Hampton, Mumford & Bond, 1997). Therefore, in addition to positive student-teacher relationships, looping results in more positive parent-teacher relationships. This, in turn, means that the teacher is more apt to be familiar with the child's home life, allowing them to understand and care for the whole child and put community psychology into practice.

In addition to relationship building, looping makes for better instruction and thus higher achievement. Many multiyear teachers note the increase in instructional time that looping provides. When teachers have the same group of students for multiple years, after the first year they do not have to waste instructional time going over rules and expectations and figuring out what each student needs help with and how they learn best. 91% of multiyear teachers believe looping increases instructional time (Cistone & Shneyderman, 2004). We know care is essential, but it takes time to develop caring relationships; looping allows teachers to devote time to forming these bonds without forgoing time for classroom instruction. Instead of spending summers preparing for new students, teachers can spend their time tailoring the curriculum to meet their students' needs. They can plan to devote extra time to concepts they already know will be challenging and even build lessons around students' cultures and interests (Little & Dacus, 1999). The increased time with a group of students also increases the responsibility teachers feel for their students' successes and failures. It not only gives teachers more autonomy to tailor the curriculum, but a heightened sense of ownership for student outcomes and sense of efficacy (Hampton et al., 1997). Looping grants teachers the opportunity to use the benefits of care to their fullest. They have the opportunity to spend time getting to know students without forgoing essential curriculum, and they can then use this knowledge to tailor material to meet their specific students' needs. These opportunities to incorporate care into the classroom produce results that speak for themselves.

Ultimately, education policy reform must be proven effective before it can

be put into place. While many families and educators might measure effectiveness on the basis of student engagement, parental involvement or teacher flexibility, policy makers and voters generally make their decisions on the basis of test scores. Fortunately, looping also scores high in this category. Cistone and Shneyderman (2004) conducted a study in which two sample groups of students were created from 15 different elementary schools with and without looping to ensure the students being compared were similar in terms of academics and demographics. The researchers found that looped students' reading achievement was between 4-8 percentile points greater than their non-looped counterparts in 2nd through 5th grade. Looped students' math achievement scores were also 6-9 percent greater than students in traditional schools (Cistone & Shneyderman, 2004). Project F.A.S.T. in Cleveland, Ohio also reported dramatic effects on student achievement. Reading and math scores on standardized tests were often five to six times what was expected of other child in the same district and the same school. Students even significantly outperformed one-year students when the exact same teacher taught both groups (Hampton et al., 1997). Milburn et al. (1981) studied two elementary schools in similar socioeconomic areas, one with traditional one-year structure, and another with teachers that taught each class for two years or more. The multiyear school outperformed its sister school on every basic skills test available (Milburn et al., 1981). The research is clear; looping produces higher achievement when compared to traditional one-year classrooms.

While simply making a teacher multi-year does not automatically make them a good teacher, it does increase the teacher's accountability for their students' comprehension and achievement. In addition, there is always the possibility of a mismatch of teacher and student. However, this is true within a traditional classroom setting and can be remedied by transferring the student to a different classroom at the end of the year just as they would normally (Little & Dacus, 1999).

Extensive research has shown that looping enhances student enthusiasm, parental involvement, teacher productivity and test scores. Looping is an effective method of infusing care into education without restructuring districts or hiring more teachers. This research was all conducted within existing school districts with existing teachers who wanted to try a different approach, thus looping has been and can be implemented using only the resources that are already present in most public schools. Despite clear evidence on the effectiveness of looping, restructuring a school is still a daunting

task for any administrator. Therefore in order to spread the positive results of multiyear teachers to all students, the federal government should incentivize looping as an evidence-based intervention as part of the recent Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Although these evidence based interventions are currently only required for the bottom five percent of failing schools, the evidence suggests that looping is an effective means of improving scores for schools across the board (Klein, 2015). Many schools are looking for exactly this kind of cheap, simple solution that works within their existing resources. If the ESEA promoted multiyear teachers as an effective evidence-based intervention and offered an incentive to be used to towards extra professional development or the administrative costs of rearranging classrooms, many schools would jump at the opportunity to raise their scores and improve student learning.

In addition, measuring the effectiveness of a new multiyear teacher program could serve as the “additional state indicator” now required by ESEA. This additional indicator could be anything that is not an academic indicator (achievement and growth on tests). The indicator must be chosen and measured on the state level. Some suggestions include student engagement, educator engagement and school climate (Klein, 2015). Looping has been shown to improve student enthusiasm, parental involvement, teacher productivity, increase attendance, decrease tardiness and decrease student anxiety. Any one of these measures could be conducted before and after a looping intervention, either based on school records or student/teacher surveys. If the state found that looping improved any of these measures, which research suggests they would, then the state would have achieved success on their additional indicator for ESEA.

Looping effectively mobilizes care in the classroom by allowing teachers the opportunity to understand their students as whole people and thus center the classroom around their needs and desires. As examined through extensive research, these two fundamental components of care, understanding the student as a whole person and centering classroom instruction around the student, are much more likely to exist in a multiyear classroom. In addition to the inclusion of care as a goal, looping produces better student outcomes than a traditional single-year teaching structure. Therefore, looping should be incentivized at the federal level as part of ESEA’s additional indicator requirement. If the federal government provides funding for schools that institute a plan to establish looping, schools would be more likely to put the time and effort into rearranging their structure to better suit their stu-

dents. The specifics of the looping plan (which grades, which teachers and number of years per loop) could be decided by individual states or districts, thus allowing the plan to be centered around the needs of each community. The mobilization of looping would provide schools with the tools they need to improve student achievement, rather than simply setting lofty goals and punishing schools for not meeting them. We must mobilize care by implementing a policy of looping in American public schools.

Conclusion

Care is a basic need. Care is embodied by a teacher who understands their students as whole people and uses that knowledge to teach in a way that is interesting and relevant to their students. When care becomes a goal of education, students excel. Therefore, in order to improve American public schools, we need not look any further than care. If care is provided, whether it is through small schools, small class sizes or multiyear teachers, students enjoy school more and their scores improve. The best, most cost-efficient option for mobilizing care in education is through multiyear teachers (looping). Multiyear teachers have been shown to enhance student involvement and parent-teacher relationships, as well as improve teacher instruction and student achievement. Looping only costs the school time and small administrative costs to rearrange their current teachers into a multiyear system. Federal policy should incentivize American public schools to institute looping so that teachers have the tools they need to get the results for which everyone is striving. Care is the key to successful education and multiyear teachers are the best way to mobilize care on a national scale.

References

- Barth, R. P. (2009). Preventing child abuse and neglect with parent training: Evidence and opportunities. *The Future of Children*, 19(2), 95-118.
- Black, W. R., & Valenzuela, A. (2005). Educational Accountability for English Language Learners in Texas. *Educational Equity and Accountability*.
- Burke, D. (1997). *Looping: Adding time, strengthening relationships*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary & Early Childhood Education Champaign IL. Cambridge University Press. (2017).
- Cambridge online dictionary, *Cambridge Dictionary online*. Retrieved at April 17, 2017.
- Cistone, P., & Shneyderman, A. (2004). Looping: An empirical evaluation. *International journal of educational policy, research, and practice: Reconceptualizing childhood studies*, 5(1), 47-61.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York, Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *textitExperience and education*. New York, Macmillan.
- Dubois, D. L., & Neville, H. A. (1997). Youth mentoring: Investigation of relationship characteristics and perceived benefits. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 25(3), 227-234.
- Eckenrode, J., Ganzel, B., Henderson, J. C., Smith, E., Olds, D. L., Powers, J., . . . Sidora, K. (2000). Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect With a Program of Nurse Home Visitation. *JAMA*, 284(11), 1385.
- Garcia, T., & Pintrich, P. R. (1992). *Critical Thinking and Its Relationship to Motivation, Learning Strategies, and Classroom Experience*. Ann Arbor, MI; National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning.
- Garza, R., Alejandro, E. A., Blythe, T., & Fite, K. (2014). Caring for Students: What Teachers Have to Say. *ISRN Education*, 2014, 1-7.
- George, P., Spreul, M., & Moorefield J. (1987). *Long-term teacher-student relationships: A middle school case study*. Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.
- Glass, G. V., & Smith, M. L. (1979). Meta-Analysis of Research on Class Size and Achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 1(1).
- Greene, B. A., Miller, R. B., Crowson, H., Duke, B. L., & Akey, K. L. (2004). Predicting high school students' cognitive engagement and achievement: Contributions of classroom perceptions and motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 29(4), 462-482.

- Hampton, F., Mumford, D., & Bond, L. (1997, March). Enhancing urban student achievement through family oriented school practices. Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, Chicago, IL.
- Horwitz, A., Widom, C., McLaughlin, J., & White, H. (2001). The Impact of Childhood Abuse and Neglect on Adult Mental Health: A Prospective Study. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 42(2), 184-201. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3090177>
- Jing-Qiu, L. (1997). The emotional bond between teachers and students: Multi-year relationships. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 79(2), 156.
- Johnson, J. G., Cohen, P., Brown, J., Smailes, E. M., & Bernstein, D. P. (1999). Childhood maltreatment increases risk for personality disorders during early adulthood. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 56(7), 600.
- Klein, A. (2015, Nov. 30). ESEA reauthorization: The every student succeeds act explained. *Education Week: Politics K-12*. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2015/11/esea_reauthorization_the_every.html?qs=esea+reauthorization
- Little, T. S., & Dacus, N. B. (1999). Looping: Moving up with the class. *Educational Leadership*, 57(1), 42-45.
- Lumpkin, A. (2007). Caring teachers the key to student learning. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 43(4), 158-160.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). Classical Texts in Psychology—A Theory of Human Motivation. Retrieved from <http://psychcentral.com/classics/Maslow/motivation.htm>
- Mathis, William J. (2016). Research-based options for education policymaking: the effectiveness of class size reduction. *National Education Policy Center*, University of Colorado.
- Meier, D. (1995). *The power of their ideas: Lessons for America from a small school in Harlem*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Melton, G. (2011). Importance of early childhood development: Young Children's Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/importance-early-childhood-development/according-experts/young-childrens-rights>
- Milburn, D. (1981). A study of multi-age or family-grouped classrooms. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 62(7), 513-514. EJ 242 413.
- Molnar, A., Smith, P., Zahorik, J., Palmer, A., Halbach, A., & Ehrle, K. (2001). Evaluating the SAGE program: A pilot program in targeted pupil-teacher reduction in Wisconsin. *Education Evaluation and Policy*

- Analysis*, 21(2), 165-177.
- NEA Staff. (2015). A Quality Teacher Is a Caring Teacher. Retrieved February, 2017, from <http://www.nea.org/tools/15751.htm>
- Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. Advances in Contemporary Educational Thought series, vol. 8. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nye, B., Hedges, L. V., & Konstantopoulos, S. (2000). The effects of small classes on academic achievement: The results of the Tennessee class size experiment. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(1), 123-151.
- Orford, J. (2008). *Community psychology: challenges, controversies and emerging consensus*. Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Pedersen, E., Faucher, T. A., and Eaton, W. (1978). A New Perspective on the Effects of First-Grade Teachers on Children's Subsequent Adult Status. *Harvard Educational Review*: April 1978, Vol. 48, No. 1, pp. 1-31.
- Ritblatt, S., Beatty, J., Cronan, T. & Ochoa, A. (2002). Relationships among perceptions of parent involvement, time allocation, and demographic characteristics: Implication for policy formation. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(5), 519-549.
- Rogers, D., & Webb, J. (1991). The ethic of caring in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(3), 173-181.
- Ryan, A. M., & Patrick, H. (2001). The classroom social environment and changes in adolescents' motivation and engagement during middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 437-460.
- Skinner, E. A., & Belmont, M. J. (1993). Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behavior and student engagement across the school year. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85(4), 571-581.
- Teven, J. J., & McCroskey, J. C. (1997). The relationship of perceived teacher caring with student learning and teacher evaluation. *Communication Education*, 46(1), 1-9.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Weimer, M., PhD. (2015, November 11). Caring About Students Matters. Retrieved February, 2017, from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/caring-about-students-matters/>



Max Pixel.(n.d.). [Hands Child Luck Friendship Mother Relatives] [Photo]. Retrieved from <http://maxpixel.freegreatpicture.com/Hands-Child-Luck-Friendship-Mother-Relatives-2332022>

Author

Daisy Culkins is a senior at Skidmore College (2018) where she is pursuing a self-determined major in the Social and Political Foundations of Education. She is interested in researching the barriers to implementing best practice methods in individual schools and school systems. At this time, she is currently working on a project to explore looping as an under-used best practice method. She can be reached at daisyculkins@gmail.com. In addition, she would like to thank Professor Hope Casto for her unwavering guidance and support throughout this and every endeavor.