The Impact of Field Experience on Preservice Teachers' Understandings of Caring

By Lisa S. Goldstein & Vickie E. Lake

Caring is considered a crucial aspect of good teaching. Kohl (1984), for example, asserts "a teacher has an obligation to care about every student" (p. 66); Rogers and Webb (1991) insist "good teachers care, and good teaching is inextricably linked to specific acts of caring" (p. 174). This holds true regardless of the age of the learners: scholars have argued for the importance of caring teaching in work with students in early childhood educational settings (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), elementary schools (Charney, 1991), secondary schools (Noddings, 1992), and higher education (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996). Caring's power has been documented across all subject areas: in the past decade, journal articles have described the importance of caring in the teaching of mathematics (Robicheaux, 1996), science (Sickle & Spector, 1996), social studies (Alter, 1995), language arts (Lamme & McKinley, 1992), and educational technology (Damarin, 1994).

This reminder about the centrality of caring in

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teaching is particularly relevant at the present moment. Teachers must contend with new legislative pressure and scrutiny, greater degrees of standardization, and strong attention to bottom lines, outcomes, and accountability. Knowing that our preservice teachers will be faced with an emphasis on testing and standards when they begin their careers, teacher educators may be tempted to lean toward efficiency — the transmission of the most knowledge and skills in the time allotted — and practical application in their courses and programs. To focus on caring relationships in this context may seem extraneous or even frivolous.

However, recent scholarship has linked caring teaching-learning relationships and membership in caring learning communities to improved academic achieve-ment for children (Reitzug & Patterson, 1998; Urban, 1999), to safer school environments (Thurston & Berkeley, 1998), to increased prosocial behavior (Shann, 1999) and improved problem-solving (Kobak, 1998), and to the develop-ment of responsible, respectful, peaceful citizens (Freeman, 1997). In addition, it has been argued that caring teaching-learning relationships are a prerequisite for cognitive growth and development. Building on recent translations of Vygotsky's work that highlight the importance of affect and emotion, Goldstein (1999) contends that teachers must establish trusting, caring relationships with learners in order for those learners to be willing to take the risks required to enter into the zone of proximal development. In other words, caring teaching-learning relationships can be viewed as a cornerstone of academic achievement and perhaps even a route to higher test scores.

The literature indicates that caring is beneficial to children both academically and socially. As teacher educators, then, one of our goals should be to create curricula and preparation programs that engender in preservice teachers an under-standing of the pedagogical power of caring and a commitment to implementing care-centered teaching practices in their classrooms (Arnstine, 1990; Goodlad, Soder & Sirotnik, 1990; Noddings, 1986).

Two prerequisites must be addressed before we can make decisions about the pedagogy or learning experiences most likely to meet the goal of educating preservice teachers about the value of caring. First, it will be necessary to document the working understandings of caring brought by preservice teachers to their teacher education experiences (Bullough, 1991; Hollingsworth, 1989). Second, we must explore the ways that those beliefs are challenged, affirmed, or transformed during their practice teaching period (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Knowledge of these baseline issues will enable teacher educators to develop programs that build on preservice teachers' prior knowledge and beliefs in ways that are aligned with their fieldwork experiences.

We explored these fundamental issues in a recent study of a group of preservice elementary teachers. In a previous article (Goldstein & Lake, 2000) we focused on the preconceptions and beliefs about caring brought by our preservice teachers to their first field placements; in this article we examine the ways in which the

preservice teachers' preconceived understandings of caring teaching played out as they engaged in their first field placements. Central to this article is discussion of the shifts and changes that occurred in our preservice teachers' beliefs about the relationship of caring and teaching. Our findings reveal our preservice teachers poised at a threshold of professional possibility. Working in a zone of discomfort and disequilibrium, the preservice teachers struggled with establishing their professional identity as caring teachers and coping with the tensions between caring and loss in teaching.

Hollingsworth (1989) insists that teacher educators "should come to understand the incoming beliefs of [their] students" (p. 161). We support this belief. However, our work in this study suggests that understanding preservice teachers' incoming beliefs is only a first step. Teacher educators must also attend carefully to the ways that those beliefs are challenged or reinforced during the preservice teachers' field placement experiences.

Preparing Caring Teachers

Preservice teachers enter their professional preparation with tacit definitions of caring and with a range of ideas and beliefs about the ways that caring will play out in their teaching lives (McLaughlin, 1991; Rogers & Webb, 1991; Weinstein, 1998). These ideas have been shaped by the preservice teachers' experiences as students (Lortie, 1975), by pervasive cultural scripts which link women and caring with the career of elementary schoolteaching (Acker, 1995; Burgess & Carter, 1992) and by images of teachers and teaching in popular culture (Joseph & Burnaford, 1994; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Preservice teachers' preconceived understandings of the relationship between caring and teaching are likely to be strongly-held and fairly stable (Kagan, 1992).

A large body of research on teacher beliefs indicates that these preconceived ideas will be a strong influence on preservice teachers' understandings of and experiences in their classroom placements (Bullough, 1991; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Dunkin, Precians & Nettle, 1994; Hollingsworth, 1989; Kagan, 1992; McLaughlin, 1991; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984). However, as Cole & Knowles (1993) point out, these preconceptions are based on limited experience and understanding of the realities of teaching, and as a result are inadequate, partial, and disconnected from the particularities of actual classroom practices. Because of the disjuncture between long-held images of caring teaching and the novel challenges of life in classrooms with children, field placement experiences can be challenging and destabilizing for preservice teachers.

When preservice teachers find their preconceptions and aspirations challenged during practice teaching experiences, ideas and beliefs previously embraced during teacher education coursework are often cast aside (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). In their field placements preservice teachers are subjected to influence from

cooperating teachers and from other classroom-based and institutional factors that can lead to increasingly conservative and traditional beliefs or to more bureaucratic and impersonal practices (Hoy & Rees, 1977; Zeichner & Grant, 1991).

Hoy and Woolfolk (1990) found, for example, that preservice teachers became more custodial and controlling toward their students as a result of their student teaching experiences. Their message is disheartening: they write, "the ideal images of college preparation apparently give way to the instrumental necessities of maintaining order and running a smoothly functioning classroom" (p. 294).

Similarly, Zeichner (1980) describes some preservice teachers abandoning thoughtful and reflective teaching practice and adopting a more utilitarian approach: "As students spend time in the field, getting the class through the required lesson on time in a quiet and orderly manner becomes the major criterion for accepting or rejecting a teaching activity" (p. 49).

During their field placement period, then, preservice teachers' images of themselves as teachers and their understandings of the contours of the job of teaching are in a state of flux. Although many of the preconceptions held by preservice teachers are robust and fairly stable (Kagan, 1992), the challenges of fieldwork can call those assumptions into question. In this article we examine the impact of field placement on preservice teachers' understandings of caring. Are preservice teachers' assumptions, beliefs, and understandings of caring firmly held or unstable? How are preservice teachers' understandings of caring effected by their first fieldwork experiences?

In light of caring's power to enhance children's learning, the answers to these questions could be used to enhance teacher education. Insight into some of field placement's inherent difficulties will help us to develop teacher education programs that allow preservice teachers to negotiate their challenges in ways that lead to a meaningful and thoughtful commitment to caring teaching.

Study Procedures

In the Spring of 1998, a cohort of 17 undergraduates and 2 post-baccalaureate students were enrolled in our Elementary Classroom Organization and Management course at a large research university in the southern United States. Lisa Goldstein (Author 1) was the course instructor, Vickie Lake (Author 2) the field supervisor.

The classroom organization and management course is required of all elementary teacher education students at this university. Meeting weekly, the class covers topics such as classroom environments, discipline, lesson and unit planning, professionalism, and so on, and serves as a practicum for the preservice teachers' first long-term practice teaching field placement. In this placement, preservice teachers spend 20 hours per week in an elementary classroom in a socio-culturally diverse urban school district for a period of 10 weeks. In the following semester, the preservice teachers engage in their formal student teaching work. The general content and topics of the

course are predetermined by the content of the statewide licensure examination, however each course instructor has a fair amount of leeway for creativity and individualization of the syllabus and of instruction within that framework.

Motivated by our belief that caring teaching-learning environments are the foundation for intellectual growth (Goldstein, 1999) and by our understanding that a goal of teacher education is the preparation of caring teachers, we created and envisioned this classroom organization and management class in ways deliberately designed to move our preservice teachers toward a commitment to care-centered teaching. The preservice teachers were aware of our focus on and commitment to the development of caring teachers and the creation of caring classrooms. This was made clear to them through our choice of materials, assignments, and activities; through our attempts to model caring teaching practices and discuss those practices explicitly; and through their knowledge about and participation in our study.

In order to facilitate and support reflection, electronic dialogue journals were an integral part of the structure of this course (McIntyre & Tlusty, 1995). Each preservice teacher in the class reflected and wrote on topics related to the role of caring in their classroom experiences and emailed their thoughts to Lisa, their course instructor.

These weekly writings, exchanged between each preservice teacher and Lisa via electronic mail, were nicknamed "ejournals." The research literature on uses of electronic mail in teacher education (Nicaise & Barnes, 1996; Schlagal, Trathen, & Blanton, 1996; Thomas, Clift, & Sugimoto, 1996) indicates that electronic dialogue journal exchanges offer student teachers the convenience of quick feedback and relief from the feelings of isolation and disconnection common to the field placement period. Email also offers students a less formal, more spontaneous medium than traditional notebook-style journals, thereby eliminating some of the pressure and drudgery often associated with reflective journal writing (Maas, 1991).

Lisa planned to use ejournals as a tool that would encourage each preservice teacher to explore and respond to the theme of caring in classrooms in a way that furthered his/her individual growth as a professional and deepened his/her thinking on the role of relationships in teaching. There were rarely any prompts or assigned areas of focus to guide the writings of the class as a whole; instead each preservice teacher received individualized attention and was provided with thought-provoking questions, supportive feedback, and anecdotes about Lisa's experiences as a classroom teacher, all aimed at fostering the preservice teacher's growth and development.

Participation in this study of caring was open to all students in the class; data comprised the weekly dialogue journal responses assigned as a course requirement. All students in the cohort wrote these ejournal responses; only those students who elected to participate in the study — 16 female and one male, with a range of ethnicities including Anglo, Asian, and Hispanic — had their responses considered as data for this project. Students were assured that their decision to participate or to abstain from participation in this study would not affect their workload for the

course, their grade, our evaluation of their work, or their future relationships with the university. The names of our preservice teachers, their students, their cooperating teachers, and their field placement school sites have been changed to protect their anonymity.

At the conclusion of the study, Lisa and Vickie employed manual data analysis strategies to examine and code all of the electronic dialogue journal exchanges. We worked independently, each approaching the data set using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and followed the same procedures as we read throught he data.

To begin, we both read the full set of dialogue journal exchanges in chronological order; this included the entries written by each of the 17 participants and Lisa's responses to those entries for each of the 10 weeks. The goal was to develop an overall sense of the progression of the class's experiences, attitudes and perceptions over the course of their field placement and to reveal general themes common to all the preservice teachers.

During this reading Vickie and Lisa identified and named the ideas, concerns, attitudes that recurred frequently in the preservice teachers' ejournals. In particular, the incoming assumptions, beliefs, and understandings of the relationship between caring and teaching most commonly shared by the preservice teachers were highlighted, and we tracked the changes that occurred in those understandings over time. The data were revisited many times throughout this process.

Next, we reorganized the ejournal data set and read through it in a different way: rather than tracking the overall experience of the cohort over time, in this pass through the data we examined each participant's unique experience during the semester. To do so, Lisa and Vickie created an individual correspondence file, which comprised that individual's 10 weekly entries and Lisa's responses to each entry, for each preservice teacher; both Lisa and Vickie read each participant's file multiple times. Again, the constant comparative method was used to identify recurring patterns in the data set. Analyzing the data in this manner revealed the development of each preservice teacher's thoughts, concerns, and attitudes over the course of the field placement period and enabled us to engage in case and cross-case analysis.

When we completed our independent analyses of the data, we compared our results. Themes which emerged both in Lisa's and Vickie's findings were explored in greater depth, and interpreted. The data were then re-read to look for ejournal entries containing disconfirming evidence that would contradict our interpretation. The recurring themes relating to the preservice teachers' initial understandings of caring—idealism, oversimplification, and essentialism — have been discussed elsewhere (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). The most significant themes regarding the ways in which these initial understandings were challenged, rejected, or transformed during the course of the preservice teachers' field placement experience are the focus of this article.

The conclusions about the preservice teachers' understandings of caring

teaching drawn from this research must be understood in light of the limitations of the study. First, the findings are based on a single data source, the preservice teachers' ejournals. Although Vickie supervised the preservice teachers' fieldwork, she did not use her field notes as data for the study. Similarly, Lisa did not document conversations about caring and teaching that took place in our classroom organization and management class. It is possible that data drawn from those sources would have deepened our understanding of the preservice teachers' perspective.

It also must be noted that the ejournals used as data for this study were a class assignment; this may have had an affect on the data we analyzed. In hopes of lessening this problem, the ejournal assignment was not graded for content — all preservice teachers in the cohort who wrote the required 10 ejournal entries received full credit for the assignment. Nevertheless, participants in the study might have self-censored, withheld information, or exaggerated their feelings knowing that their ejournal entries would be used as data.

Tensions in Caring Teaching

As documented elsewhere, our preservice teachers' preconceptions about caring teaching were characterized by essentialism, oversimplification, and idealism (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). As the preservice teachers spent time in their field placement classrooms, however, they realized that their initial preconceptions about caring and teaching were inadequate to explain the complexity of what they were witnessing and experiencing. The preservice teachers expressed discomfort and confusion. Confronted by uncertainty, the preservice teachers were in a position to reconsider their initial beliefs and to develop new perspectives on the interaction of caring and teaching.

Analysis of the ejournal entries highlighted two significant dilemmas common to virtually all of our preservice teachers: establishing their professional identities as caring teachers, and coping with the teachers' fundamental, inherent challenge of caring deeply for children who will only be "yours" for a limited period of time. The preservice teachers' ejournals revealed their understandings shifting in different ways in response to each of these dilemmas.

Caring and Professional Identity

Beginning to establish a professional sense of self is a central educational goal of the preservice teachers' first field placement. This is an extremely complex process that involves attention to many internal and external factors and leads to a range of personal and professional transformations. Although the preservice teachers' ejournals revealed professional identity development happening along many axes, for the purposes of this study we concentrated solely on those aspects of professional identity linked to caring teaching.

One challenge many of the preservice teachers faced as they embarked on this

journey of professional self-definition was discarding worn-out metaphors they had previously used when imagining themselves as caring teachers. For example, during her first week in her classroom placement Kay found herself "having a hard time separating the baby-sitting world and the teaching world." Kay automatically drew upon previously-established patterns of caring interaction with children but found them to be inadequate and inappropriate within the context of a classroom: she realized the chasm separating baby-sitting from teaching.

Like Kay, other preservice teachers confronted the limitations of their working metaphors for caring teaching. Mark worried that his goal of "being viewed [by the students] as a good friend when you are also their teacher" was causing him to be too easy on the students. Barbara wrestled with her "natural instinct to want to mother the children instead of teach them," finding, like Kay and Mark, that although a teaching relation is rooted in caring, it is distinctly unlike other caring relations between children and adults.

Lortie (1975) described in great detail the ways that biography plays a role in teachers' development of their professional self-images: models and beliefs that take hold in childhood are internalized and remain strongly influential throughout preservice teachers' preparation and induction. The images of teaching held by our preservice teachers quoted above — baby-sitter, good friend, and mother — are, in all likelihood, images deeply rooted in the preservice teachers' life histories. For example, it seems that Barbara had strong connections with what Burgess & Carter (1992) have called "the Mumsy discourse." The Mumsy discourse explicitly links teaching young children both with images of idealized, middle class mothering and with "socially approved feminine virtues such as 'caring' and nurturance" (p. 353).

As others have argued, central images of practice (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and other teaching metaphors (Cole & Knowles, 1993) are deeply seeded and profoundly powerful. Negotiating the transmutation from baby-sitter/friend/mother, the images most prevalent among our preservice teachers, to teacher/authority figure was a key challenge facing these novices as they worked on developing their professional identities as caring teachers. A particularly complex aspect of this process involved the establishment and maintenance of comfortable interpersonal relationships with the students in their classes.

After attending one of her students' weekend soccer games, Barbara wrote:

> I think it's important to show children that you love and care for them and you support them in all their endeavors (not just academia). . . . At first I wondered if this broke the professionalism of being a teacher (i.e., keeping the relationship confined strictly to between the walls of the school). The more that I have thought about it, I truly believe that teaching is caring about individuals and when you are for someone as a human being you don't set limits on when and where you are for them.

Barbara concluded that her personal understanding of professionalism left room for certain levels of extracurricular intimacy and relationship. Devry, on the other

hand, created boundaries for appropriate professional conduct that were much tighter than Barbara's. Her boundary-setting experience happened during the writing of one of her ejournal entries. Devry's decision-making process is revealed here:

> One student in particular, [a child] that I have connected with and really like, wants to hold my hand, especially while walking in line. Is this appropriate to do?.... When I think about it, I do not see any harm in it, except that it might lessen the authority figure [image/status] that a teacher needs to have. Any thoughts about this? I am a strong believer in showing my students affection though. I find I give out lots of hugs. The dilemma I have is knowing where to draw the line, from a hug to holding their hands. The more I think about it, the more it seems too much, holding the student's hand. I already feel somewhat uncomfortable when this particular student wants to hold my hand.

Devry begins by saying she likes the child and sees no real harm in holding his hand; three lines later Devry has come to the opposite conclusion says that she has felt uncomfortable with the child's desire and doesn't want to hold hands. Using her reflective journal to scaffold herself as she reorganizes her schema for teacherly caring (Goldstein, 1998), Devry worked toward resolution of a professional dilemma.

Underlying the preservice teachers' concern for establishing boundaries is a broader and more complicated professional identity issue: the need to negotiate a stance with regard to legitimate authority and teacherly caring. The dilemmas related to balancing caring and control are challenging even for experienced teachers (Hargreaves, 1994). Managing the tension between being nice and having authority is an essential dilemma faced by novice teachers as they experience their first extended stay in a classroom. As McLaughlin (1991) described it, preservice teachers often find that "their attempts to care may conflict with their hope of assuming an authoritative professional stance" (p. 182).

Our preservice teachers spent a good deal of time considering this dilemma. Often, they saw caring and authority laid out in a simple either/or dichotomy. For example, in describing her cooperating teacher, Thuy stated: "She is not only an educator, but also a caregiver." Thuy felt her cooperating teacher to be noteworthy because she manages to be *not only* an educator, *but also* a caregiver, as if these were usually two mutually exclusive options.

Along similar lines, Devry wondered "if students ultimately respond better to a compassionate, fun teacher compared to a stiff, demanding one?" and Barbara believed "there is a huge difference between being an unbiased professional and a caring teacher. It is very hard to know the correct time to assume each role." In the eyes of these novice teachers, one is either professional, unbiased, and unfeeling OR compassionate, fun, and caring.

At other times, preservice teachers in our cohort veered away from this tendency toward oversimplification and stark either/or dualisms and instead wrestled with a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the tension between authority and caring. These ejournal entries capture the complexity and fluidity that are a

daily reality in the lives of classroom teachers. Kate stated, "I think that a major dilemma of teaching is finding a balance between necessary discipline and showing that you care for your students." Likewise, Devry mused, "I have always wondered how as a teacher to be caring yet firm and disciplined with the class."

Experienced teachers have a range of ways to manage these dilemmas (McLaughlin, 1991). Kay's cooperating teacher, for example, offered her advice that echoes the old "don't smile till Christmas" adage: Kay wrote, "I really wanted the kids to like me, but Mrs. Lester kept telling me that it is important to first demand respect and liking will come with it." Devry's cooperating teacher, on the other hand, modeled a working balance between caring and authority that seemed more rooted in joy and connection with the children than in demanding respect from the children. Devry found that watching her cooperating teacher led her to believe that "teachers can have a great time with their students and still be the authority."

After asserting her authority and disciplining students for the first time, Andi reflected on the working balance she was able to establish that day, and wrote: "I felt very good because taking away their [reward sticker] stars made me feel like I was being a 'mean' person, but I was actually doing my job." Andi wrestled with the ways that feeling good, feeling like she was being mean, and "actually doing [her] job" folded back upon each other, and she attempted to reconcile the conflicting and complex interactions among these feelings and responsibilities and understandings.

In general, our preservice teachers positioned being nice and being authoritative in opposition to one another. Weinstein, too, found her preservice teachers struggling with this dichotomy: she quotes a preservice teacher who echoed Andi and said "I want to be nice but I have to be mean" (Weinstein, 1998, p. 153). This dichotomy has been presented by other researchers: for example, Reitzug and Patterson (1998) describe a principal as empowering her students through caring *rather than* control.

However, other scholars have attempted to move away from a binary interpretation of the relationship of caring and control. George Noblit (1993) offers an interpretation of the tension between niceness and authority that transforms the terrain of this essential dilemma. Noblit asserts that caring in classrooms is not about finding a balance between exerting teacherly authority and demonstrating teacherly nurturance; instead, caring "is about the ethical use of power" (p. 24). Repositioning the dilemma in this manner offers a way to think about caring and authority that skirts the either/or tension that plagued our preservice teachers. Instead, Noblit's view encourages the development of a sense of teacherly responsibility and consciousness and is likely to strengthen novices' professional identities. Along similar lines, Gordon's (1998) ethnographic study of two urban school contexts demonstrates the complex interaction of caring and control and reveals the range of ways in which teachers negotiate this dilemma.

In the ejournal entries relating to the establishment of a caring professional identity, we found the preservice teachers in a state of flux. They realized the

limitations of their previous metaphors of caring teaching, faced the complex landscape of student-teacher relationships, and questioned the relationship between caring and authority. The preservice teachers had begun the process of wrestling with the challenges before them.

Caring and Loss

The caring relationships with pupils that each of our preservice teachers worked hard to establish and to nurture were a source of joy, pride, fulfillment, and validation for them. However, like all caring relationships, these close connections made the preservice teachers vulnerable to hurt and heartache. As Ariel wrote: "It hurts to care. However, I couldn't imagine not caring about my students for a second. After this week, I have realized my own version of an old cliché: It's better to have cared and lost, than not to have cared at all."

Our preservice teachers' first encounters with these painful losses occurred when children left their placement classrooms when their families moved away. The preservice teachers were shocked at the depth and intensity of their sadness at the loss of a teacherly relationship. Often, their reflections contained the seeds of meaningful personal growth. The first time Ariel had a pupil move away (a classroom experience she later called "the part of teaching I hate"), for example, she coped with her sadness in a way that gave her great strength when she faced this situation again at later points in her field placement:

> Did I give her a hug the last time I saw her? Did I have to correct her or was it just a day of smiles? How will she remember me? Will she remember me? Out of the questions and emotions came some comfort from newfound wisdom. No one knows how long one will have a student. There is no safety in assuming the child you have today will be there tomorrow. Therefore, every day must be treated as though you'll never see that child again. That means there's never too much time for hugging, smiling, encouraging. The exciting things you put off tomorrow may never be realized. The child you put off until tomorrow may not be there the next day to explain your reactions or emotions. You must invest today as if there is no tomorrow.

Ariel's journal entry refers directly to "newfound wisdom" garnered through experience: her thinking about the fundamental nature of caring teaching was changed and her prior conceptions of teaching were discarded as a result of "losing" a child.

The preservice teachers' sense of loss was particularly acute when they came to the end of their field placements. Unlike the specific and localized feelings of loss that accompanied the departure of individual children from their classes, these feelings of loss were global and immense. All of the preservice teachers were affected to one degree or another, and their ejournals were filled with tales of overwhelming feelings. Describing her last day with her children, Halina wrote: "Tears came to my eyes and, believe me, I had to make a huge effort not to cry..., I had such a lump in my throat. I told them I wasn't feeling well, which was the truth anyway."

Halina's emotional response surprised neither her nor us; she felt deeply connected to her children and many of her ejournal entries were rich with feeling. However, there were other preservice teachers for whom the intensity of their response to leaving their placement classrooms was unexpected. For example, Maria reported:

> I did not think I would be this sad about having to end my internship until Wednesday morning when Ms. Ziffle [her cooperating teacher] informed the children that Thursday was going to be my last day with them. The choice of words she used in telling the students and the atmosphere it provided brought sadness to my heart and made my eyes water. I knew at that moment it was going to be difficult for me to say my good-byes on Thursday without crying. Well sure enough, as I was telling the students how and why they were special to me, tears rolled down my cheeks as they are now as I write this entry. I could not believe I cried! I never cry! But just the fact that I was not going to see these sweet, cute faces almost every day anymore, made me truly sad.

Maria could not believe the sadness she experienced at the end of her placement. She had held an image of herself as someone who never cried, and had imagined a world of teaching that contained far less discomfort and emotion than the world she encountered. As a result of her experience in Mrs. Ziffle's first grade classroom, Maria was forced to think differently about herself and about the relationship of caring and teaching.

These feelings of loss are inevitable, a standard part of a teacher's experience. Goldstein (1997, p. 153-4) writes:

> Teachers enter into [these] relationships knowing full well they will not last. Each year, the cycle of teacherly love plays itself out in classrooms. Children arrive, relationships grow and blossom. In June the gorgeous blossoms are picked while in full bloom. The end of the school year is a difficult time...the severing of mutual attachment is painful.

Nelson (1994), too, has documented the heartache teachers feel when separating from their students at year's end; she quotes one teacher as saying, "It is very hard. You feel like you're losing a part of you" (p. 199). Along similar lines, Bullough and Knowles (1991) tell the story of a teacher who looks at her students in the last week of school and thinks "I'm never going to see these kids again. I've been busting my [rear end] to connect with them, and I'm never going to see them again. . . . This is going to rip me apart" (p. 137).

We attempted to prepare our preservice teachers for this painful separation, recalling our own years as elementary teachers and sharing our experiences of hardship and loss at the end of the year. Our preservice teachers appeared to have gotten the message. Picking up on Lisa's teaching stories, Devry asked: "How did you handle the last day of each year with your students? Knowing you as I do, I am sure you have shed a few tears on the last day of class!" Along similar lines, Barbara wrote: "I know that it will just kill me as a teacher to say good-bye after spending such quality

time for a whole year with them. I feel as if they were my own children after just a semester of half days!" However, both we and the preservice teachers learned that loss of this kind is hard to know fully until it has been experienced first-hand.

Becoming involved in mutually caring relationships with students is one of the perks of teaching (Hargreaves, 1994; Nias, 1989); our preservice teachers rushed headlong into these relationships and found them deeply satisfying. Goldstein (1997) would contend that our preservice teachers had fallen in "teacherly love" with their students (p. 98). Characterized, like other forms of love, by commitment, intimacy and passion (Sternberg, 1988), yet constrained by the structures of the institution of schooling, teacherly love is a unique, specific form of love familiar to many educators. Teacherly love is unlike other forms of love, Goldstein argues, in that it is shaped by the academic calendar, by the contours of pedagogical relationships, and by the boundaries of professional responsibility.

Unaware of the distinct parameters of teacherly love and apparently acting on the belief that caring was monolithic, the same regardless of the relational context, our preservice teachers bonded with their students just as they had bonded in their prior significant relationships. But then, at the end of their field placement period, the preservice teachers found their implicit working definition of a caring relation-ship — a definition rooted in constancy and duration over time, a definition that had served them well in the past — inadequate to capture the challenges specific to teacherly caring.

The preservice teachers' pain at separating from their students helped them realize that caring teaching was more complex and multi-faceted than they had suspected. In the case of this particular facet of their teacherly lives, the preservice teachers' initial conceptions of caring teaching were slowly being replaced by an understanding that was richer, fuller, and more realistic. The preservice teachers' struggles with caring and loss appear to have led to increasing professional maturity.

Implications for Teacher Education

Our preservice teachers had anticipated that caring for the children they taught would be easy. For example, in their very first ejournal entries, Andi asserted, "I think that caring for a student comes naturally," and Mary stated, "I think a caring teacher cares for each child as a student and as a person. When the caring is genuine, it is as natural as it should be." However, once the preservice teachers were faced with the dilemmas described here — dilemmas about caring and professional identity and dilemmas about the heartache of separation — their initial understandings of teacherly caring were challenged.

Letting go of inadequate prior conceptions of teaching is only a benefit to preservice teachers if the new conceptions and metaphors they adopt are fuller and richer than the ones left behind. At the conclusion of this study it was impossible to determine how the preservice teachers' professional identities as caring teachers

would come to be characterized. With ample support during their student teaching semester and in their induction year, these novices might develop professional identities rooted in responsible and thoughtful caring.

It must be noted that our preservice teachers' beliefs about the relationships between teaching and caring did not change dramatically over the course of this study: the disequilibrium caused by their first field placements was followed by a slowly-growing awareness of the need for new understandings and conceptions, and a gradual stretching toward reconceptualized perspectives. Furthermore, the images, ideas, beliefs, and understandings held by our preservice teachers at the end of this study and documented in this article are unlikely to be stable: this slow process of growth and change will continue throughout our preservice teachers' teaching careers.

Because the field placement period is a time of professional instability and transition, teacher educators are in an ideal position to take an active role in supporting preservice teachers as they create their teacherly selves. The preservice teachers involved in this study were fairly well supported by the structure of our university's teacher education program. The preservice teachers were in daily contact with professors during the semester in which this study took place: they were enrolled in three methods courses, a course in learning and development, and the classroom organization and management course in which this study was embedded, and logged at least 20 hours of field experience each week. The preservice teachers had weekly ejournal dialogue exchanges with Lisa, their professor, and they had regular one-on-one meetings with Vickie, their fieldwork supervisor. However, we see room for improvement; we believe the suggestions we offer here will also be useful to teacher educators in other care-centered elementary education teacher education programs.

Working to ensure that the preservice teachers' course instructors hold common images of the kinds of caring teachers we are hoping to prepare in our program would be an important first step. The preservice teachers might be less vulnerable at this tenuous time in their professional lives if their coursework experience at the university sent uniform messages about caring, teaching, and the moral and intellectual responsibility of teachers. Increasing communication and collaboration among course instructors would be another way to provide our preservice teachers with images of caring teaching that are clear, consistent, and positive.

Cooperating teachers' influence on preservice teachers' images and understandings of teaching must not be underestimated (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Graham, 1999; Nettle, 1998). As a result, teacher educators must strive to establish relationships with cooperating teachers and other significant school personnel who embody the values and ideals communicated by the university coursework and who model the caring practices and attitudes we hope our preservice teachers to acquire. Although this might sound like a statement of the obvious, all too often high quality classroom placements can be difficult to come by and compromises are made at the expense of our preservice teachers' growth and development.

Our findings in this study suggest that it is unwise to assume preservice teachers' ideas about the relationship between caring and teaching will become richer, more thoughtful, and more sophisticated as a natural course of events over their fieldwork period. In order to ensure preservice teachers' incoming preconceptions, beliefs, and assumptions about caring are replaced by a range of more sophisticated understandings, then, this issue must be confronted head-on and addressed directly. This could take place within a practicum linked to the preservice teachers' fieldwork placements, such as the classroom organization and management course that we teach.

Caring is often taken for granted and underdiscussed within teacher education. As the educational climate in the United States increasingly turns to talk of standards, outcomes, and accountability, there is the danger of caring being pushed even further into the shadows of our programs. However, caring teaching-learning relationships are profoundly important. We cannot allow preservice teachers to labor under mistaken impressions about what it takes and what it means to teach with care. Instead, we contend that we need to develop an orientation toward teacher education in which preservice teachers' pre-existing beliefs about caring and teaching are called into question, scrutinized critically, and then thoughtfully re-integrated into their evolving practices.

If, as has been argued widely, caring is indeed a central facet of good teaching, then teacher educators must make attention to caring a central facet of our teacher education programs: it is essential that we attend carefully to the working understandings of the relationship of teaching and caring that preservice teachers bring with them into teacher education programs, to the experiences with caring teaching that our preservice teachers have in the field, and to the ways that their understandings of caring teaching change over time. Preservice teachers' vulnerability and confusion offer teacher educators a host of teachable moments and offer the novices a range of opportunities for professional growth. We suggest responding to the preservice teachers' state of uncertainty in a manner that will help them develop visions of caring teaching strong enough to form a foundation that will sustain them throughout their careers.

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