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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses caring relationships and their importance in supporting student learning, examining a study conducted at a public elementary school. The first section describes a theoretical context for care in the school community and argues for its presence in capturing the essence of school reform. It explores one component of care, dialogue, and how dialogue provides a forum for the practice of care. The next section discusses the context and methodology of the study, which supports an examination of care in the development of teacher community. The third section uses two illustrative cases to examine the dialogue in this specific community which reveals how the teachers relate to one another in ways that are consistent with a definition of care. The first case focuses on shared questions about student learning (how the teacher addresses the diversity of reading levels in the first grade). The second case concerns process (how the teachers rally around a curriculum mandate in order to develop a meaningful curriculum for first grade students). The final section of the paper discusses the implications for building caring communities in schools and offers some possible future directions. (Contains 33 references.) (SM)

Developing and Sustaining Teacher Communities: Caring as Central in Teachers' Negotiation of Reading Instruction and Curriculum Implementation

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Finding ways to get at the heart of *how* to improve student learning perplexes educators who wrestle with this very complex issue. Some educators work steadfastly on critical aspects of our schools including developing mathematical communities where students must justify their answers (Cobb, 1997), devising ways for technology to enhance problem solving in the classroom (Kozma & Grant, 1995), and understanding the increasing language and racial diversity of our students (Ogbu, 1994). Others are exploring alternative conceptions of leadership (Sernak, 1998) and teacher preparation (Richardson, 1997). Each of these lines of research is essential and converge on the importance of improving student learning as the singular focus. But *how* do we get there? No matter what line of research is being explored, the direction taken hinges upon the responsibilities and relationships that members involved construct with one another. Much greater attention must be given to these responsibilities and relationships among members who attempt this challenging work. This is also the intent this paper.

In a larger ethnographic study, the development and sustenance of a first grade teacher community provided the impetus to examine the responsibilities and relationships of members as they attempted to develop a meaningful first grade program for students (See Weeks Neal, 1999). Community, as defined in this study, revealed a collective responsibility for student learning and for professional learning among the first grade teachers. Furthermore, four essential elements emerged as central to the teachers' collaborative work-- shared values, committed participation, an emphasis on diversity, and caring relationships. This paper focuses on one of those elements--caring relationships. Specifically, to explore what is meant by *caring relationships* and its importance to supporting student learning, I divide a discussion into four sections. In the first section, I describe a theoretical context for care in school community based mainly on Noddings' research (1984; 1992; 1995) and argue for its presence in capturing the essence of school reform. I explore one component of care, *dialogue*, and how dialogue provides a forum for the practice of care. Second, I discuss the context and methodology of this particular study which supports an examination of care in the development of teacher community. Third, through two illustrative

cases, I examine the dialogue in this specific community which reveals how the teachers relate to one another in ways that are consistent with a definition of care. The first case focuses on shared questions about student learning: how the teachers address the diversity of reading levels in the first grade. The second concerns process: how the teachers rally around a curriculum mandate in order to develop meaningful curriculum for first grade students. Finally, I discuss the implications for building caring communities in schools and offer some possible directions.

A Theoretical Context For Care in School Communities

School reform[1] agendas argue for shifting school structure and practices to improve student learning and highlight the critical role that teachers play in fostering these shifts (Glickman, 1993; Murphy, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1996). As teachers move toward developing student-centered classrooms, they need opportunities to make decisions over issues of importance in their classrooms, to develop their own understanding of them, and to rely on colleagues for expertise and critical review. Much has been written about changes in structure (e.g., shared governance councils and collaborative planning time) and practices (e.g., interdisciplinary curriculum) to empower teachers. Where little attention has been given, however, is to the relationships that teachers construct with one another in order to realize the goals of school reform-- to improve student learning.

Some of the literature dealing with the relationships of members in community characterizes the phenomenon as a need for building trust among members. "Trust is built through disclosing one's thoughts, ideas, conclusions, and feelings and having the other group members respond with acceptance, support, and reciprocation of the disclosures" (Johnson & Johnson, 1997, p. 471). Palmer (1998), an educator who advocates self reflection in teaching, argues that community is about the "capacity for connectedness." In addition, Jackson and his colleagues

[1] Discussion of how the notion of *reform* has evolved is useful background, but a detailed account is beyond the scope of this paper. In the school organizational literature, a shift in emphasis moves from discussions of reforming schools (see Cuban, 1990) to restructuring schools (see Murphy, 1991) to reculturing schools (See Fullan, 1994).

(1993) discuss trust in an ethnography portraying the moral life of schools. They ask why people come to trust each other at all. Trust is "not because of specific acts or particular things but the way they [people] strike us. We can't put our fingers on the source but it emerges expressively" (p. 33). Trust develops over time from what colleagues do. It is not built in a single act but embedded in whole interactions. Part of trust, then, is about the ways in which members respond to one another-- or reciprocate.

While some research attributes "trust" to the building of relationships, Gilligan's (1982) seminal work focused on care as the basis for moral choices. She challenged previously held assumptions about moral development based on Lawrence Kolhberg's stage model (Kohlberg, 1981) which suggested that the highest moral choices are based on principles of justice and rationality. Gilligan posited an alternative that moral and ethical choices are also based on norms of care, connectedness, and relationship. She identified care as an orientation, and cautioned about the inaccuracies of relating care with sentimental feelings as opposed to thought and conscious action. Building on Gilligan's work, Noddings (1984) called attention to the importance of caring as a relation. "A *caring relation* is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human-beings-- a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for. In order for the relation to be properly called caring, both parties must contribute to it in characteristic ways" (Noddings, 1992, p. 14). The point here is that care resides in relationships, not within individuals. It is not simply an individually-held virtue as in, "she is a caring person."

Several other points in Noddings' (1984) description of caring as a relation are relevant to the question of teacher community. First, caring is described as a move away from self. It involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's. Understanding another's point of view is critical to a broader understanding of the issue at hand. Second, there is reciprocity in caring. Mutuality exists in caring relationships whereby all parties contribute. Relation is reciprocal. Third, there is risk in caring. Caring involves opening oneself to others and being responsible for other's well-being. Finally, when working from a caring ethic, no prescriptions exist as to how to participate under given conditions.

Later, Noddings (1992) extends her theory for schools by arguing that schools should be organized as "centers of care" where students are cared for and encouraged to care for others. Noddings applies her theory of care to a model for moral education of students, and outlines four components. A first component, *modeling*, is necessary to show students what it means to care. Students need opportunities to learn how to be responsive cared-for individuals. They need images of others acting in caring ways toward another.

The second component in the care perspective is *practice*. In schools, students should be encouraged to help one another and participate with a spirit of cooperation. To accomplish this, students need opportunities to work at developing the capacity to care. Responding to other students' needs and being able to try a hand at helping is an important part of becoming a carer. Therefore, one such avenue is structuring schools for opportunities to practice care. For example, the service learning movement in many secondary schools and college campuses has blossomed in response to the need to help students develop care and compassion.

The third component from a care perspective is *confirmation*. Noddings suggests that to confirm others is to bring out the best in them. When someone commits an uncaring act, we respond "by attributing the best possible motive consonant with reality" if we are engaged in confirmation (Noddings, 1995, p. 144). Students must be validated and affirmed in caring relations. Adults often play a pivotal role in responding to and confirming students in these ways.

The fourth component and most fundamental to the care model is *dialogue*. True dialogue is open-ended. In attributing the importance of dialogue to Paulo Friere's work (1970; as cited in Noddings, 1995), Noddings writes:

> Participants do not know at the outset what the conclusions will be. Both speak; both listen. Dialogue is not just conversation. There must be a topic, but the topic may shift, either party in a dialogue may divert attention from the original topic to one more crucial, or less sensitive, or more fundamental (p. 140).

Dialogue as defined above suggests an active component of caring. It is a practice that shifts caring from a mere sentiment potentially to a dynamic process required for successful caring. Also,

dialogue provides an invitation to critical examination and deeper self-understanding where one must understand the "other" with whom one is in dialogue. Dialogue "can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process-oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for something undetermined at the beginning" (Noddings, 1992, p. 23).

In contrast to Noddings, Peter Senge and colleagues (1994) understand the role of dialogue in building relationships from a learning organization perspective. They suggest a similar importance.

> As we practice dialogue, we pay attention to the space between the word, not only the words; the timing of action, not only the result; the timbre and tone of voice, not only what is said. We listen for the meaning of the field of inquiry, not only its discrete elements. In short, dialogue creates conditions in which people experience the primacy of the whole (p. 353).

Thus, dialogue is the forum for engagement for community no matter what the issues at hand may be. Each of these four elements-- modeling, practice, confirmation, and dialogue-- may play out in teacher communities as they do for Noddings' work on whole school communities. This idea will be explained in greater detail in the following section.

Methodological Considerations

How does one research the relationships among colleagues in a teacher community? A methodology that attempts to answer this question would capture the relationships among the teachers as they are constructed in this first grade teacher community and are revealed through dialogue and interactions. What follows then, is a brief overview of the school context and the research design including data collection and analysis strategies.

Description of the Context

This study was conducted at Cedar Hill Elementary, a public elementary school nestled in the southwestern part of a mid-size southeastern city. The student population is mostly middle

class and comprised of nearly eighty percent white, twenty percent African American , and very few of other minorities. One section of low income housing is zoned for the school. There are five hundred and twenty-five students at Cedar Hill. Eight first grade teachers and the principal were participants in this study. The eight teachers worked together as a grade level unit within the larger school community[2].

I came to this study two years before its inception through my involvement with the Teacher-in-Residence program at one of the local universities. By working with the school-based teams of each Teacher-in-Residence, I came to know Danielle[3], and her team at Cedar Hill. I had opportunities to understand Danielle and her team's philosophy of teaching over the course of the year through lengthy discussions about their beliefs about student learning and their own learning. Constantly searching for ways to create better learning opportunities for first graders, the team was open to discussion about issues of teaching. I also knew that this team was evolving. According to the present team, the teachers began sharing materials and resources about eight years ago. They began to develop curriculum from the district guidelines and spent hours of their own personal time discussing challenges in teaching first grade. Made public were their beliefs about teaching and learning through their ongoing conversations. Therefore, the team constituted an interesting context to examine teachers' relationships with one another.

At the onset of the 1997-98 year, the year in which this study was conducted, several challenges confronted the teachers. A new curriculum was mandated for grades K-6, a synthesis of Core Knowledge, derived from E. D. Hirsch's (1987) philosophy, and a skills-based approach to subject matter designed in the early 1980s by the central office curriculum staff. In essence, a content-based and skills-based curriculum were blended together. For the first grade teachers in this study, the mandated curriculum was a "blow" to the momentum of the team's curriculum efforts. They had been developing interdisciplinary units that spanned six to nine weeks of instructional time. On the first day of preplanning in August, the teachers looked at each other with

[2] According to the principal and confirmed by the first grade teachers, the first grade team's work together was much more collaborative than other teams at the school.
[3] All names are pseudonyms.

an expression of, "What are we going to do?" Several comments illustrated that the new curriculum was not perceived as a step toward innovation. "This flies in the face of what we believe about children," said Danielle (FN 8/7/97)[4]. And Lolly, a team member who had returned from a leave of absence the prior year to work on her master's degree resounded, "I have just figured out I'm a constructivist and now we have this!" (FN 8/7/97). As the teachers pursued the preset curriculum, they were overwhelmed and frustrated because it seemed so disjointed. There was a sense that there was too much to teach, too fast.

Research Design: Data Collection and Data Analysis

Because of a desire to achieve a close interaction between research design, data collection, and analysis and because of its centrality to developing an intimate understanding of caring among colleagues, the study incorporated a characteristic *funnel* design (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). As the study progressed, I increasingly focused on key situations (Erikson & Gumperz as cited in Michaels, 1981)-- mainly bi-monthly team meetings-- and the dialogue that evolved from them. This dialogue revealed the teachers' relationships as they wrestled with issues of teaching and learning.

Data collection occurred throughout the entire school year (August 1997- May 1998) through participant observation (Spradley, 1980). The corpus of data collected included hand-written and expanded field, methodological, and theoretical notes, extensive audio-taped observations of team meetings, semi-structured interviews with Danielle and the other first grade teachers at key points in the year, informal conversations with them, and documents analysis of meeting agendas and curriculum they developed.

Data analysis and interpretation were not distinct stages but a year-long dialectical interaction. The processes of examining the literature and conducting tentative data analysis were interwoven as recurring themes emerged (LeCompte & Preissle, 1984). My purposes in this

[4] Transcription conventions include: "IN" indicates interviews and subsequent numbering identifies the order of interviews. "GR" represents group reflection. "FN" represents field notes. The date conducted follows the abbreviations.

iterative process were to delineate patterns that were grounded in the data and supported by my developing theoretical understandings of that data. I tested and retested my hypotheses against the growing corpus of data and intentionally sought confirming and disconfirming cases. At the conclusion of my data collection in the field, I read all expanded field notes and interview transcriptions, and reviewed all documents. I paid particular attention to the theoretical notes and memos and the themes that were explored through them.

From a theoretical framework based mainly on Noddings' four components of care in whole school community and my theoretical notes from the study, I developed three key constructs of caring dialogue in this particular teacher community: *invitations to ideas*, *convergence on shared values*, and *problem solving*. Similar to Noddings' argument that dialogue is most fundamental, the analysis of the work of this specific teacher community points to dialogue as the central forum for the practice of care. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between caring and dialogue. The arrows that connect dialogue to the three constructs are bi-directional to illustrate the generative nature of dialogue in this study. A brief schematic of the dimensions is provided here and will be explored further within the cases.

Dialogue as a Component of Care

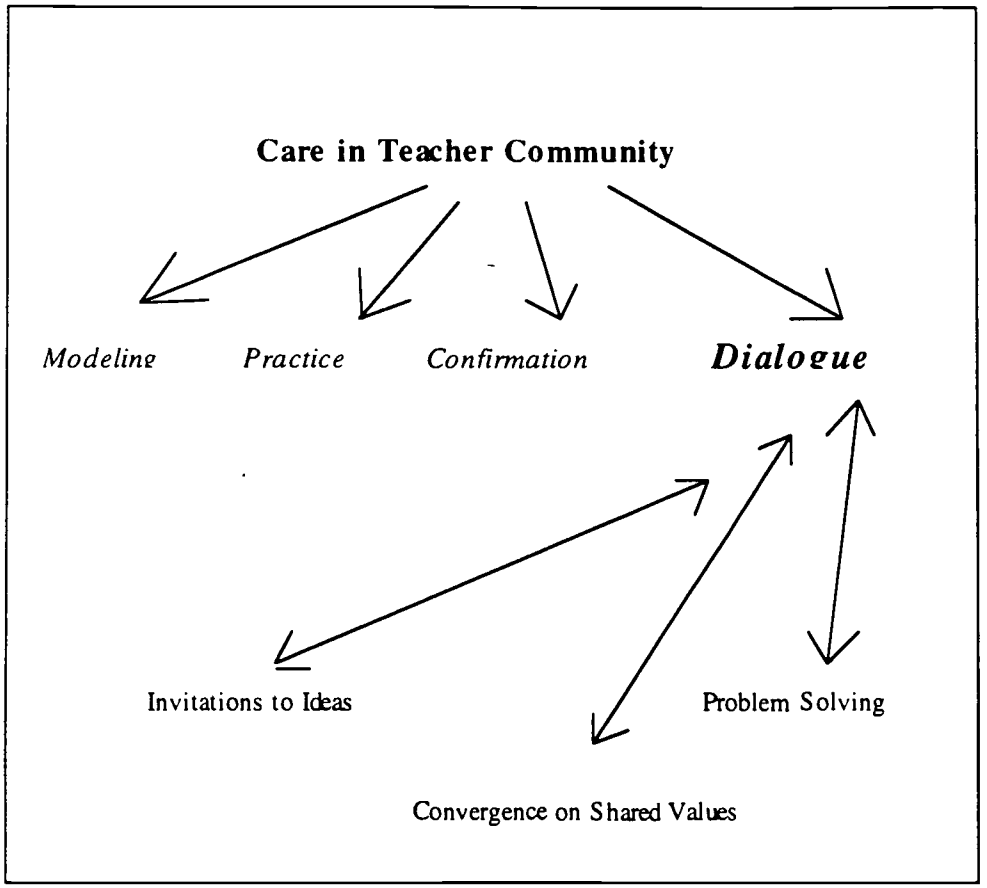

Figure 1. Care in Teacher Community

Invitations. The first dimension of dialogue shows the ways in which the teachers elicit one another's perspectives and ideas. Phrases such as, "Here's what I'm thinking, how about you?" and "We need to open this up for discussion because we haven't heard from everyone" provide ways for others to enter the conversation. These invitations, questions or statements that call other voices to the table, are possible because members report a genuine desire to understand and to include other perspectives. This notion is compatible with Palmer's (1998) argument that diversity in viewpoints is necessary to understand the "great things" and is evidenced in the reading case where diverse pedagogy is a central issue for the teachers. Dialogue then becomes the vehicle for exploring this diversity. Furthermore, relations which permit a level of intimacy and disclosure

do not just happen; they require understanding of other's preferences and predilections, an idea central to caring relations. For the first grade teachers, this means being invited to and acting upon a desire to speak openly about what they feel, think, and believe. Giving and receiving such invitations requires a level of openness and is part of the vehicle for caring.

Convergence on shared values. The second dimension of caring dialogue involves the ways in which members center and recenter the dialogue around their shared values and purposes. Kept at the foreground of discussion are the teachers' beliefs about students-- meeting their needs, providing opportunities for their success, and creating connections across the curriculum to maintain a level of coherence in students' learning (See Weeks Neal, 1999). Thus, while members articulate divergent perspectives on issues of teaching, they emphasize what they hold in common. If the dialogue becomes too disparate or diverse perspectives scatter the central strand in the conversation, the teachers revisit their shared values by asking questions such as, "What are our shared purposes here?" In effect, this action reconnects the divergent viewpoints around a common agenda. In other words, drawing on the values and purposes the teachers have in common builds a sense of commitment and shared images. These shared images reinforce their relationships with one another.

Problem solving. The third dimension of dialogue speaks to the emphasis the teachers place on problem solving in their conversations. When concerns about teaching (e.g., curriculum, assessment, organization, and procedures) are voiced by individuals, the team works toward devising ways to address the concerns. Concerns and questions become the basis for discussion wherein the team emphasizes the possibilities and opportunities of their shared concerns. Dialogue highlights "what can be done" rather than what cannot. By centering the conversation around the opportunities embedded in teaching, the teachers rally around the possibilities stemming from their work together rather than a list of constraints. A focus on possibilities invites further connection with one another and enables their work to progress. For example, instead of revealing a list of constraints about why the new curriculum will not work, the teachers emphasize the curriculum's strengths and build on the strands they identify as possibilities for first grade students. Lolly

describes how the emphasis on the "sky is the limit" shifts conversation patterns from complaining about the curriculum, to what can be done with the curriculum. "It's a creative process for us" (IN.1, LM, 9/8/97).

Two Cases of Care: Teaching Reading and Implementing Curriculum

> I like this sentence, "It [caring] permits disclosure in a safe setting." And I think that's what we're saying here. We feel like we can disclose, and disclosure means spilling your guts and feeling safe about it. I don't think there's anybody in here that feels like we couldn't say something and feel confident that it would stay within this group. When you talk about dialogue, you take down the barriers and that disclosure invites other disclosure (Lolly's thoughts, shared during a discussion of Noddings' *Care and Moral Education* on April 28, 1998).

Near the end of the 1997-1998 school year, the teachers and I were attempting to understand more about the caring ethic that pervaded the team. Together, we read and discussed an article by Nel Noddings (*Care and Moral Education*, 1995) that described her framework for care and moral education in schools. During the discussion, Lolly revealed the previous comments which indicated her belief that dialogue was an essential part of caring relations. Dialogue is thus explored through two cases of care in this section.

Case #1: How Do We Meet the Diverse Needs of Readers?

In order to understand how the team confronts ongoing questions of teaching reading within the context of care, I illustrate two major ideas. First, I briefly summarize the case in reading by addressing the following questions: What did the teachers talk about in terms of teaching reading? and What were the issues on which the teachers agreed and disagreed about teaching reading? Second, and more importantly, I analyze this case by using two of the previously described constructs of dialogue. How do the teachers invite divergent perspectives on reading? How do they create space to voice difference and contradiction? and How does the practice of caring enable them to come to consensus about teaching reading?

Overview of the case. Across the first grade classrooms, students' reading abilities ranged from emergent to fluent. While some students had been exposed to few literacy events and were becoming familiar with concepts of print, others had developed sophisticated vocabularies and prediction strategies by reading chapter books. This provided an on-going challenge for the teachers.

The district's requirements for teaching reading consisted of the use of a reading basal series and a skills-based program to guide instruction. The teachers followed these guidelines but augmented their program with many other resources and instructional strategies. They often read children's literature to the entire class, devised many opportunities for students to read and write in more authentic situations than by use of basals, and maintained extensive classroom libraries of children's literature, beckoning the students to read. They varied instruction within whole class, small group, and individual formats. Among the first grade teachers, there was general consensus that students needed many different types of opportunities to engage in reading and that instruction must evolve from their experiences. Where they differed, however, was in specific instructional grouping patterns to reach these shared views. More will be said about this later.

After a few weeks of school (FN 8/27/97), several team members raised the question of how to address the diverse needs of readers. Concerns stemmed from the aforementioned observations of students. In particular, some teachers were concerned about ensuring that very capable readers throughout the first grade had opportunities "to fly" (FN 9/17/97). Implicit was the expectation of relying on the collective wisdom about teaching reading, not only to inform instruction in individual classrooms, but also to develop additional ways the entire team could support students' reading needs.

To this end, the teachers decided to create a first grade format to share the responsibility for teaching reading. They agreed to rotate the first grade students for one hour weekly among the teachers. This strategy was built on the notion that all adult members of the first grade community might know and support students. During this time, the teachers focused on specific concepts in reading with their group of students. For example, students who needed guided reading in chapter

books gathered in one classroom, while students who needed early literacy experiences would gather in another. In addition, one group was comprised of high level readers who explored Junior Great Books. The team called the rotations, *Success Groups*, based on its belief that this process would provide opportunities for fostering success among students. Therefore, some groups were based on ability, yet embraced the same theme across them (e.g., themes included *Homes* and *Cinderella* and its multiple versions) with the exception of the Junior Great Books group.

How students would be grouped for instruction required many conversations throughout the year. There was no single correct way. The team renegotiated the composition of student groups as events and insights informed their understanding of reading. For example, the team initially discussed what constituted reading groups based on early observations of students (FN 8/27/97), clarified definitions such as *high ability* (FN 9/17/97), discussed assessment to collect data on student reading levels in order to redefine the groups (FN 9/30/97; FN 10/29/97; FN 11/18/97), addressed the issue of reading enrichment activities in the classroom (FN 3/25/97), and sought the expertise of the school psychologist for insights about the multiple levels of reading (FN 3/25/97). In fact, after the trial basis of the Success Groups, the teachers relied heavily on assessment techniques such as Individual Reading Inventories to guide placement into the accelerated reading group and to assess lower readers. Further, the support from the principal to use the Junior Great Books program to work with accelerated readers became a reality from the second six weeks until the end of the year. Each of these strands was part of the conversation about teaching reading, a conversation Angela suggested, "We haven't resolved. We may never, but it's important to always talk about it" (IN.2, AD, 3/26/97). Indeed, blending different perspectives into the continuing dialogue about reading may never be resolved. What was critical was having a forum to engage such perspectives.

Pertinent to a discussion of caring was that the teachers differed in <u>how</u> to meet the needs of the diverse reading levels through Success Groups. The decision to create high, low, and mixed ability groups was not instantaneous. Some felt strongly that grouping students by ability

for one hour a week and using the Junior Great Books Program [5] to address the needs of very able readers was a sound strategy. Some believed that pooling high readers was legitimate, but that their work should also be part of the agreed upon theme for Success Groups. The assumption underlying the Success Groups was that each group would work on the same theme, but that instruction would be differentiated depending on the group. As part of the same experience, students would have a lesser chance of perceiving that their group was "different" from others.

In addition to these perspectives, the teachers voiced differences to how to use instructional time for lower readers. The belief of some teachers was that low readers needed opportunities to flourish with similar ability students. Another teacher held fast to the belief that mixed-ability groups might serve student needs better. Her argument was that lower readers needed role models found in heterogeneous groups.

This brief story about how the team took collective responsibility for addressing the needs of students' diverse reading abilities and developing a course of action is instructive in and of itself. It provides a viewpoint on an issue that teachers inevitably confront, whether alone or with the support of colleagues. Teaching reading (or math, or science, or social studies, or anything) requires that teachers look at each class and every student to discern ways to meet changing needs. Finding ways to meet the needs of students is a shared value and responsibility for the team. What follows, then, reveals the caring context in which they addressed these needs.

Invitations: What constitutes a reading group? In exploring options about how the teachers might employ different strategies and grouping patterns to teach reading, Kim and Angela began a discussion. They mentioned the possibilities of grouping high-ability readers while students of different abilities would be involved in similar projects. The following dialogue was from a meeting on September 17, 1997[6] and provided the inception of what would be, a topic of conversation revisited throughout the year. Both Kim and Angela took the lead and presented their views on the composition of reading groups. They built off one another, but invited others to the

[5] Annie Bass was a strong advocate of the Junior Great Books program and encouraged the first grade teachers to experiment with it. She provided funding for the materials for the program.

[6] "....." Denotes omission of transcription because it strayed from the developing argument of caring as a relation.

dialogue by raising questions and directly seeking their opinions. Implicit in the ways in which the teachers expressed their ideas and opened the dialogue was the suggestion, "Here's what I am thinking. Your ideas are necessary for our collective understanding."

Kim: Last year we only pulled our high readers. And you know we thought this year we would include all of them in our special projects. But we could mix every group except for that high group. That high group needs to fly on stuff like this. They need to be with their peers academically where the sky is the limit.

Angela: Well, the only thing that I would like to bring up here is that, sometimes the high group is high in one place, maybe not in another. And the low group is low in one place but very high in others.

Katie: Some of my most able math people, are not reading yet.

Kim: Yes, but we know we get some readers that need to fly. And they need to have an opportunity to do that.

Angela: So how do we decide? Are we talking about readers and nonreaders? If we're talking about readers and nonreaders, then I think when we do activities with the readers, the high readers, maybe we're going to include higher level reading books. The low level readers may be able to create a *Homes* project or neighborhood scene better than students with higher abilities.

Kim: Why sure! Well, we're basically doing this to meet the needs of our high level learners and high level thinkers. But, I really think it is going to benefit them all because we are talking about something exciting and fun, a time for them to mix with other children and to be creative.

Angela: Now, how do we manage it? As far as each of us [teachers]. What are we each doing? How would this happen during that hour?

Kim: This is my outlook on it. All of you, let me know what you think. Each six weeks, one of us would take that high level group...Well, actually each of us could take one of these [Core Curriculum] themes and put down some suggested activities that we might do. What do you think?

Angela: So you're suggesting, we need to do something mainly for the high readers?

Kim: I think so. Let's open it up for discussion.

At this point, Kim led in putting forth ideas and Angela responded to Kim's reasoning. Angela raised questions in the spirit of brainstorming. She asked, "How would this play out?" These open-ended questions had the effect of fueling additional conversation. After Kim and

Angela put forth a set of ideas to be considered by others, Kim opened up the discussion to make space for additional perspectives. She stated, "Let me know what you think," which had the effect of inviting others to comment. The assumption was that other perspectives were necessary for developing an understanding of working with high level readers.

Essential to the idea that invitations were integral in caring dialogue was that others were able to receive and respond to the invitation. Akin to the centrality of reciprocity in caring relationships, as Noddings (1992) argued, was reciprocity in invitations. Once an invitation has been issued and others recognize it, participants had the responsibility to respond honestly and openly. This involved a level of risk for others. In this case, Danielle picked up the invitation and stated the following.

Danielle: I think it would be helpful for me, though, if I had a mixture of the other children because it's helpful to do a little peer tutoring, when I am putting together partners or cooperative group activities.

Angela: It's only going to be one hour a week.

Danielle: But I still feel like they can learn much from their peers. I mean, I agree with putting those children who really need to be challenged in a group by themselves.

From here, the conversation shifted in emphasis, a natural occurrence for a group with eight members. But Danielle was not satisfied with how the student groups might be defined, so she returned to the discussion on mixed ability grouping. Danielle was open to considering other ideas about groupings, including Angela's perspective on working with emergent readers in a group by themselves. However, as was the case for every member, Danielle assumed the responsibility for openness, while also articulating her perspective. Therefore, once members' voices were solicited, all participants had the responsibility to listen and respond until others were satisfied that their voices had been *heard*. This value stemmed from a desire to honor one another's contributions, a notion central to maintaining caring relationships throughout the dialogue. Hence, Danielle, revisited her earlier line of reasoning.

Danielle: But still, aren't we going to focus on... I'm getting confused now. I think we are getting back to reading now. I pictured it, envisioned

it, we would all be doing *Homes* as a theme [from the Core Curriculum]. We could all do different projects and we'd even mentioned coming together in some kind of assembly or something at the end to share what we had done. So it won't be that some are going to Mary and reading a book that's not related possibly, and some are coming to us for a themed group.

.....

Danielle: But I still think...I don't know if I agree, putting all of those low students together and they don't have anyone to model for them.

Angela: Well, it would be like a tutoring sort of thing, a time for them to stand on their own, maybe. Because sometimes it's good for them to have the peering. But sometimes they need to be forced to try to do something on their own. Then they can be proud of themselves. Remember my Dominique from last year? When he was with that small group where the children were similar in ability, they were getting started on reading, you could see. Oh! He can really do something... It just makes sense to me that if we're going to do something for the higher readers, let's do something for the lower readers too. Our justification is zeroing in on their needs.

Danielle: I don't know. You could have discussion groups in there going, if they were children of all abilities. I mean, that's what I've been thinking. Then you could get a book that relates to *Homes*. I think that it's important that we all stick to the same theme, then when we share, it's not going to be so apparent. "Oh, look what we did." Today, for instance, on those [Word Study] charts I put Lashanda and Evelyn together. It was amazing what Lashanda did. If I had put Lashanda and Tereka together, we wouldn't have had a chart with very many ideas on it. And Evelyn felt like the teacher, and she learned from it too.

Angela: But Danielle, we're still doing that every other day in our own classrooms, through Word Study, through oral reading. I feel strongly that we should allow some of the lower readers to think or feel that they can teach somebody else and that they can do something. And I think it would do a tremendous amount for their self esteem which will carry over to their academics.

Danielle: On the other hand, I don't want them to think, "Why am I in this group every week? Is something wrong with me?"

Angela: Well, I don't know. I guess this is an issue we have to think about for them....what's more important for them.

Danielle: Well, I think it's really touchy for them.

At this point, several different grouping strategies for reading instruction were on the table, each justified by the teachers' personal theories. The different perspectives included enabling accelerated readers opportunities to be challenged, concentrating on emergent readers in one group

in order to work on specific strategies, and providing heterogeneous grouping so that students could learn from peers and not feel differentiated from others[7].

While these different perspectives were voiced, they were not presented as rigid opinions. In other words, the teachers expressed their perspectives to inform the collective understanding of teaching reading, not to position themselves in camps and attempt to persuade others to their "side." In fact, as will be noted in the next section, actions taken from this conversation were not those of any particular individual, rather they were constructed from the collective voice. Thus, Noddings' argument holds that participants do not know at the outset what the conclusions will be. Or, as Lolly reminded us, "We can disagree with each other's ideas. And that's okay. It's important that we really listen. Who knows where it will take us" (IN.2, LM 3/16/97).

Convergence on shared goals for meeting student needs. Given that the teachers agreed to confront the challenges of meeting the needs of student readers, their diverse perspectives gave rise to the need to move toward a common course of action. This was not a case in which teachers aired their differences and then closed their doors and took independent action. Norms of independence that pervade schools suggest that even where teachers do articulate strong differences, they return to their classrooms and do their "own thing," unfettered by others' beliefs and theories. In contrast, the first grade teachers held one another accountable by embracing a collective responsibility for all students and developing a collective course of action to address the needs in reading. Thus, out of their differences, they reached a consensus about a set of instructional reading strategies for the entire first grade.

How did this team champion individual perspectives yet move toward a shared view to take *action*? In this case, a collective action, developing strategies to teach reading across the first grade, was required despite members' diverse perspectives. One way the teachers maintained their relationships amidst strong differences was by focusing on common values and outcomes necessary to devising a shared action. While maintaining the integrity of individuals' ideas, the teachers emphasized their larger purposes and maintained relationships in the face of differences.

[7] This is an oversimplification. Teachers have complex and distinct theories about teaching reading.

There was a convergence around their shared values. Several short examples in the dialogue about reading illustrate this point.

After the conversation in which Danielle expressed concern for suggested grouping patterns, Angela referred back to a common base for all students-- they all have thinking skills. Further, Angela then suggested that the team needed to clarify the purposes for groups. Was the focus to be on reading? Or was the focus on promoting higher level thinking? Asking the teachers to redefine the purposes of the groups rallied them around their shared concerns and values. Consider Angela's comment:

> Angela: And all of them have the thinking skills. I feel like a lot of them who cannot read have thinking skills. Remind me again, what exactly is our goal here? Let's define the purposes of the groups.

Later in the conversation, Kim encouraged the team to pinpoint the needs of students. From Kim's question evolved the collective decision to focus on reading.

> Kim: Let's remember what we are trying to do here that is different from what we do in our own classrooms. What is our strategy?

Katie also contributed to convergence around the team's shared values, that is, to meet the needs of students in reading. Further, she highlighted the diversity of these needs. Her contribution was to suggest that the team may need to experiment with several different strategies indicated by the team members.

> Katie: Maybe this is just for the first time [first six weeks]. Maybe we can get a feel for these children. We want to try to figure out how to meet each of their needs. We all want that. And whatever we try, it may not work.

As the teachers moved toward consensus on a course of action, several voices highlighted portions of their shared beliefs across differences in individuals' beliefs. The dialogue suggested a common search for understanding and empathy toward others. The teachers entered a genuine quest to develop a shared understanding undetermined from the start. Of particular importance was the teachers' reaffirmation of their shared values. They had not conducted this discussion from opposing camps suggested by the perspective of "to ability group or not." Instead, they constantly reaffirmed their common ground, implied by the question, "How do we meet the needs of diverse

readers?" At the end of the discussion, they decided to create Success Groups on a trial basis. One was to be an accelerated Success Group, one was to focus on the needs of lower readers, and four would be mixed ability. They also concluded by highlighting and affirming the commitment to work on this challenging issue. Following was the end of the September 17, 1997 discussion:

Kim:	Okay. We can try it for six weeks.
Danielle:	I just don't want to commit to it all year. I want to make sure that all children feel successful. I'm willing to experiment with grouping the higher level together and letting Angela work with the lower readers. Let's see.
Kim:	Let's see what happens with the children. This has been an important discussion. We've worked hard on this together.
Angela:	Yes. This is tough and really important.

At the conclusion of the conversation, different viewpoints were heard and responses were made. The teachers exit the conversation affirmed, whether or not they *persuaded* anyone to their perspective. Hence, the previous excerpt confirms the notion that they had made great strides in their ongoing commitment to addressing the wide-ranging abilities of readers.

Conclusions from Discussion about Reading

As mentioned previously, what surrounded the issue of teaching reading was that the teachers constantly entertained and refined ways to grapple with students' reading abilities. Within this community, there were avenues for highlighting shared values and points of difference that honored individual perspectives and maintained relationships across differences. Out of a desire to understand other ideas, evolved a sense of responsibility to listen to and to respond openly to one another. Dialogue as defined here was about talking and listening, sharing and responding to each other.

How does this come about? The dialogue invited the multiple voices of its members. It was complex, yet confirming. The teachers articulated their own theories of reading, and "opened up the discussion" to invite other perspectives. For the team, it was important to listen and to seek clarification. Invitations required that members not only elicited ideas from others, but responded

in open ways. The conclusion of this conversation suggested that the team would "have a go" at this model of reading instruction for six weeks.

The dialogue began with and returned to the values held in common by this group. Addressing the wide-ranging needs of readers was a communal value. Further, enabling students to be successful, yet not making them feel less able than their peers, was a shared value. This value entered the conversation on grouping by ability. There was a sense that this issue was "our" issue, not the responsibility of individual teachers to work out on their own. Therefore, when the teachers articulated strong differences, they worked toward a common course of action by converging on their shared values.

In essence, the practice of caring assumed that everyone's voice was necessary to grapple with complex issues involved in teaching, in contrast to a perception of tolerating different perspectives or simply being polite. The practice of caring created a forum for engagement around inevitable differences of opinions, viewpoints, and theories among members of school communities. What was evidenced here was that the teachers had distinct ideas while also being open to genuine dialogue.

Case #2: How Do We Work with the Core Curriculum to Support Our Students?

While one strand of dialogue for the first grade teachers at Cedar Hill centered on teaching reading, another centered more on teaching processes, or working with curriculum, and provides the framework for this section. First, I paint an overview of the Core Curriculum story that unfolded across the 1997-98 school year. Working with the new curriculum was filled with trial and error, and successes and failures. These circumstances are briefly addressed. Second, I revisit the case of implementing the new curriculum by examining the third dimension of caring dialogue as construed by this study, the emphasis on opportunities in the dialogue.

Overview of the case. From the previous section describing the context of Cedar Hill, readers gained a sense of how the Core Curriculum came to be within the political context of a large urban school system. Included in this description was that the new Core Curriculum (CC),

as Metro called it, was a synthesis of Core Knowledge from E. D. Hirsch's (1987) philosophy, and a skills-based approach to subject matter designed in the early 1980s by the central office curriculum staff. The mandated curriculum was a "blow" to the momentum from the team's planning. As mentioned previously, Lolly stated, "I have just figured out I'm a constructivist and now we have this!" (FN 8/7/97).

However, their frustrations did not lead to inaction. What evolved from the team was the commitment by all eight to work together to develop thematic units[8] from the curriculum. Much of the conversation at team meetings and other times centered on the new curriculum: How will we "web" the curriculum? How can we make the subjects "connect?" What can we leave out because there is simply too much to cover in any depth? The teachers took several actions to accommodate the new curriculum.

They developed structures to make sense of the new curriculum (See Weeks Neal, 1999, for more about the team's structures). They created notebooks that housed the immediate requirements of the Core Curriculum , their daily plans, and their long-term units. They devised centrally-located theme boxes to pool their literature in order to have copious resources from which to draw. Later, the teachers recognized that their newly-devised system would not work because they could not find what they needed. For example, because books on pilgrims were in a *Thanksgiving* box instead of an ***Immigrants*** box, they remained unused during a mini-unit on immigrants. Hence, they altered their system of storing resources. More importantly, they created a web structure for working with weekly planning to address the mandated curriculum within larger thematic units. The purposes for this structure changed dramatically over the course of the year and focused their evolving conversations.

Therefore, from this webbing structure, they refined the ways in which they planned instruction. During the first six weeks, the web revealed a collection of isolated skills and concepts. For example, during the third week of school, under the theme of "Family," the team

[8] Based on the belief of making connections across the curriculum, the teachers decided from the onset to develop thematic units with CC. However, the units were not thematic at the beginning as they would define it. It took them most of the year to make the various content and skills "connect" as they desired.

emphasized disparate concepts such as shapes and problem solving in math, identification of K/M/N in Word Study, and word order through the basal story called, "Silly Sally". Each of these isolated concepts was required. However, the team's growing dissatisfaction with the disconnections led them to choose what they would emphasize and what they would merely "expose" students to in the curriculum.

The teachers experimented with refining the curriculum in different ways. They often brainstormed ideas on a given theme during meetings. Pairs of teachers devised units to share with the entire first grade, an action that Lolly characterized as an "intermediate step" (FN 1/14/98). The teachers attempted to "web across the curriculum" by extracting the themes from the CC topics, but also to develop the themes based on their prior experiences and students' needs. Even at the end of the year, however, the teachers were not satisfied with the curriculum . "We still have lots more to do to make it meaningful for children" (IN.2, CB, 3/26/97).

Care in context: Problem solving about the curriculum. What makes the teachers' work on curriculum refinement of special interest? Embedded in the context of this community, the teachers' reflection on and refinement of the curriculum was indicative of ways they related to one another. They connected as problem solvers who were deeply concerned with one another's joys and frustrations in teaching. Their responsibility involved satisfying the basic human need to be cared for (Noddings, 1984) and supported through challenges such as developing meaningful curriculum. To illustrate further the notion that dialogue provided a forum for caring, I revisit three events from across the year encompassing the conversation about curriculum.

The first event surrounded the initial reactions to CC and their first steps in working with it. After the immediate shock of a vastly different curriculum, the teachers began to channel their energies. "We took a stance from the start and said, how can we help each other, rely on each other? You won't find us griping our energies away as you do in other places" (IN.1, KC, 9/3/97). As part of the agreement to share the burden of the new curriculum, they focused on what they *could* do, in contrast to what was beyond their control. At the second team meeting (FN 8/27/97), the team began a process for working with the new curriculum. Once they read the ten

pages of required skills and content to be covered during the first six weeks (for which they are held accountable for "exposure" to students), there was a sense of "what now?" Teachers unloaded their frustrations and insecurities about the curriculum.

Lolly: I am so overwhelmed. Where do I begin? What manuals should I be reading?

Mary: How are you managing all of these different subjects? What is CCRP exactly?

Kim: No one needs to panic. We are in this together and will plan together so that everyone feels comfortable with the curriculum. You are new [referring to Lolly and Mary] so there is so much new for you. We will bring you up to speed on what we know. But we all could use the help so we don't feel overwhelmed.

Danielle: I went home last night, and thought, "where do I begin?" There's just so much. So I gathered all of my manuals together and that new curriculum notebook. I decided to make a working notebook and use it for each six weeks to help me organize everything. I have a section on the curriculum [the official document from Metro]. I have a place for daily lesson plans and our weekly lessons. I brought you guys notebooks if you wanted to do something like this. Don't feel like you have to, but it gave me a sense of relief. Mary, we will help you understand CCRP, MIP and all of that stuff.

Lolly: What a great idea, Danielle.

.....

I don't feel as overwhelmed with what we have to do because you guys are here to help. We will make it work.

Beyond the scope of the discussion, but meriting brief mention, was that the community afforded a special kind of mentorship to new teachers like Lolly and Mary. Team members stepped out of the discussion from time to time to illuminate key issues for "new" members. For all of them, the team dialogue provided a forum to air insecurities and a filter to sift through incoming information such as curriculum mandates and accountability memos from central office. This forum provided a place to be tentative or to imply that one is overwhelmed as articulated by Danielle's comments.

In addition, Danielle's contribution about the notebook suggested another possibility for dialogue as a forum for caring. Members could not only air their tentative ideas or be unsure of themselves, but they could offer suggestions to others. In essence, Danielle stated to her

colleagues, "Here's one way we might better manage the CC. I invite you to experiment with it." What this contribution did for other members was implied by Lolly. It gave her a place to begin, a place to think about how one might go about working with this CC. Later, Lolly voiced that the curriculum notebook was her "working notebook and lifesaver" (FN 10/7/97).

A second event that illustrated how dialogue shaped opportunities for teachers to work through problems occurred from an urgent need to gather resources (e.g., teaching materials, children's literature, maps, and globes) to teach specific content initiated by the Core Knowledge part of the curriculum. For example, the first grade curriculum required that students be exposed to world religions including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Because this topic was not addressed in first grade before, resources were scant. Thus, the teachers raised the question, "How can we gather resources so that we all might benefit?" Kim explains, "We need to come up with a system where we can share our materials" (FN 9/30/97). Thus, with skepticism by some, including Angela who thought they needed to keep the resources within individual classrooms, the team decided to create boxes identifying the upcoming CC topics. In December, Lolly explained why the system did not work (FN 12/2/97).

Lolly: I think it's great that everyone wanted to share materials but we made troubles for ourselves. We didn't know where the boxes were on the right topics and how we filed them [the various resources].

Angela: We don't really know what things we have. What is another way we can share materials on Core topics, but not file them away for oblivion? Plus, we need to spend our Core money on things we need, not things we already have.

Kim: Okay. Let's keep them in our own rooms and then when the topic comes up, it's your [each teacher's] responsibility to rotate the materials to everyone. Everyone will need to bring your own stuff to the meeting where we plan on that unit.

Katie: I agree. Yeah, and we can buy materials that we can rotate like sets of magnets for the electricity unit. And we can pool all the money and spend it on the things we need [Each grade level was given some money to spend on materials designated for CC. Some grade levels at the school divided the allocated money among the teachers to spend on CC].

Lolly: I have magnets left over from a kindergarten unit. We can use them.

From this excerpted dialogue, one can surmise several key ideas. First, the system the team devised to collect materials did not work. Hence, the teachers brought to the conversation this very point and asked, "What else can we do?" They took on the role of problem solvers in the dialogue. Second, ideas brought forth built off one another; they were "watered" (IN.1, KC, 9/3/97). "Yes, we can do this" was the sentiment fueling additional possibilities. This contrasted with the team's report of occurrences at other grade levels in the school and at other Metro schools. At a team meeting, Kim explained, "So many teachers are complaining that they don't have the resources to teach the content required. I wonder what they are doing to [remedy] the problem" (FN 9/23/97). Perceiving CC as an opportunity(however mismatched and poorly constructed the teachers may believe it is), and one another as resources, enabled them to move forward in working with the curriculum.

A third event in the conversation around CC that illustrated the notion of embedded opportunities occurred later in the school year. It involved discussion that took place on February 11, 1998. Through many prior discussions, the team struggled to make the curriculum "connect" and be more coherent. The weekly web still felt disjointed and similar to a smorgasbord. As stated by Lolly, however, the team was trying to find a way to "beat Core" (FN 10/14/97). Danielle generated the topic again. Out of the need to build coherence, Angela entertained the idea of skipping around in the required reading series. One notes the problem solving nature of the team's discussions manifested in attempts to remedy the disconnections in the curriculum.

Danielle:	What's confusing to me is that I still feel like we are doing skills, but are making separate work for ourselves. I mean, here we are trying to cover all these skills that are required. We are trying to put them in subject areas that make sense and develop activities that address them, and all of this goes in a thematic unit! This seems redundant. How are we going to do this?
Katie:	I feel like we are doing ten things at once.
Danielle:	This is too much and doesn't help the children. They must feel jerked from activity to activity.
Kris:	Are use of the basal stories required by the Core Curriculum?

Angela: Only two are required [each six weeks], you see (pointing to the manual).

Kris: Could you skip around then if they fit with the themes you are trying to develop?

Angela: Yes, as long as they aren't too hard for the children . The way I see it, you know, we could pull stories into the units that directly relate to the themes and develop activities around them that cross other subject areas, similar to the way Katie has already helped us do this.

Danielle: We don't have time today to brainstorm how we could do this next unit on *Weather*. What if Christy and I take *Weather* and develop it thematically, putting in the skills where they are appropriate? But how would we get ideas from you?

Angela: Bring them to the next meeting and ask us about them. Whatever time you have, share them with us..... I think that is a great idea. What do you think?

Katie: I'll share my weather kit. I'll bring it to your classroom.

Lolly: Yes. And I have tons of weather books I'll bring.

Angela: And I've been looking over what is required by Core and have a pretty good idea of the things we have to cover. The children could rotate in small groups.

From this point in the conversation, the teachers continued to build off one another's ideas to help Danielle and Christy develop the next unit. They also divided responsibilities for drafting forthcoming units on Mexico and the Earth. The assumption was that once the units were drafted, they would return to the team for feedback.

Several key phrases in the dialogue suggested that members engaged in caring as a practice by helping their colleagues sift through frustrations about the curriculum. Danielle was confused about the purposes of webbing and elicited responses from others. Her comments did not remain as a complaint, rather they became the forum for collective problem solving. In response, Angela entertained skipping around in the required reading series, a break from the regimen, to realize their shared value of making connections across the curriculum. Finally, Danielle suggested that she and Christy might start with the "big understandings" (Routman, 1994) and blend the required skills where appropriate. To this end, the teachers balanced their values about developing

coherence in the curriculum with what they acknowledged were the constraints and requirements of the curriculum.

Conclusions from discussion on the Core Curriculum. During a final group interview with the first grade teachers (FN 5/19/98), I noted that they did not view the curriculum and the strides they took to building inner coherence as the end of their work. They suggested that some units were not developed in sufficient depth for students to gain a deep understanding of concepts and that the year exhibited a great deal of trial and error. Their work with the curriculum was an upward struggle and full of amendments.

These insights were part of the realities of teaching as the first grade teachers struggled to improve their support of student learning. This case also indicated that when colleagues engaged in the practice of caring, they were aware of others, their sense of well-being, and their areas of frustration and concern. In this community, a forum existed to air those concerns that became fuel for collective problem solving and envisioning possibilities in their work.

Implications for Care in Teacher Community

Why place such an emphasis on the practice of caring and building the capacity to care within teacher communities? What can be gained from inviting disclosure among participants? Caring among colleagues includes satisfying the basic human need to be nurtured and supported. It involves considering dimensions such as connectedness and responsibility to and for one another. It also means thinking about the perspectives of others and responding to need. When teachers care in ways that encourage communication with their colleagues (and the students in their classrooms), they support the nurturing and care of others. As Angela states, "We hope that children see us as caring too. We want that of children" (FN 5/19/98).

What Matters for this Community

For the teachers in this community, dialogue is a forum for caring. Dialogue connects members and helps to maintain caring relations. It also provides them with the knowledge of one

another that forms a foundation for their responses in caring. "We respond more effectively as carers when we understand what others need and the history of the need. Continuing dialogue builds up a substantial knowledge of one another that serves to guide our responses" (Noddings, 1992, p. 23). Three major aspects of dialogue-- the idea that the dialogue provides an open forum where we invite members to it, that converging on our shared values helps us navigate through differences, and that problem solving in conversation helps us confront our challenges in positive ways-- have significance to developing schools where teachers openly discuss their practice.

The teachers' collaborative dialogue had bearing on their professional lives in several ways. First, the teachers' sense of efficacy and fulfillment from their shared work played a role in their level of job satisfaction (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Louis & Kruse, 1995). For some, it also prompted discussions about their apprehension and hope if they were to change work settings[9]. They raised questions about how they might nurture caring in new environments because it was requisite for meeting their sense of fulfillment in the profession.

Second, dialogue as a forum for caring provided a place to flesh out issue and problems in practice in ways that fostered participation. It provided an environment of experimentation and a place to articulate conflicting viewpoints, to be tentative in their thinking, and to discuss ideas that were "under construction" (IN.1, LM, 9/8/97). As Lolly's comments from the beginning of this section indicate, this kind of disclosure encourages members to take risks and to seek help from others. It encourages members to be honest and open with their perspectives. Without such a forum, it would be more difficult for members to steer through the challenges of students' diverse reading abilities and the ambiguities of a new curriculum. As evidenced by the negotiation of beliefs around reading, a forum for engagement in the practice of caring enables teachers to discuss their diverse theories about teaching reading in an explicit domain where negotiation can occur, rather than in an emotional or reactional domain. Schools need such opportunities because the realities suggest that members of school communities will always have diverse viewpoints and theories about teaching students. Such a forum enables discussion, consensus, and contradiction

[9] Two members left Cedar Hill after the school year for reasons related to family needs.

to occur. This is essential if educators take seriously the work of school improvement, work that is ambiguous, challenging, tentative, and requires incredible flexibility of members within school borders.

Third, caring not only satisfies a basic human need (Noddings, 1984), but provides the basis for an argument in school reform on the need for accountability. From a philosophical standpoint, Noddings (1992) writes, "Responsibility is broader, deeper, and more ambitious than accountability, and it describes commitment in interpersonal relations more accurately" (p. 65). The relationships in this community resonate with Noddings' account. Caring created a level of responsibility to colleagues that is rarely prompted by external measures of accountability. As Mary remarked, the teachers' responsibility to one another "raises the bar on teaching" (IN.1, MW, 9/11/97) and encourages efforts toward improvements in teaching.

A final point about the implications of relationships grounded in care is that they do not come without a price for participants. Caring is not soft and mushy as Meier (1995) reminds us. The teachers on this team were incredibly invested in their work. They engaged in time-intensive dialogue that went well beyond the systemic time supports for their work. In particular, their struggles with the curriculum provided a case where they might have abandoned their efforts had it not been for their shared commitment to work through questions they cared about. In other words, given several futile attempts at working with the new curriculum, the teachers could have closed their doors on the exhausting process of working with the new curriculum.

Acting Upon What Matters in Schools

If fostering caring relationships (in both teachers and students) is important, then how might we create such opportunities? Successful development of community would engender a profound shift in the perception of and responsibility for our roles as teachers and in the organizations we create to support it. Based on this study of one particular teacher community, I suggest some places to begin in schools by examining changing patterns of interactions among school members, devising structures that support interactions, and altering organizational patterns.

Changing patterns of interaction. Given typical patterns of interaction among teachers, characterized by norms of autonomy and isolation (Huberman, 1993), how might we change these patterns to reflect more communal models of learning? Schools must nurture purposes for teachers to work together around compelling issues, given that their time is already constrained by vast and immediate demands of teaching. For this team, each member relied on the others for expertise in curriculum and instructional practices.

Schools must also think more about building the capacity of members within borders who can act as facilitators of change. In the case of this team eight years ago, there were teachers who were eager to work with colleagues and took the lead in facilitating the course. For this team, it was a natural process to create forums for conversation and interactions. Over the course of the last several years, the team has developed ways to work together which invite diverse perspectives to discussion, as discussed during the case of teaching reading.

In other communities, these actions may not come as naturally to members. But schools can develop ways to build the capacity of members to support change. Part of the work of a school community could be in developing relationships which support inquiry into practice. One example suggests that faculties could spend some time focusing on cultivating their shared values and purposes. While recognizing the complexity and possible controversial nature of such a task, the outcomes have far reaching implications. Beliefs about teaching and learning become public and open to scrutiny. This deprivitization of teaching implies that what we do with students is important to all members of the community and is open to their critical review. The process of intensive dialogue has the potential to build school-based relationships which honor diverse perspectives and viewpoints and nurture the work of its participants. Furthermore, in their formal leadership roles, principals are in a position to be role models by listening intensely to faculty and connecting leaders and groups of teachers across the school with similar interests (See Beck, 1994, and Sernak, 1998, for an understanding of caring administrative leadership).

A final way that schools might think about changing patterns of interactions is by reprioritizing the workload of teachers to engender greater levels of connections among them. The

reality in many schools today suggests that present accountability models driven by hierarchy and heavy emphases on rules and regulations tend not to foster collective values around student and teacher learning. Instead, they channel efforts toward a system of checks and balances. As argued earlier, external measures of accountability are not tied to collective responsibility; they place emphasis on the efforts of individuals in the school. Thus, from a set of shared values and purposes that faculties might develop, a shift in emphasis toward collective responsibility for students might occur. This, in turn, requires a shift in priorities and a commitment to time intensive efforts for teachers to work on issues that focus on student learning.

Devising structures that support interactions. Changing patterns of interactions requires long term, time-intensive opportunities for colleagues to talk together about shared questions. If schools take seriously the notion of changing patterns of interactions to be more communal, they must provide sustained opportunities for dialogue. The teachers in this study created their own structures to support their work beyond the sparse planning time allotted by the school system. And they capitalized on the one structure-- the grade level-- that was institutionalized and supported systemically. However, the time intensive nature of dialogue required grave sacrifice of their own personal time.

Structures and their uses that evolve from participants' needs serve important purposes in the school. For this team, grade level meetings were forums where the teachers had autonomy over decisions about their purposes, processes, and use of time. This contrasts with other structures like faculty meetings, an institutionalized structure in most schools, which the team described as not useful to their learning about school improvement. Decisions at faculty meetings were made almost single-handedly by the principal.

In part, the lack of forums designed to encourage dialogue across members of Cedar Hill explains the contradiction of how the team operates as one community within a school-wide community that placed much less emphasis on dialogue around student learning. Without networks to connect faculty around diverse issues in teaching, such patterns of interaction will not come to fruition. On the one hand, changing structures to support teacher learning is partly about

providing time for such intense interactions. On the other, structural support is not an additive model, but requires changes in the purposes of present structures.

Altering organizational patterns. To foster relationships built on collective responsibility for teacher and student learning, other organizational contexts must move from hierarchical and bureaucratic models to centers of care (Noddings, 1992). Centers of care offer the potential for school personnel to build from a set of values to transform the core work of schools. Schools must flatten the hierarchy between students, teachers, parents, principals, and district offices by building relationships across stakeholders. Thus, changing schools requires changes in relationships (Sarason, 1996).

For example, the system's mandated curriculum was handed to the teachers through a series of channels and after very sparse dialogue among stakeholders. In addition, an outgrowth of the new curriculum was that the principal had to step into a substantially more hierarchical role. She was required to check the teachers' plans for evidence of the new curriculum being taught. Such examples that guarantee existing power structures do little to engender more intimate and nonhierarchical relationships across groups.

Directions

Reconceptualizing school organizations as *caring* organizations holds possibilities for developing and sustaining school communities where responsibility for improving student learning is shared by all members. We must be cautious, however, in advocating *care* unilaterally given the lack of research to support it. Caring as a practice in schools must work in conflict, difference, and contradiction if it will hold. It cannot be merely another mechanism by which to accomplish the same goals as hierarchical organizations do now. If, on the other hand, there is more instrumentality in caring relations, then we might explore its implications. We need to raise critical questions about caring and develop research agendas around it so that it does not become another soft reform suggestion for schools.

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