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CRITICAL AND CARING THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS

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Dedication

With my deepest love and appreciation, I dedicate my dissertation to my dear family and friends. My parents' respect for learning, work ethic, and devotion inspired my faith, commitment, and confidence: thank you Mother and Daddy for always believing in me and helping me believe in myself. My children (Andy, Summer, Aubrie, Lucas) and grandchildren (Mia, Bode, Henson, Simon) are my greatest joys and make life meaningful: you are my motivation and inspiration. I also dedicate this dissertation to my beloved sisters, Lesa and Dana: your constant encouragement, love, laughter, and prayers have sustained me through this long process. My prayer sisters have been my greatest cheerleaders: thank you for your love, interest, enthusiasm, and many prayers. Finally, the love and unwavering support of my husband, Bob, allowed me to follow my dream: you have been my partner in this, as in all of our life together.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the question of what impact, if any, opportunities for service had on my eighth grade students. I also hoped to discover what types of service might inspire critical, caring thought and action. Early adolescents are facing a number of critical social and educational dilemmas that include civic disinterest (Callan, 1997), materialism (Billig, 2000), social isolation, exclusion, and anonymity (Carlson, 2010), the rise in child suicides (Cutler, Glaeser & Norberg, 2001), violence and disrespect in schools (Noddings, 2002), and an epidemic of bullying (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005). Ethical care theorists suggest that much of the widespread alienation and violence so endemic in today's society correlates to a lack of caring (Noddings, 2002). Ethical care theory, bolstered by critical consciousness theory and systems theory, was used as the framework and foundation of this study to examine and better understand what conditions and relationships could encourage caring in middle school students. There seemed to be four principal implications that emerged from the findings of this inquiry. For service to inspire caring, it should be practiced and personally relevant, relational, include real opportunities to take responsibility, and be based on needs that are authentic, redefined, and understood. Implications for instructional practices include insights and understanding of how service opportunities could influence meaningful growth in middle school students' caring, empathy, and critical social consciousness.

Preface

They wanted to be famous. Seven high school cheerleaders lived a "typical" life in an average, suburban, United States neighborhood: Friday night football games, weekend sleepovers, homework.   Luring Victoria Lindsey to one of these Friday night sleepovers, six of her friends ambushed her, slamming her head into the wall, hitting and kicking her while another videotaped the entire attack, later posting the horrific episode on YouTube. The girls' explanation? They "just wanted to be famous."

Shawn wanted to belong. Every day, when Shawn and his father walked by the middle school baseball field on their way home from school, Shawn asked his dad if he, too, could play ball "with the guys". Because of Shawn's mental and physical limitations, his father knew that these middle school boys wouldn't welcome Shawn's participation. Finally, to appease his son, Shawn's dad reluctantly asked the boys if Shawn could play. Not only did they let Shawn play, when it was Shawn's turn to bat, the opposing team's pitcher left the mound to come "lob" the ball gently to let Shawn hit, and each of the opposing players deliberately overthrew the bases so that Shawn could get a "home run". With tears in his eyes, Shawn's father related to a packed room of civic leaders that these middle school boys would never know the full impact of how their kindness had helped Shawn to feel he belonged.

What made the difference? In so many respects, these two groups of teens

were similar: they lived their everyday lives within the commonplace parameters of school, friends, family, work, and activities. But what factors led to such radically different choices? What causes some people to use their creativity, energy, and intellect for the common good, placing others' needs equal to their own, while others use these same traits in destructive, self-serving ways? What makes an Abraham Lincoln, a Mother Teresa, an Anne Frank, a Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as countless others who may not be as well known, but who affect a positive difference in our world?

Life should be about the "big picture" and the "big questions." One aspect of the big picture is living a life that strives to make our world a better place through caring for, and service to, others. During 27 years of teaching – in public and private, rural and urban – schools, my middle school students have regularly participated in service activities. While I did not consider service as an organized curriculum, I did hope that caring for others would be the outcome. About 13 years ago, I began to incorporate scheduled service projects into my gifted and talented classes. Those projects gradually evolved into the implementation of a school-wide service-based sister school program and the year of service in which our eighth grade students currently participate. Of course, I have hoped that giving my students plenty of opportunities to serve would establish the conditions and relationships that encourage compassionate, empathetic, and giving hearts. But how could I determine if an attitude founded in praxis was developing in my

students? Might *reflection* on social injustices spur *caring*, with caring then leading to *action*? Yes, I am a middle school social studies teacher. I want my students to love our country and cherish their world. But my biggest desire is that somehow my students, whatever their role in life, will come to realize that they can be the ones to make some kind of positive difference in how all people are understood, respected, and valued. If we indeed teach who we are, as Parker Palmer (2007) suggests, then this study was an outgrowth of what I have increasingly come to see as *my* "big picture".

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Need for Care in Society and Education

Contemporary breakthroughs in technology, medicine, agriculture, and communication have created a quality of life that not so long ago was only a dream. Yet ironically, the very advances in technology, medicine, agriculture, and communication that have enriched so many lives have also influenced increasing global and domestic competition, hierarchal domination, ethical conundrums, and ecological crises (Capra, 1996). Many of these societal problems' roots spring from a lack of empathy for others. The race to "get ahead" has produced a "cultural emphasis on individualism and personal gain" (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003, p. 310). In our young people, this focus on individual gratification is evidenced through civic disinterest (Callan, 1997), materialism (Billig, 2000), social isolation, exclusion, and anonymity (Carlson, 2010), a rise in child suicides (Cutler, Glaeser & Norberg, 2001), violence and disrespect in schools (Noddings, 2002), and an epidemic of bullying (Eisenberg & Aalsma, 2005).

Nel Noddings (2002) believes that much of the widespread alienation and violence endemic in today's society correlates to a lack of caring. She explains, "Today many young people not only fail to develop the capacity to care, but also seem not to know what it means to be cared for. Some confuse coercion with care, some deceive themselves that they are cared for in highly exploitative

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situations, and some simply have given up hope that anyone will care" (p. 25). They do not recognize the world as interconnected and interdependent, failing to realize that since all life is related, all life has value, worth, and meaning.

These dilemmas raise a number of questions about the need for care in society and education. Could caring counter these cultural and societal problems? How can we establish conditions that will produce engaged, caring citizens? Can caring be taught, and if so, what are effective approaches to teach about and encourage caring and a commitment to social justice? And, what might I specifically be able to add to this conversation?

Rationale for Service

Could service be that *action* inspired by, and in turn inspiring, caring? What is service? Service is variously portrayed as community service, service-learning, volunteerism, or, as stated in the Preface simply using our gifts for the common good, placing others' needs equal to our own.

Service is an important aspect of civic life. One of the defining aims of education, according to John Dewey (1916), is the development of democratic citizens. Dewey (1964) believed that democracy was a way of living, stating, "the directing guide of educational work is…contribution to a common and shared life [in] services rendered to others" (p. 11). If one of the desired results of education is to encourage the development of caring, committed citizens, it follows that this outcome – as with any educational objective – can and should be

the result of an organized effort, of practice. As Nel Noddings (2002) explained, "To develop the capacity to care, one must engage in caregiving activities" (p. 19).

For service to inspire caring, then, it should be *active*. Martin Luther King, Jr., also believed that a vision needs action to be effective: "Visions are necessary to give us goals…But goals without commitment and action seldom bring results" (Roeper Review, 2008, p. 63). Noddings (1998) elaborated, maintaining that the experiences in which we immerse ourselves develop attitudes and philosophies: "If we want to produce people who will care for one another, then it makes sense to give students *practice* in caring and *reflection* on that practice" (p. 191). Service to others could provide that active *practice* and *reflection* that inspires caring.

Service for the common good, choosing to consider others' interests and needs as equally important to our own, is one of the hallmarks of caring. When John F. Kennedy exhorted us in his 1961 Inaugural Address to "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country", we heard a plea for unselfish caring and service. Yet, reconciling our fierce individualism and independence with the needs of a democratic community can be a challenge. As Walter Parker (1996) reflected, "How can people live together justly, in ways that are mutually satisfying, and that leave our differences, both individual and group, intact and our multiple identities recognized?" (p. 33). Our Declaration of

Independence speaks of our self-evident "inalienable rights" (paragraph 2), given to us by the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God". We feel entitled to these rights of citizenship: "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (paragraph 2). In *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves* (1991)*,* Robert Wuthnow asked:

> How is it that we as a people are able to devote billions of hours to volunteer activities, to show care and compassion in so many ways to those around us, and still be a nation of individualists who pride ourselves on personal freedom, individual success, and the pursuit of self-interest?
>
> How do we reconcile these paradoxical elements in our tradition? (p. 17)

Admittedly a paradox, still, America's tradition of service has deep roots in our culture, history, and society. In 1840, Alexis de Tocqueville remarked on our commitment to service, "I have seen Americans making great and sincere sacrifices for the common good and a hundred times I have noticed that, when needs be, they almost always gave each other faithful support" (pp. 594-5).

For service to inspire caring, however, we should determine to help in a way that will contribute to changing the underlying structural *causes* of injustice and oppression rather than simply addressing the surface manifestations. Service will hopefully be motivated by more than a shallow expression of emotion, duty, or guilt. Paulo Freire (1970) referred to this shallow service as "false generosity". False generosity involves token giving or temporary serving that does not change

the basic, underlying conditions of the problem.

Conversely, "true generosity" identifies a problem's structural causes, challenges norms, and bestows dignity and worth upon those being cared for, so that they can ultimately be empowered to be carers themselves. Freire explained:

> True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes
> which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and
> subdued, the "rejects" of life," to extend their trembling hands. True
> generosity lies in striving so that these hands - whether of individuals
> or entire peoples – need be extended less and less in supplication, so that
> more and more they become human hands which work and, working,
> transform the world. (p. 1)

To practice true generosity, we must also refrain from thinking of our lives as "morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow 'them' to be more like 'us' " (McIntosh, 1989, p. 10). In other words, if we practice *true* generosity, we will gradually work ourselves out of a job as those we serve take a more active role in shaping their own world. One goal of true generosity is social transformation.

Service allows us to give ourselves to a higher purpose. It allows our lives to have meaning when those we serve gain the freedom and confidence to influence their world. When Victor Frankl was imprisoned in the bestial Nazi death camps of Dachau and Auschwitz, he faced dehumanizing conditions that

made him question a reason to keep on living. He realized that each of us has choice of action and of attitude, and that choice gives us a "spiritual freedom – which cannot be taken away – that makes life meaningful and purposeful" (Frankl, 1959, p. 87). If service is coerced, given grudgingly or out of guilt, there is little meaning. If that choice of action is willingly given to serving others out of compassion or love, our lives may have a greater purpose and focus.

Service is ultimately founded in praxis: could *reflection* on social injustices spur *critical thought and caring*, with caring then leading to *action*? Nel Noddings (2002) explained, "Those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs. Caring-about is empty if it does not culminate in caring relations," (pp. 23-4). Injustice and oppression may provoke an emotional response, but "Compassion is an unstable emotion," Susan Sontag (2003) wrote in *Regarding the Pain of Others*. "It needs to be translated into action or it withers. The question is what to do with the feelings that have been aroused, the knowledge that has been communicated" (p. 101). Thus, while service can be variously described as service-learning, generosity, civic or community service, or volunteerism, I consider true service *active*: it questions injustice, allows the voiceless to speak, and transforms the cared-for, the carer, our community, and our world.

"Vision without action is merely a dream. Action with vision just passes time. Vision with action can change the world" (Barker, 1993).

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Service-learning: an Approach to Teaching about Caring

Service-learning, a particular learning strategy using active service to inspire caring, developed from the social activism of the 1960s and l970s. Founded in the social studies, service-learning sought to inspire active, caring, engaged citizenship. While the connection of education to civic responsibility is rooted in antiquity – Aristotle proposed that the function of education was to produce effective, active citizens (Hummel, 1993) – the social studies are a relatively new discipline. Originally intended to promote social improvement through an organized, integrative citizenship education, social studies has increasingly been perceived as a conduit for social transformation, citizenship, and democracy (Parker, 1996). The social studies ask important questions that deal with the way we respect and relate to all living beings on our earth. Ideally, social studies education leads to reflective inquiry, a process that focuses on using informed decisions to solve real social problems (Barr, Barth & Shemis, 1977). Based on the social studies, service-learning was designed to teach civic responsibility, strengthen the sense of community, and address the lack of caring and empathy for others (Stanton, 1990).

There are differences of opinion on what service-learning actually entails. Service-learning is variously seen as a "philosophy of education, a curricular tool, or a program design" (Billig, 2000, p. 659). Terry and Bohnenberg (2007) posit that there are actually three levels of service-learning: community service,

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community exploration, and community action. At the community action level, not only do students become aware of a need and provide a service, but they then become so engaged that they develop a difference-making plan of action. Thus, service-learning can provide teachers with a vehicle to engage their students in real experiences that appeal to their idealism and their desire to make the world a better place. Judith Ramaley, assistant director of the National Science Foundation's Directorate for Education and Human Resources, stressed the importance of providing students with real-world service situations:

> If we want our students to lead creative, productive lives, we must give them opportunities to learn in ways that have consequences for others, as well as for themselves. I know of no better way to invoke the many facets of cognitive development, moral reasoning, and social responsibility than to engage students in service-learning opportunities. At its best, a service-learning experience can be transformative.
> (Fiske, 2002, p. 58)

The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 describes service-learning as involving young people in learning through participation in organized service that meets real societal needs. Service-learning provides opportunities to "connect academic knowledge to analysis of social issues" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 302). The pedagogy of service-learning intentionally combines *understanding, practice,* and *reflection.* Since the distinctive element of service-

learning is that powerful learning outcomes are hopefully achieved through meaningful service, it can be argued that service-learning is a combination of theory, pedagogy, and design for learning.

According to a survey conducted by Pritchard (2002), 75% of all American K-12 schools participate in *some* form of service activities or curriculum. Pritchard acknowledges however, that when respondents were asked if their programming included clearly defined learning objectives, student reflection, and a theoretical foundation, the percentage of participating schools dropped to 32%. Research conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service (2005) indicated that around 38% of middle and high school students surveyed participated in some type of school-sponsored service opportunities. Service-learning programs and curriculum have been adopted in every state, including Oklahoma. In 1990, Oklahoma House Bill 1017 required every school district to include service-learning. The Oklahoma State Department of Education's service initiative, "Oklahoma Learn and Serve" provides training and grants to public school districts that incorporate service-learning into their curriculum. Billig (2000) explains that the most common reasons that schools adopt service-learning include "helping students to become more active members of the community, increasing student knowledge and understanding of the community, meeting real community needs, and encouraging students' altruism and caring for others" (p. 659).

Numerous studies have been undertaken to determine the impact of

service opportunities on students (e.g., Astin, et al., 2000; Reardon, 1998;

Skinner, 1999; Weiler, et al., 1998; Yates & Youniss, 1996, among others).

However, there has been little research that explores either practical conditions or

theoretical factors most likely to encourage those attributes in students that result

in a commitment to critical, caring thought and action. Research findings on

service-learning can be generally categorized into implications of service-learning

for civic attributes, academic learning, and character and attitude development.

Impact of Service-learning on Civic Attributes

Service is often founded in ethics and virtues. *Ethical* or *character*

education is related to *civic* education (Callan, 1997); indeed, the social studies is

"built on a foundation of ethical commitments and beliefs" (Farr Darling, 2002, p.

266). Without this foundation, "the goal of preparing students for responsible,

thoughtful citizenship would be an empty one" (Farr Darling, p. 267). Dewey

(1916, p. 3) agreed that not only the social studies, but all education "which

develops power to share effectively in social life is moral." MacIntyre (1985)

urged schools to actively promote civic, or social, attributes such as liberty,

equality, justice, and tolerance, while Claus and Ogden (1999) argue that service-

learning can spur children to realize that in addition to personal rights, they also

have social responsibilities. Madeline Kunin, former deputy of U.S. Department

of Education, agrees, stating, "Service-learning resurrects idealism, compassion

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and altruism…we cannot survive as a nation unless we hold onto these qualities and teach them to our children" (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002, p. 11). Cipolle (2002) explained in her study of service learning and social justice:

> As educators, it is our responsibility to help students acquire the necessary information, skills, and desire to be engaged citizens who can meet not only today's social and economic challenges but who will also work to eradicate the root causes of in inequity and injustice. Service-learning…has the potential to build skills, attitudes, and behaviors connecting students to their community, as well as creating a lifelong pattern of active citizenship. (p. ix)

Service-learning provides a process to encourage caring, engaged citizenship in our students of today who are our civic leaders of tomorrow.

However, while one of the key objectives of service-learning – and American education, in general – is to prepare our students for active citizenship (Cipolle, 2010; Wade, 2001), helping students discover and develop civic dispositions is not easy, and could be controversial. For various reasons, many educators are unwilling to reflect or act upon moral attributes in their classrooms. Debates related to civic education include conflict over the vision of democratic citizenship and dispute over spending valuable instructional time on non-tested curriculum. Conflicting cultural or moral traditions, the risk of indoctrination,

and the actual efficacy of civic programming are also debates related to civic education.

Conflicting views about the fundamental nature of citizenship can hamper efforts to promote civic attributes in our classrooms. Some feel that citizenship promotes the freedom of a democratic way of life. Community, or sharing the responsibility of a greater whole, defines citizenship for others. Many believe that good citizens take an active role in the political process, while for some, volunteering and serving are the essence of citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003). Although most teachers cover the rudiments of civic education such as pledging allegiance to the flag, or laying a foundation of American history and tradition, allowing students to explore, then act upon, ethical concerns and problems requires sufficient time and thoughtful deliberation. In addition, endorsing civic attributes "calls for willingness to see things from a moral point of view, to recognize that both social studies and democratic citizenship are built on common ethical ground" (Farr Darling, 2002, p. 268), or what Callan (1997) calls "a commitment to moral reciprocity" (p. 26).

Another argument arises from those who believe that while service and moral education have a place in developing caring and good character, they do not promote social transformation, democracy, or civic engagement. Charged with the "false generosity" (Freire, 1970) of doing little to remedy societal *structural* ills,

programs that rely on character training to bolster democracy do not

encourage participants to explore whether people are poor because of

personal "character flaws" or because there are far fewer jobs that pay

pay living wages than there are people to fill them.

(Kahne & Westheimer, 2003, p. 301)

In fact, several studies support evidence that there is a growing trend toward civic

disengagement among young people within the United States.

Research indicates that several factors contribute toward civic

disengagement in our young people. First, many of our students are lacking in

basic civic knowledge and dispositions. Students in grade 12 who participated in

the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress responded to questions

that were designed to measure their civic dispositions and knowledge of

American social and political institutions. Results showed that 64% of 12th grade

students only scored at or below the Basic Level, 24% scored at the Proficient

Level, and a mere 4% scored at the Advanced Level. Second, young people often

do not feel that their efforts can make any meaningful impact on their

communities or the government, therefore they do not vote in equal proportion to

those in earlier generations (Flanagan, 2004; Kahne & Westheimer, 2002).

Finally, many adolescents distrust the political process (Torney-Purta, 2002).

Disillusioned with the hypocrisy and partisanship of not only the political process

but its leaders, numerous teenagers regard civic processes with cynicism

(Noddings, 2002).

These findings are an interesting conundrum however, when contrasted with studies that indicate volunteerism among young people has grown dramatically. Statistics from the United States Department of Labor Statistics report that the rate of teenagers volunteering more than doubled from 13.4% in 1989 to 28.4% in 2010. Additional research may help determine why there is often a disconnect in our young people between civic knowledge and dispositions and service to others.

Service-learning could influence civic dispositions. In 2005, the Corporation for National and Community Service conducted one of the most ambitious studies on service-learning, entitled *Youth Helping America*. Surveying over 3,000 American youth between the ages of 12 and 18, the study sought to identify the role of school-based service opportunities in volunteering, perceptions of those experiences, and the relationship between this service and the students' civic attitudes and behaviors. The report found that those students who were included in planning service activities, participated in service for at least one semester, and then reflected on their experiences were more highly engaged in future civic behaviors such as voting, volunteering, and protesting social injustices, than were those students whose experiences only included one or two of the elements, or who did not participate in service activities at all. *Planning, practice, and reflection* on service were seen as the key elements that influenced

the development of civic attributes.

Other studies also attempted to determine the influence of service-learning on civic attributes. An evaluation of The Philadelphia Freedom Schools Junior Leader Study (Billig, 2002) showed that the African-American participants increased in community involvement, capacity to plan projects, and aspirations to higher education after a year-long service-learning program. Kahne, Chi, and Middaugh (2002) evaluated the Constitutional Rights Foundation's City Works service-learning program. This study found that the examples of role models and the opportunity to be involved in issues that mattered to them had the greatest impact on students' civic involvement. However, Henness' 2001 study of 11 rural, Midwest school districts showed no discernable differences in civic knowledge, skills, or values after their participation in service-learning.

While service in and of itself may be an inadequate stimulus for some democratic processes, certain aspects of service could allow caring to grow into civic action. The Points of Light Foundation illustrates the juxtaposition of developing compassionate citizens through service; this program hopes to "solve serious social problems" by "engag[ing] more people more effectively in volunteer service" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003, p. 300). It can also be argued that certain democratic processes and values, such as identifying and acting to solve social problems, tolerance of multiple perspectives, as well as concern for the greater good of our local and global communities are often the result of caring

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translated into civic action.

Impact of Service-learning on Academic Learning and Educational Reform

Can service-learning be a vehicle for academic achievement and educational reform? While few studies demonstrate that service-learning contributes to academic *achievement*, much of the research indicates that service-learning could help students acquire academic *dispositions*. For example, research links service-learning to improved school attendance (Morgan, 1998), higher high school and college graduation rates (Davila & Mora, 2007), fewer behavioral problems (Bradley, 2005), increased class participation (Hecht, 2002), and higher motivation to learn (Billig & Klute, 2003; Kraft & Wheeler, 2003). One survey conducted by Indiana University in 1999 (Billig, 2000) demonstrated that eighth-grade students who participated in service-learning in Indiana scored higher in standardized tests of math and English than those who did not participate in service programs. While the academic impact of service-learning is evidenced in several positive outcomes, few studies reported quantifiable increases in grade point averages or test scores as a direct result of service-learning. The few studies that reported academic or testing improvement attributed those outcomes to the quality of the programming.

One reason that the academic impact of service-learning is hard to determine is that the often abstract, intangible qualities of attitudes, ideas, and values are difficult to test or measure. Our current testing culture mandates that

"progress" can and should be measured. Knowing what and how well our students learn and understand is a necessary function of teaching. Testing is an educational practice that has, for many years, been the tool for measuring academic growth. However, spurred by the recent school reform movements (for example, the 2001 "No Child Left Behind Act"), a phenomenon known as high-stakes standardized testing has developed. This entire reform movement is predicated on the notion that, ultimately through education, America must retain her competitive, international economic edge. Ironically, what is couched as school "reform" (implying new, improved practices) is rooted in an old worldview: modernism.

Modernism is a theory that holds that humans can create or improve their world by holding to a rational, scientific set of steps that achieve learning, understanding, and achievement. We see the results of modern thought in education through the implementation of high-stakes testing, back to basics instruction, and the panic that our students are regressing, instead of progressing. The emphasis on testing the "basics" (reading, mathematics, science) has resulted in schools scaling back or completely eliminating curriculum if it is not a tested subject.

While testing can determine knowledge at a very basic level, it also "…undercuts the authenticity of scores as measures of what children really know or can do" (Maxim, 2006, p. 394). In fact, "reductionist efforts to 'measure'

learning… inevitably suppress the excellence they purport to advance" (Houser, 2006, p. 11). In 1991, Conrad and Hedin wrote:

> Only time will tell whether…the service ethic of our nation's youth will be sustained or whether new priorities or the same old pressures for higher test scores and improved basic skills will keep youth service on the fringes of the political and educational agenda. (p. 744)

Impact of Service-learning on Character and Attitude Development

While early, colonial American schools emphasized character education as a part of the curriculum, the teaching of virtues began to be questioned in the 1960s, when virtues became synonymous with *values* (Evans, 2004; Maxim, 2006). Parents, educators, legislators, and the public began to demand, "Whose values should be taught?" Nel Noddings (2002) draws a distinction between character education, which may include moral or character judgments (values transmission) and what she terms "care ethics." Noddings proposes that care ethics instead investigate the dispositions and skills that ostensibly encourage tolerance, justice, understanding, and sense of community: attributes that could lead to caring.

Research shows service-learning has had the most impact on character and attitude development outcomes related to respect for diversity, development of moral values and judgments, social responsibility, self-confidence, relationships, decision-making, and empathy (Billig, 2000; Conrad & Hedin, 1982; Eyler, Root

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& Giles, 1998; Fredericks, 2003; Scales, Blyth, Berkas & Kielsmeier, 2000).

Some educators and social/emotional researchers believe that research on service-learning demonstrates that "social emotional learning provides the skills while service-learning provides the opportunities to apply the skills" (Fredericks, 2003, p. 1). Although there has been little research done on the social and emotional impact of service-learning in recent years, numerous programs have adopted strategies based on the conclusions drawn by these earlier studies (Billig, 2000). Many educators have embraced service-learning to encourage the development of caring, social responsibility, and ethics.

Other researchers, educators, and social theorists have legitimate concerns about using an educational strategy such as service-learning to foster attitudes and ethics in our students. While civic attributes such as social justice, reflective thinking, and respect for multiple perspectives are all important educational objectives, critics of character development rightfully ask, "Can virtue be taught?" (Nash, 1997; Noddings, 2002). And if virtue – respect, courage, caring, tolerance, justice – cannot be taught, how is it attained? Complaints against ethics education include the accusation that it relies on indoctrination, unduly influencing or manipulating children's perspectives (Farr Darling, 2002). Others worry that character education may attempt to instill what are viewed as religious virtues, crossing over into the realm of conscience formation.

Teachers may also be reluctant to address social values when they

conclude that children are not developmentally ready to tackle the deliberation required of moral reasoning and ethical debate (Farr Darling, 2002; Kohlberg, 1981). However, Noddings (1994) explains that when children are exposed to concepts such as fairness, kindness, and trust, a basic foundation of morals, values, and ethics is being laid. Thus, if teachers consistently model respect and acceptance of various perspectives to their students, they may gradually learn to extend that same respect and acceptance to others.

Vivian Paley (1992) wrote of rejection and inclusion in a study of herkindergarten classroom; she viewed belonging as a component of the civic virtue of citizenship. Similarly, Dewey (1916) viewed the classroom as a community, and held that the attributes needed to function in a community include the moral dispositions of good citizenship. While teachers do need to take care to introduce developmentally appropriate topics and service opportunities, even very young children can welcome the implied respect when they are asked to think deeply and thoughtfully about social injustices. They are empowered when allowed to act. When teachers encourage children to share their belongings, find a mutual solution to a conflict, respect others' property or feelings, we are reinforcing virtues.

When teachers model thoughtfulness, respect, and responsibility, we are reinforcing virtues. When teachers ask students for their opinions and perspectives and then accept those opinions and perspectives, we are reinforcing

virtues. When a relationship of trust, caring, and respect has developed between the child and the teacher, "virtues develop almost naturally out of these relations" (Noddings, 2002, p. 5).

A final objection to moral education is the debate over cultural differences. In our diverse society, we have multiple faiths, cultures, backgrounds, and ethnicities – all whom deserve an equal and respected voice. Those who argue against introducing moral issues or problems in school believe that we risk devaluing someone's traditions or beliefs if a particular viewpoint is espoused (Farr Darling, 2002). Is it possible, or even desirable, to remain morally neutral when introducing ethical issues? Instead of unavoidable conflict when addressing differing moral traditions and thorny problems, it may be that opening up differing perspectives increases understanding and tolerance. Linda Farr Darling believes that social studies classrooms may be "the most appropriate places for learning how to openly and sincerely listen to one another across multiple differences" (p. 279). A starting point for mutual respect may be that differing perspectives are at least heard, and once heard, then the process for understanding can begin.

While countless studies have been undertaken and literature written about those who have devoted their lives to improving the human condition, further investigation is needed. What factors and conditions could encourage the development of those caring, compassionate, and yes, confident attributes in our

students that result in *choosing* to live a life of service that empowers others? The rationale for this study arose from concerns about the critical need for care in society and education, and whether or not service to others could inspire the compassion that might help counter these problems.

Research Questions

In light of these social concerns and educational possibilities, this inquiry investigated the following questions:

1. What impact, if any, do service experiences have on my eighth grade students?

2. What types of service could help inspire critical, caring thought and action?

In Summary

In Chapter One, I proposed that there is a critical need for caring and empathy in our society and in our schools, due to a lack of community, social isolation, selfishness, and materialism. Research, literature, and my own practices suggest that service to others may encourage civic responsibility, strengthen community, and address the lack of caring for others, as well as give meaning and worth to the lives of both "carer" and "cared-for" (Noddings, 2002). My inquiry searched for possible insight into what conditions and relationships might encourage eighth grade students to use their creativity, energy, and gifts for the common good, placing others' needs equal to their own.

In Chapter Two, I will present a theoretical lens, which will be used to interpret the data. Chapter Three will explain the Research Methodology, including the participants, context and setting, methods used to gather, interpret, and analyze the data, and the plan of my investigation. Chapter Four will describe the findings of my research, organized thematically, while Chapter Five will conclude with an analysis of the findings and implications for my teaching practice and education in general.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Lens

In Chapter One, I examined the critical need for care in society and education, and whether or not service to others could counter these cultural and societal problems. I also identified the research questions to be explored. In this chapter, I will present and explain the theoretical lens through which the findings will be analyzed and interpreted.

There are diverse ways of looking at the question of whether service to others can help promote critical, caring thought and action. For example, the concept of critical consciousness proposed by theorist Paulo Freire (1970) suggests that true generosity encourages personal dignity, autonomy, and active transformation of those cared-for through structural change rather than simple the treatment of surface manifestations.   Systems theory proposes that all of life is a network of relationships (Capra, 1996); thus, serving and caring for others could influence a symbiotic, dynamic reciprocity of respect, compassion, and caring. Ethical care theory (Noddings, 2002) advocates establishing conditions that rely on relationships in context to encourage caring.   Because care and social critique are so closely related, after consideration of several possible theories I decided to examine the question primarily through the lens of Nel Noddings' ethical care theory, bolstered by both Freire's critical consciousness theory and systems theory.

The Ethic of Care

Ethical care theory begins with the realization that all people everywhere want to be cared for. Noddings (2002) suggests that the central aim of a moral life is to address this universal desire for caring, for respect, for compassion, for understanding. Ethical caring, according to Noddings, is an ideal of remembering what it is like to be cared for and recognizing that universal need for care so that we can respond willingly, compassionately, and relationally. By establishing conditions through relationships that encourage respect, tolerance, and compassion, a *natural, ethical* – not obligatory, or principle-based – caring will hopefully develop.

The interrelated factors that Noddings believes are likely to encourage caring include modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. She describes *modeling* as demonstrating to others what it means to care. *Dialogue* is, according to Noddings, the most fundamental aspect of care ethic. She uses as her example Paulo Freire (1970) in explaining that dialogue should be open-ended with true attention to the wants and needs of the cared-for. *Practice* in care-giving activities helps one to develop the capacity to care. Finally, *confirmation* brings out the best in others by attributing the best possible motive to their actions, in conjunction with reality. *Relationship* is the glue that holds all of these factors together, and contributes to caring thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

There are four aspects of Noddings' ethical care theory that are

particularly relevant to this study:

(1) Caring takes practice

(2) *Caring is relational*

(3) *Caring invites emotion*

(4) *Caring should be active in situational context.*

These four aspects will be examined in this chapter, congruent with the interrelated factors that Noddings believes are likely to encourage caring: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

Caring Takes Practice

From Noddings' perspective, as mentioned in Chapter One, the experiences in which we immerse ourselves develop attitudes and philosophies, "If we want to produce people who will care for one another, then it makes sense to give students practice in caring and reflection on that practice" (1998, p. 191). However, if caring can be encouraged through practice, what should be practiced? Does the direct teaching of specific virtues such as honesty, integrity, compassion, and courage, advocated by character education encourage caring? On a practical level, if caring is associated with ethical morality, can morality be addressed and practiced with students of various familial, cultural, traditional, and religious ideologies?

Noddings draws a distinction between the practice of care ethics and character education. While "character educators and care theorists agree that the

way to a better world is more likely to depend on better people than on better principles" (2002, p. 1), the two camps differ on how to produce these "better people". Care theory relies on establishing conditions that rely on relationships in situational context to encourage caring. In contrast, character educators believe that the direct inculcation of values and moral principles will hopefully result in caring, compassion, and other virtues.

Care ethicists do not necessarily reject the values and moral principles that character educators espouse; rather, they believe the pedagogy of instilling these virtues to be inadequate in motivation. For example, setting up a system whereby children are rewarded for moral behavior can become an externally motivated competition, instead of the intrinsic motivation that should typify virtuous living (Kohn, 1993). Hartshorne and May (1928-1930) concluded that children who were taught character virtues behaved well while under the direct supervision of their teachers, but did not display the taught virtues when on their own. Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) dismissed character education as not truly education, instead terming it a "bag of virtues", reliant on indoctrination of young and impressionable minds.

My personal experience also questions the efficacy of the "bag of virtues" approach. When a "virtue of the day" is merely discussed over the school intercom on the morning announcements, it is rare that students take that virtue to heart and actually practice it. Other critics of character education point out that

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since programs are planned in advance, virtues are taught out of context with the development of caring relations becoming a secondary consideration. Thus, care ethicists believe that, while perhaps well intentioned, the practice of character education rarely results in caring relations.

If virtues education is not effective in inspiring lasting caring, what factors and conditions should be practiced to encourage compassion and caring? Noddings (2002) suggests that working cooperatively in small groups gives students practice in helping one another succeed and also encourages the development of relationship. She also argues that while in many societies women develop a deeper ability to care because of cultural expectations, both sexes can learn to care deeply. This implies that boys and girls should both be given opportunities to practice caring through service that they consider personally relevant based on their interests and abilities.

Critical reflection is another key component of practicing caring. Just as dialogue supports a relationship and permits the carer to try to understand what the cared-for is feeling or experiencing, critical reflection can serve as the means of monitoring our actions and thoughts. Noddings encourages not only informal sharing, but regular seminars in which students can engage in dialogue about their experiences and feelings. Reflection can induce further thought, analysis, evaluation, and understanding about reciprocal responses with the cared-for. True, critical reflection should lead to action (practice), in an "authentic praxis"

(Freire, 1970, p. 66) that in turn inspires reflection to a new action.

To summarize, if caring thoughts and actions are to develop, then caring – as with any attitude, habit, or philosophy – must be practiced. Noddings draws a distinction between character education and care ethics, explaining that care theory relies on establishing conditions that rely on relationships in context to encourage caring. Cooperative learning, personally relevant opportunities to serve, and reflection are a few strategies that can be practiced to encourage caring.

Caring is Relational

At its heart, caring is relational. Noddings suggests that several relational factors contribute to the development of caring. First, caring begins with the recognition that we have a relationship with all people, since there is a universal desire to be cared for, loved, respected, or understood in some way. Also, children who have a caring relationship with people who genuinely model compassionate attributes are likely to develop natural caring. Finally, the reciprocal, relational response of the cared-for with the carer has significant impact on the development of caring attitudes. The relational aspect of caring extends to all whom we encounter through an *ethic* of care.

According to Noddings, caring should rely on an ethical ideal. She explains that ethical caring is an offshoot of a natural, caring relationship. For example, if a child has been cared for with love, consistency, and stability, a relationship of trust is established. This trusting, respectful relationship makes it

more likely that a child will not only respond to devoted care, but develop a natural caring for those he or she loves. This natural caring occurs not out of duty but out of desire. However, at other times we may recognize another's need but do not want to respond as carers. In these instances, Noddings believes that one must draw on the inner foundation of ethical caring: an ideal of remembering what it is like to be cared for and recognizing that universal need for care so that we can respond willingly and compassionately. She explains,

> In such instances we have to draw on ethical caring…a set of memories of caring and being cared for that we regard as manifestations of our best selves and relations…we accept our obligation because we value the relatedness of natural caring. Ethical caring is always aimed at establishing, restoring, or enhancing the kind of relation in which we respond freely because we want to do so. (2002, pp. 13-14)

Thus, *ethical caring* is a manifestation and extension of *natural caring*.

Noddings proposes that the development of caring attitudes does not end with modeling these attributes to young *children* so that they will naturally react as carers. She posits that caring relationships with adults – parents, teachers, extended family, religious mentors – is critical to *adolescents* as well. Children of all ages need adult models that show them how to care, engage in reflection on caring, and provide various opportunities to practice caring. The security of knowing that a loving adult cares for them can sustain and nurture a young person

even in less than ideal circumstances.

Another factor that has a significant impact on the development of caring attitudes is the reciprocal response of the cared-for with the carer. Tied to Noddings' theory of confirmation, whereby we can bring out the best in others by attributing to them the best possible motives, how one is treated can bring out the best or the worst in a person. According to Noddings, whether someone can become or remain a caring person largely depends on a reciprocal response. For example, if sincere caring has been extended but is harshly and arbitrarily rejected, it may be difficult for the carer to remain generous and compassionate unless there is a relational foundation. Thus, the cared-for also has responsibility in the development and nurturing of relationship. Care theory recognizes that a reciprocal response contributes understanding, connection, and dialogue that benefits both the carer and the cared-for.

In summary, care theory posits that caring is relational. Caring develops through the realization that all life is connected and should thus be respected, from modeling caring attributes to young children, and from the reciprocal response of carer and cared-for. In care theory, relationships come first, then caring hopefully develops naturally from those relationships.

Caring Invites Emotion

Another condition likely to inspire caring, according to Noddings, is opportunity to cultivate emotion. She believes feeling is "the key to moral

motivation. To act morally [to care and act upon that caring], we have to be moved; we have to feel something" (p. 153). Noddings refers to the arousal of emotion as "educating the passions":

> Faced with evil, we must feel revulsion. Faced with another's pain, we must feel the desire to remove or alleviate it. Faced with our own inclinations to cause harm, we must be both shocked and willing to face the reality. Then we can invite reason to serve our corrected passions.
>
> (p. 8)

Noddings points to C.S. Lewis to bolster her point that the starting point of caring is feeling, "From his perspective, emotion is central to moral life, but moral life cannot be reduced to emotion; neither can it be reduced to rational thinking" (p. 42). Care theorists believe that when natural caring fails, a carer can draw on an emotional ideal to respond to the needs of another.

Emotion can be cultivated through stories that arouse sympathy. Stories can highlight human dilemmas, and make students aware of social problems: factors that could encourage caring. Stories build understanding of why good people can make horrific mistakes, how entire communities can go wrong, how fear can cause us to betray our loved ones, why a mob mentality overcomes a group whose members are usually moral. Emotion can also be cultivated through stories that help us understand and respond to various perspectives. Quite naturally, perspective is dictated by a particular set of beliefs, traditions, or

cultural and familial mores – qualities that make up community.

There is a philosophical dichotomy in the concept of community, however. Some philosophers and educators hold that community is the foundation of citizenship, believing that an overemphasis on individual autonomy could lead to chaos, isolation, and selfishness. For example, MacIntyre (1985) and Bellah (1985) believe that a strong community depends on shared, interdependent practices and traditions to solve problems and produce effective citizens. Others view inculcation of specific values of a community as prescriptive and arbitrary, perhaps leading to a self-righteousness that may cause us to look at our lives as "morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal" (McIntosh, 1989, p. 10). Can the dialogue and understanding required of relationship – and of caring – exist if there are no shared beliefs, emotions, and ideals? Care theory emphasizes responding relationally to individual encounters rather than only caring for those with similar and common features. Ethical care causes us to also care for those with whom we have nothing in common, those not of our community.

Richard Bernstein (1992) believes that true communication and understanding can not exist unless beliefs, emotions, and commitments are shared. He proposes that there must be a willingness to really listen and try to understand even in instances where perspectives are totally different. The problem with the mutual ideals and emotions of a community arises when "this

commonality is not really shared, it is *violently* imposed. A false 'we' is projected" (p. 51). This false "we" presupposes that in this universal desire to belong, to be cared for, that caring should be manifested identically. While most people yearn to be understood, to communicate, to be a part of a community, to what extent should the common values of a community be taught while leaving room for understanding of various other viewpoints and ideologies?

Paulo Freire (1970) argues, "only through communication can life hold meaning" (p. 77). He explains that true communication is *dialogue*: an encounter between people that allows both to "name" the world, transforming it through reflection and action. Dialogue cannot be the act of one person "depositing" the common mores, values, and ideas of a dominant ideology (of the larger community) into another. Dialogue is people coming together in love, trust, and humility to "learn more than they now know" (p. 90). If dialogue is mutually respectful and understanding of other perspectives, hopefully each person has a voice.

A key to understanding other perspectives is found in *balance*: in most people, the longing to belong is balanced with a longing to be free (Bernstein, 1992, p. 66). Noddings references the writing of theologian Paul Tillich (1952) in proposing that either extreme – individualism or communitarianism – should be avoided. Instead, she believes that while community can be a valid vehicle of the need to belong, we should "respond to others according to their needs, not

according to their membership in a symbolic community or according to 'universal' rules…It may be that in such communities the virtues to be prized will be relational rather than personal" (Noddings, 2002, p. 67). Establishing communities that honor both shared values and diverse thought remains a challenge.

To summarize, caring invites emotion. Emotion can be aroused through stories that help us understand and respond to various perspectives. Shared perspectives and emotions are also one facet of community. Care ethic calls for us to respond relationally to individuals with diverse perspectives, as well as those with whom we share the common ideals and emotions of our community.

Caring Should be Active and in Context

Noddings believes that for caring to develop, it must be actively applied in context that reflects needs and situations that are authentic, concrete, and immediate. Parental lessons on values and character are effective because lessons are "usually delivered on the spot in response to a particular situation or occurrence" (p. 4). For example, if a young child is rough with his puppy, her mother will instantly admonish the child to be kind and gentle. Further, Freire (1970) asserts that if the context of caring is interpreted according to our version of reality, often the realities of those we are attempting to care for are ignored. He explains, "The starting point for organizing the… action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (p. 95).

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Another factor to consider in the development of active caring in context is the distinction Noddings draws between "caring about" and "caring for". In her early work, Noddings dismissed "caring about" as involving a well meaning but distant, benign attentiveness that did not involve personal commitment or relationship. "Caring about" requires little effort or action; one can send a donation or be moved with emotion and feel justified in having cared. She explained "caring for" as active, personal, and relational caring for specific needs. While Noddings (2002) still believes that the distinction between "caring about" and "caring for" is valid, her views on "caring about" have evolved. She now holds that "caring about" may be one of the foundational pillars of justice.

"Caring about" may establish conditions that allow "caring for" to occur. No one can "care for" all of humanity. But there must be a starting point to encourage caring and compassion, and perhaps "caring about" humanity in general is that starting point. For example, we may learn about the forced assimilation of Native American children in early 20th century reservation schools that enforced the knowledge, values, mores, and culture of Caucasian, Christian civilization. While we may "care about" those children in an *abstract* sense, it could also spur an *active* respect and "caring for" the culture, traditions, and values of children with whom we do come in contact. A key once again, according to Noddings, is balance. While "caring about" can create a climate of care and justice, we must be sure that "caring about" culminates in "caring for."

In Summary

In summary, this study uses ethical care theory as espoused by Nel Noddings as a foundation and underpinning to examine *what* conditions and relationships encourage and foster caring in middle school students. According to Noddings, caring should be active and in context. Noddings draws a distinction between "caring about" and "caring for": while valuable as a starting point of compassion, "caring about" requires little direct action. For "caring for" to develop, it must be actively applied to actual, personal situations. Tenets of Paulo Freire's critical consciousness theory as well as systems theory supported the foundation of ethical care theory. Care theory is not a model; rather, it encourages the establishment of conditions that most likely support the development of caring. In Chapter Three, I will discuss the methodology that was used to investigate the question of what impact, if any, do opportunities for service have on the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of my eighth grade students. Could service help establish the conditions and relationships that influence meaningful growth and encourage critical reflection leading to caring?

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

The purpose of this inquiry was to investigate the following questions: what impact, if any, do opportunities for service have on my eighth grade students, and what types of service could help inspire critical, caring thought and action? In this study, using my eighth grade students as participants, multiple primary data were collected and analyzed. Several qualitative strategies were utilized to hopefully discover helpful insights that could influence my own and others' practices.

In Chapter One, I examined the critical need for caring and empathy in our society and in our schools, due to a lack of community, social isolation, selfishness, and materialism. I also explained that research, literature, and my own practices suggest that service to others may encourage civic responsibility, strengthen the sense of community, and address the lack of caring and empathy. Service may also give meaning and worth to not only the life of the "carer", but the "cared for". In Chapter Two, I explained the theoretical framework through which the findings will be analyzed and interpreted. Chapter Three will explain the epistemological assumptions, general research approach, description of the participants and setting, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis used to explore the study.

Epistemological Assumptions and General Research Approach

Epistemology is the study of knowledge: what is the nature of knowledge,

how is knowledge derived, and of what does it consist? Since epistemologies

"provide much of the justification for particular methodologies" (Schwandt, 1997,

p. 39), my research approach and methodology was driven in large degree by

what epistemological assumptions fit the purposes of my study.

Due to the nature of my questions, the design of my study relied primarily

on qualitative research methodology. Qualitative inquiry is often inductive. That

is, theory is inductively inferred from common patterns or themes that are

discovered from analysis of observable data, rather than deductively testing an

already established theory (Merriam, 2002). In an attempt to understand the

meaning of particular service experiences for my eighth grade students, I

collected and analyzed data to develop common themes that inductively built a

theory.

Qualitative research is largely founded on constructivist assumptions,

whereby meaning is not considered to be universal or absolute, but rather depends

on, or is constructed by, individual interpretation. Sharon Merriam explains:

> The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that
>
> meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their
>
> world. The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or
>
> measurable phenomenon that is assumed to be in positivist, quantitative
>
> research. Instead, there are multiple constructions and interpretations of
>
> reality…that change over time. (p. 4)

Qualitative research thus describes unfolding results that are open to understanding, adaptation, and modification (Cresswell, 2003).

Qualitative inquiry practices also rely on application of the knowledge, insights, and understandings gained from the study. This application is not technical know-how, or a quantitative measurement; rather it is knowledge "in the more fundamental sense of making something relevant to oneself" (Schwandt, 1997, p. xvi). In addition, my study required prolonged observation of middle school students in their normal surroundings: qualitative methodology is suited for studying people or events in their everyday, natural settings (Punch, 2005). Qualitative research also relies on interpretations of smaller, focused samples – such as a small group of eighth grade students – rather than the large random samples of experimental, quantitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

There are numerous approaches to conducting qualitative research; one of my research strategies involved an *interpretive* approach. The characteristics of interpretive study consist of an understanding of how participants construct meaning, an inductive strategy, and a descriptive outcome (Merriam, 2002). To help me understand the perspectives of my eighth grade students, data was collected through interviews, documents (journal reflections and surveys), and observation. I then analyzed the data to find recurring patterns and themes to inductively form a theory. Finally, I provided a full description of the findings of the study, framed by the literature.

My research strategies also included the tenets of *action* research: qualitative inquiry that focuses on the relationship between reflection and action**.** According to Greenwood and Levin (1998), "Action research is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis…" (p. 6). Action research is also designed to gain insight into human behaviors, values, concerns, or motivations. My study was designed to investigate a personal, practical question relating to my practices as a teacher. Thus, action research fit my study's focus and intent since I hoped to gain insight into the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of my students.

Action research is openly ideological and critical (Hammersly, 1993; Merriam, 2002; Punch, 2005). Action research is *critical* in the sense that we must question and examine the power relations in a situation, as well as the underlying assumptions on race, gender, and social class in relation to the dominant ideology (Brookfield, 2005). Maxine Greene (1988) suggests that critical inquiry, reflection, and practice be used to transform our present society into a more just and compassionate community. Thus, action research is founded in praxis: its aim is to "integrate theory and practice…[so that] individuals become aware of the contradictions and distortions in their belief systems and social practices and are then inspired to change those beliefs and practices" (Schwandt, 1997, pp. 24-5). The aim of my study was to determine this praxis; might reflection on social injustices inspire critical, caring thought and action?

Action research is also problem-focused. Greenwood and Levin (1999) emphasize that the credibility, validity, and success of action research should be measured according to the effectiveness of social action on real-life problems. Educational action research was heavily influenced by the philosophy of John Dewey, who believed in a participatory, lived democracy whereby all citizens – including professional educators – work together to solve problems (O'Brien, 2001). His belief echoes the goals of action research: reflection and action that lead to positive change in the participants. Claus and Ogden (1999) concur, explaining, "Citizenship in a democratic community requires more than kindness and decency; it requires engagement in complex social…endeavors" (p. 34). Action research is often values-based and emancipatory, founded in the philosophy that research should help affect and influence change. Thus, the action research process is problem-focused, specific to context, looks to the future, and aims at improvement and involvement (Hart & Bond, 1995).

In addition, action research is participatory; it involves researchers working with and for research participants. Embedded in Greenwood and Levin's (1999) action research philosophy is the assumption that the construction of knowledge should be a respectful, collaborative process between participants and researchers. Participatory action research has emerged as a form of service-learning that not only addresses the underlying causes of social injustice and oppression, but equally involves those served in finding solutions (Reardon,

1998). Increasing numbers of schools and universities are engaged in participatory action research: service that "focuses on the information and analytical needs of society's most economically, politically, and socially marginalized groups and communities and pursues [solutions] determined by the leaders of these groups" (p. 59). Involving the participants in mutual equality, love, and trust opens up the dialogue that Paulo Freire (1990) believes is "the key encounter between men…in order to name [that is, to change] the world" (p. 76).

Action research aims to "design inquiry and build knowledge for use in the service of action to solve practical problems" (Punch, 2005, p. 160). Action research is values-based, participatory, reflective, and critical. Thus, the epistemological assumptions of *critical action research* are based on the idea that self-reflection and self-knowledge may lead to caring and effective social action: the crux of my entire study.

Participants

Out of 57 eighth grade students enrolled at "Elmwood", 52 were given consent by their parents and assented to participate in the research study. Before the study commenced, I explained the purpose of my study to the students. I emphasized that all service and leadership activities were open to, and optional, for all students whether or not they assented to participate in the study. Student anonymity was maintained in data collection and analysis. After discussion and questions, students were asked to sign an assent form indicating if they wished to

participate. At the annual eighth grade parents' meeting, I explained the purpose

of my study to the assembled parents. While every student assented to

participate, only 52 out of 57 parental consent forms allowing students to

participate in the study were eventually returned.

Elmwood is a small, rural, dependent, public, pre-kindergarten through

eighth grade school. Most of the students at Elmwood were from upper middle

class, professional families – the average family income in the district was

$217,183.00, with a 1% unemployment rate, compared to 5.9% unemployment

statewide. Only 10% of the students at Elmwood qualified for free and reduced

lunch; three eighth grade students who lived at a campground near the school

were considered to be Economically Disadvantaged according to the *No Child*

Left Behind Act Annual Report Card 2010-2011. While the majority of the

school's students were Caucasian, a small proportion of the school's population

was ethnic minorities.

Elmwood's eighth grade class was comprised of 45 Caucasian students,

five Asian students, five Black students, and two Hispanic students. The three

economically disadvantaged eighth graders who lived at the campground were

ethnic minorities from transient, migrant families. Participants included 32 boys

and 20 girls of various ethnicities; five Caucasian students did not participate.

Most eighth graders belonged to families with conservative, Christian belief

systems, although a small percentage had Hindu, Muslim, or no faith

backgrounds. Most Elmwood eighth graders had attended school together for several years and interacted with almost every classmate on a daily basis, year after year, forging deep relationships. Although social interactions are significant to most adolescents, peer relationships were thus especially important to Elmwood eighth graders.

Middle school age students were chosen as a purposeful sample because this stage of their development was unique: these young adolescents were facing the challenges of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual change. Because this stage of development is so fraught with change, children in these middle years tend to focus on their relationships and want to understand themselves and how they fit in with their peers and parents. Since they are struggling to define themselves as individuals and in relation to others, they find themselves in a transition between childhood and adulthood. Every day is new with adolescents: responding one day as children and the next day as young adults!

Young adolescents in the middle school years (around ages 10-15) are asking "some of the most profound questions human beings can ever ask: *Who am I? What can I be? What should I do?*" according to John Arnold (1985, p. 23). While these young people are vitally interested in complex moral issues and social injustices, they are unprepared to deal with them, tending to view these problems in black and white, right or wrong. "Young adolescents are long on idealism and short on experience" (Arnold, p. 23). They can be very sensitive,

finding it hard to understand why people are not treated fairly and why injustice

cannot be solved immediately. Experiences have a profound impact on the

development of these young adolescents' attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. They

find experiences and issues that apply to their own lives the most meaningful.

Thus, reflection on the *whys* behind social injustices and an emphasis on serving

others may have lasting impact on their beliefs and actions since young adolescent

children are forming life-long attitudes and values.

Setting/Context

Elmwood has long been a model not only of academic achievement but

also of character development. One of the ways that it strove for excellence was

in developing future leaders. Begun informally several years ago, service projects

planned and implemented by the eighth grade students evolved into a treasured

tradition. Part of this gradual evolution included the participation of all grades in

service activities, beginning in the preschool department and culminating in an

eighth grade year of service.

As an extension of the Enrichment (gifted and talented) Program, the

Service-Leadership Course was born. All eighth graders were given the

opportunity to enroll in a rotation in Service-Leadership; each rotation met for one

hour per day for six weeks. Each student was encouraged to participate in the

Service Planning Committees that fit his or her individual interests and abilities,

as well as given the opportunity to serve as the chairman of one of the

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committees. In addition, while each eighth grader participated in a specific six-week rotation of Service-Leadership, all students were given the opportunity to be included in the other activities planned and implemented during the other rotations. Service-Leadership activities included mentoring younger students, participating in various social and community service projects, and involvement in the Sister School Project with Hope Academy in Ghana, West Africa.

Initially, I intended for my study to observe and investigate students' thoughts and attitudes using three service activities over a six-week period. However, as the study progressed, a different timetable and research strategy began to emerge. Research indicates that the specific content and goal of service dictates its effect, outcomes, and impact (Billig, 2000). Since my study's intent was to determine if any meaningful growth might develop in my students as a result of service to others, I concluded that a wider and more extensive variety of service activities would yield more credible and comprehensive outcomes. Therefore, I expanded the study to encompass six service activities and conducted my research over the course of a semester – eighteen weeks – during normal school hours.

Service Activities

The six activities that my research observed and investigated included a relationship with our sister school in Ghana, West Africa, implementing an annual school-wide reading festival, as well as participating in a mentoring program with

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an urban preschool. Eighth grade students also served at the annual school sponsored, community-wide Thanksgiving Feast, "adopted" several needy children for Christmas, and provided food baskets for area fire stations. In addition, students prepared and voted on a budget for each service project and determined appropriate fundraisers that would provide funds to enable them to carry out their planned service activities. Each of these six service activities will be explained in subsequent detail.

Elmwood School has participated in a Sister School Program with Hope Academy in Ghana, West Africa for three years. According to leading Ghanaian educator, Fred Asare (2012, p. 3), only 2% of West Africans can hope to progress beyond a second grade education. Hope Academy, however, has demonstrated excellence in preparing their students to progress to high school while suffering from a lack of the most basic instructional materials, facilities, curriculum, and teacher training. All Elmwood classes from kindergarten through eighth grade were given the opportunity to partner and interact with the same grade class at Hope Academy in curriculum that extended and expanded the regular curriculum in the classroom. Students in grades three through eight participated in writing letters to pen pals at Hope Academy. Eighth graders also invited the other grades to participate in a service project designed to provide teaching/learning materials for the Academy. The Sister School Program takes place during the entire school year. The Sister School Program is designed to not only broaden the worldviews

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of both Elmwood and Hope Academy students, but to foster collaboration: a mutual sharing and learning.

Twenty-three years ago, I implemented Reading in the Park, an annual school-wide reading festival. It was held in late September at a small, local park. Teachers presented book talks for our primary students while eighth graders served as group leaders to guide our primary students from center to center or assist the teachers in their presentations. Goals for Reading in the Park were two-fold: to pique interest in reading, and to encourage responsibility, service, and leadership in our eighth grade students.

Elmwood's relationship with an inner city, impoverished preschool has been both challenging and meaningful. Most of the students at Elmwood were from high socio-economic backgrounds with conservative social and political views, while the majority of the preschoolers were from first-generation immigrant families who worked two and three jobs to survive. The preschool operates in collaboration with the public school system and the Department of Human Services. Eighth graders visited the preschool in the fall, the first of several visits during the school year, paired with the same preschooler each time to foster a developing relationship. Gaining a deeper awareness and broader perspective of others was the objective of interacting with these children from different cultures, languages, and social status.

Elmwood School has hosted an annual, community Thanksgiving Feast

for many years. During the Feast, the students served meals, directed parking, greeted guests, and cleaned up the eating area, a monumental task that lasted the entire school day. In serving over 1200 guests, our eighth graders were exposed to the idea that belonging to a community means working together for the common good.

The Christmas adoption program has become a cherished tradition of Elmwood eighth grade classes over the years. Providing a Christmas for needy children (identified by a local social service agency) grew from the sponsorship of two children 15 years earlier to this class' decision to sponsor 12 children. Elmwood eighth graders formed 12 groups that each "adopted" a child, then raised all of the necessary money to provide a complete Christmas for each child. They spent a morning in a school-sponsored shopping trip to select gifts. Because the identities of the sponsored children remained anonymous for their protection, the eighth graders dropped off all of the gifts at a local church for distribution. Serving others without any expectation of reward or acknowledgement was the primary objective of this activity.

Many of our eighth graders' homes as well as Elmwood School were threatened with destruction by rampant grassfires in the fall. Students felt compelled to offer a special thanksgiving to local firefighters for saving their homes and school. Treat baskets were prepared and distributed to seven nearby fire stations.

Methods of Data Collection

Multiple primary data were collected using several different qualitative strategies before, during, and after students participated in the six service experiences. These strategies, common to a qualitative research paradigm, included a preliminary cross-sectional survey, reflective journal entries, committee chairpersons' applications, an exit evaluation cross-sectional survey, interviews, and observational study. Sources of secondary data included the research of other educators and social scientists. While in *Introduction to Social Research, Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, Keith Punch (2005) describes the value of using a variety of data gathering techniques in ethnographic research, his argument can be applied to qualitative research in general:

> …ethnography is eclectic, not restricted…An ethnographic fieldwork continuum would range from direct nonparticipant observation to participant observation, then to ethnographic interviewing with one or more informants, and then to the words of the people themselves… Data collection may…be further supplemented by anything that gives a fuller picture of the live data, such as film or audio records, documents, diaries, and so on. It may also use structured and quantitative questionnaires, with scaled variables… (p. 153)

Using multiple data collection methods also fit the epistemological assumptions of my study, since action research is "more of a holistic approach to problem-

solving, rather than a single method for collecting and analyzing data…it allows for several different research tools to be used as the project is conducted" (O'Brien, 2001, p. 9). Hopefully, trustworthiness was enhanced by this triangulation of methods used to collect and analyze data, serving to give a rounded and realistic picture of the study's research, as well as assuring its reliability, accuracy, and credibility.

Surveys

I developed and administered the first cross-sectional, Preliminary Survey at the beginning of the fall semester before any service opportunities began. A cross-sectional survey is designed to collect information at one point in time from a pre-determined sample. Fifty-two eighth graders completed the Preliminary Survey. After the conclusion of the six service opportunities, a cross-sectional Exit Evaluation Survey was administered; 51 students completed the Exit Survey. The administration of short and easy surveys allowed me to obtain a wide range of student opinions. Both surveys included open-ended questions, rank-ordered questions, as well as five-point Likert Rating Scales – intended to express the respondent's opinions about caring, empathy, specific service strategies, connections, and interests – ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). The surveys also included demographic information such as age and gender while maintaining anonymity. Differences in demographic data were included in the analysis.

The surveys' open-ended questions allowed students to make in-depth responses and "provide opportunities for yet more information, opinions, and feelings to be revealed" (Martin & Chiodo, 2009, p. 9). While students at Elmwood are introduced to service-learning in sixth and seventh grades, other practitioners who may benefit from this study may use this survey tool without any prior exposure to service. Introductory Survey questions included:

INTRODUCTORY SURVEY of Service Leadership

+_____+_____+_____+_____+

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree

- On a scale of 1-5 (1 being "strongly disagree", 5 being "strongly agree"), how important is helping others to you? Why?

- Are you interested in being allowed to *choose* what activities to participate in? Why or why not?

- Would you be interested in chairing/designing a service activity? If so, what type of activity?

- Does leadership involve serving others? If so, how? If not, why not?

- What types of service opportunities, if any, interest you the most? Least? Rank these opportunities in order of importance.

- Do you hope to make our world a better place? If so, how?

After the students completed the service activities they were asked to complete an Exit Evaluation survey of their experiences. Exit Evaluation survey questions included:

EXIT EVALUATION SURVEY of Service Leadership

+_____+_____+_____+_____+

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree

- On a scale from 1-5 (**SEE** above scale), rank each of the following activities:

  - ➢ Reading in the Park:_____
  - ➢ Firefighter Appreciation Trip_____
  - ➢ Celebrations Preschool_____
  - ➢ Family Feast Day_____
  - ➢ Christmas Adoptions_____
  - ➢ Pen pal program with Hope Academy_____

- Which of the service activities did you most enjoy? Least enjoy? Explain.

- How could any of the service activities be improved?

- Are you interested in any problem or need that you see in our world that could be changed or served? Explain. What could YOU do to solve this problem?

- On a scale of <u>1-5</u> (1 being "strongly disagree", 5 being "strongly agree"), how important to you is helping others? Why?

- Are you interested in being allowed to *choose* what service activities you participate in? Why or why not?

- Would you be interested in chairing/designing a service activity? If so, what type of activity?

- Does leadership involve serving others? If so, how? If not, why not?

Interviews

In order to gain a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the students' responses on the surveys, informal, open-ended interviews were conducted from six stratified, purposefully selected students. Sometimes referred to as a creative interview (Douglas, 1985), an unstructured (or semi-structured) interview should be conducted like an "intimate conversation" (Punch, 2005, p. 172). Since the demographics of Elmwood include a high percentage of Caucasian, high socio-economic students as well as a small proportion of students from minority and migrant families, I included students from these two diverse populations in my interviews, as well as a combination of both boys and girls. Participants included three Caucasian, economically affluent girls, one affluent Caucasian boy, an affluent African American boy, and one minority, migrant boy.

My research study attempted to determine if service influences the development of caring attitudes; when I conducted the interviews, I took care to remember that,

> A person filling out a questionnaire, responding to an interview…– even though he is trying to be genuine – may not be able to provide accurate information about his usual behavior in real, complex settings. One area that this shortcoming has been especially frustrating is attitude research… people's responses on questionnaires and in interviews have not provided adequate information about their observed actions. (Wilson, 1977, p. 248)

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Therefore, I conducted the interviews as an informal, group dialogue; participants were asked to share and reflect on their eighth grade experiences, including the service activities. So as not to miss any scheduled classes and thus hopefully not feel singled out, the students gathered in my room during their break time.

Journal Reflections

As well as surveys and interviews, data collection included several journal reflections. Since there are legitimate concerns regarding hierarchy and possible bias in a personal teacher/student relationship (Deutscher, 1966; Reinharz, 1992; Wilson, 1977), I tried to neutralize these influences as much as possible by having another teacher administer two of the journal reflections. Students were asked to complete journal reflections after the completion of the reading exposition, delivery of the firefighters' gift baskets, and at the end of the first semester. Data from all three journal reflections were included in the study's analysis.

The first two journal prompts asked students to reflect on what impact, if any, participation in each service activity had on them and solicited suggestions on how to make the opportunity a better experience. As a "warm up" to an oral evaluation of the reading exposition, I administered the first journal reflection in my classroom after the Preliminary Survey. Forty-eight students completed the prompt. Elmwood's middle school language teacher administered a second prompt over the fire fighters' activity as part of the students' voluntary weekly writing journal; only 12 students completed that journal. The same language

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teacher administered a final, third prompt at the end of the first semester; 46

students completed the third journal reflection. The final, third journal prompt

asked students to reflect on the most meaningful, enjoyable, and significant

experience of their first semester of eighth grade.

Observations

Another form of data collection included personal observation of service

activities. Since one of the most common research methods used to determine a

more realistic picture is to study the phenomenon in natural settings (Wilson,

1977), observation included the recording of field notes at the service

opportunities, as well as soliciting the observations of other teachers present. A

qualitative approach to observation can be unstructured, when "the researcher

does not use predetermined categories and classifications, but makes observations

in a more natural open-ended way…the behavior is observed as [it] naturally

unfolds" (Punch, 2005, p. 179), in undistorted, real-life situations. Copious notes

of observation were taken immediately after each activity while the students'

responses and actions were still fresh both in my mind and that of other attendant

teachers. My documentation of the students' participation in service activities

recorded the nature of students' interactions, engagement, and civil discourse with

one another and those they were serving. I also compared and contrasted those

observations with their interactions during the course of normal classroom activity

and school functions. One of the greatest benefits to my research was the

opportunity to have direct, prolonged observation – a "bird's eye" view – of the students' participation during service activities, as well as during normal classroom and school functions.

Methods of Data Analysis

In qualitative inquiry, since any set of data can be analyzed from different perspectives, I took care to apply scholarly rigor in describing, analyzing, and interpreting my data. Since "data is only useful if it actually measures what it claims to be measuring" (Livesey, 2009, p. 2), my methods of data analysis strove to be "systematic, disciplined and able to be seen (and to be seen through, as in 'transparent') and described" (Punch, 2005, p. 195). Data were inductively analyzed to find recurring themes. By using the constant comparison method (continually and systematically comparing and contrasting the collected data), then coding (labeling and categorizing) the data, common themes and patterns gradually began to emerge. To discover patterns (recurring ideas or events) and themes (sets of patterns), Labov (1972) encourages researchers to look for sequences of repeated phrases or phenomena. Themes enabled me to develop an analysis, interpretation, and understanding of my problem area. Integrity was maintained in transcribing students' direct quotes, regardless of spelling or grammar. The entire body of data was categorized, coded, and related to one another to develop understanding.

In addition, a systems/complexity approach to research analysis helped me

to make sense of the data. *Analysis*, by definition, enables understanding by reducing a study into components. Only by looking at the empirical evidence in light of the *interconnected and interdependent components* of middle school culture, context, and demographics, in conjunction with students' interactions with each other and with me, could I begin to make inferences.

However, it must be duly noted that while certain insights arose in my research, these conclusions will be general principles. Since students are "living systems" that can "alter their own behaviors to respond differently to almost identical circumstances" (Bowsfield, 2004, p. 7). I cannot predict with certainty that these principles will be effective in every circumstance. Experienced teachers know that individual students can interpret, or construct meaning of, the exact same activity or experience in completely different ways.

Triangulation of data sources allowed me to examine the integrity of my conclusions and inferences. For example, crosschecking students' surveys that described their reactions to specific service opportunities with both my and other participating teachers' observations allowed me to examine the consistency of these data from more than one perspective and method. Methodological, as well as theoretical triangulation helped provide assurance that the data were valid and accurate descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation, while accepting that living systems cannot be predicted or replicated in a "best case" scenario.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter One examined a critical dilemma among our American young people: a continued focus on individual gratification. As mentioned by Billig (2000); Carlson (2010); Cutler, Glaeser and Norberg (2001); Eisenberg & Aalsma (2005); and Noddings (2002), individual gratification is evidenced through civic disinterest, social isolation, exclusion, disrespect, suicide, and bullying. This dilemma raises a number of questions about the need for care in society and education. How can we establish conditions that will produce caring citizens? Can service to others help counter a lack of care that contributes to these societal and cultural problems? Is service-learning an effective approach to teach about and encourage caring, compassion, and empathy?

With this problem in mind, this inquiry addressed two questions. First, what impact, if any, did service experiences have on my eighth grade students? Second, what types of service experiences could help inspire critical, caring thought and action? The intent of my study was to try to understand my students' perspectives in order to inform my own teaching practices, as well as exploring possible implications for other middle school educators.

In Chapter Two, I explained the theoretical framework through which the findings will be analyzed and interpreted. Chapter Three explained the epistemological assumptions, general research approach, description of the participants and setting, methods of data collection and analysis used to explore

the study. The influence of service – with its overlapping and interconnected

conditions and relationships – on these eighth graders' attitudes and actions will

be explored more fully in this chapter.

Impact of Service

The first question asked what impact, if any, service experiences had on

my eighth grade students. After careful analysis of the data, my findings

suggested that service experiences did have an impact on some of my eighth

grade students. First, service had on impact on these eighth graders' thoughts and

feelings. Second, service impacted some of the eighth graders' actions. While

service experiences did seem to impact the thoughts, feelings, and actions of these

students, the degree of influence varied and evolved, based on assorted,

contributing conditions and relationships.

Impact of Service Experiences on Eighth Graders' Thoughts and Feelings

Experiences have a profound impact on young adolescents' attitudes,

thoughts, and feelings. Their thoughts and feelings, in turn, may form their

perspectives. If as Nel Noddings (2002) believes, we must practice those feelings

that we hope to cultivate, service experiences could provide that practice. Service

experiences impacted eighth graders' thoughts and feelings primarily in two

ways.

First, service experiences impacted students' thoughts and feelings in their

growing ability to think critically. Critical thinking requires an examination of

the underlying causes and power relations behind injustice. Thinking critically also teaches young adolescents to look at social issues and people from multiple perspectives: a first step to understanding and caring.

An illustrative example demonstrates that service impacted students' ability to think critically. Initially, eighth graders viewed Africa and its problems from a one-dimensional perspective: as deprived, unenlightened, primitive, and chaotic. While deeply engaged with their pen pals, they "cared about" their Ghanaian friends in the abstract, as "recipients" of their help and caring. Gradually, however, some of the students began to see a different, multifaceted picture of Africa. Studying sub-Saharan Africa's legacy of colonialism and slavery allowed them to examine the underlying causes of much of Africa's current poverty, cultural chaos, and political upheaval. From beautiful art and crafts they received from their pen pals, they began to understand that while the culture was different, it was rich and meaningful. From letters they received, they glimpsed peers who had dreams, humor, talents, and longings, just as they did. When several educated, cultured guests from Ghana visited Elmwood, they realized that if given equal opportunities, people could excel. Thinking critically encouraged the students to not only examine the roots of Africa's problems, but to understand those problems with compassion and understanding.

Another illustrative example also demonstrates the growing influence of students' critical thought. Engaged by a discussion of the impending ecological

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crisis surrounding rain forest deforestation, students began brainstorming about possible ways to address this predicament. Since they did not understand the origin of much of this deforestation, their perspectives were limited to "selfish" or "ignorant" locals who cut the rain forests "to make money." Critical analysis helped the students realize that for many communities caught in the cycle of dire poverty, cutting the timber to sell or clearing the forest for affordable grazing and farming were often the only means of survival. Gradually, students were drawn to an understanding that in many cases, solutions to deforestation may rely on empowering these communities in finding alternate resources as livelihoods. Thinking critically led to understanding and empathy in some students.

The second way that service seemed to impact students' thoughts and feelings was an emergent empathy: an emotional awareness and understanding of what others feel. While much of this awareness was a neutral "caring about" in the broad sense of caring for humanity, there were also glimmers of relational "caring for". It took repeated and constant comparison, coding, and triangulation of the data (interviews, surveys, journal reflections, observation) to discover that my students' perceptions of, and reactions to, authentic need largely determined their growing empathy. Several examples illustrate students' emergent empathy.

First, students appeared to respond with stronger caring and empathy in instances where they felt they could make a true, relational difference. Students spoke and wrote of their desire not only to make the world a better place, to "help

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other kids in other countries who don't have homes to know someone out their loves them", but also to impact their friends and peers. One boy wrote, "The only people I help are my friends. But, if a friend were in trouble I would never turn them down." Another boy whose friend had a sister with special needs wanted to spend time with children at the Special Olympics "because it would be really cool to help out people who are just like you, with the slightest difference that makes them "special." Many students tried to put themselves into others' situations, writing in their journals about how they would feel if they too were bullied, destitute, or friendless.

Second, that empathy is the result of a learning process, of practice, was evident during a meeting with several committee chairmen. Six students and I met to discuss how to spend the remainder of their donated funds. Instead of just donating their funds to beautify a local, lower income school, students wished to meet the children, paint, plant flowers, and repair the playground. They wanted a personal connection with those they were serving. Until we discussed the implications of their plan – belonging to the same athletic district means students frequently interact – they did not understand that while their motives may have been pure, they might actually be resented as condescending. Although the students unintentionally highlighted their beliefs that their way of life was different or superior, it seemed that genuine caring and empathy motivated them.

In marked contrast to most Elmwood eighth graders, Jamie's life

circumstances offer a poignant example of a child who found it hard to demonstrate empathy. A ward of the foster system, Jamie had been adopted after he was removed from an abusive home. Tragically, his adoptive family used him as their scapegoat. They subjected him once again to verbal and physical abuse until his adoptive father disappeared and the family disintegrated. Once again he became a ward of the state. By eighth grade, Jamie had been shuffled through several foster homes, rejected by both his biological and adoptive parents. Jamie's basic needs of love and security had rarely been met.

The most telling evidence of Jamie's lack of confidence in having his basic needs of love and security met was not in what he wrote, how he acted, or what he said. His insecurity and apathy seemed evident in what was *not* written, done, or said. When asked to fill out the service surveys and journal reflections, most of the questions on caring and service in the surveys were left blank. When reflecting on the most meaningful experience of his eighth grade year, he wrote a cryptic response about an incident in math class. Although he chose to participate in most of the service projects, most of time he stood apart and unengaged. In class discussions of social issues, Jamie was rarely if ever disrespectful, but demonstrated a marked lack of interest and understanding of the feelings or motivations of others. His friends were very important to him, yet he often seemed unable to translate social cues. There were frequent although unintentional misunderstandings that led to conflicts. Jamie's lack of control and

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security in his own life seemed directly tied to his apathy towards others.

Adele also found it hard to empathize with the needs of others. Victim of a contentious divorce three years earlier, Adele had been placed in the role of confidante and support of her emotionally devastated mother. She had no meaningful relationship with her father who was distant and critical of her. While she wrote in a survey that she "would do anything for her friends", she ranked her interest in helping others as a 2 (little interest) out of a possible 5. In discussions of social injustices or needs, Adele often displayed a pragmatic realism that seemed to disregard or belittle the feelings or motivations of others. Because it appeared as if Adele's own emotional needs were largely ignored, she rarely demonstrated empathy for any but her closest friends and family. Seven months after the study ended, Adele took her own life.

It may be possible that the degree of caring that most Elmwood eighth graders manifested was influenced by their physical, economic, and emotional security. Further investigation may be needed to determine if those whose physical, spiritual, and emotional needs have already been met are more receptive to the needs of others. If we all as Noddings claims (2002) have a fundamental desire to be cared for, is there a possible correlation between the security, confidence, and happiness a child feels and the degree of willingness to serve, or even care? Is caring a *luxury?*

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Impact of Service Experiences on Eighth Graders' Actions

Actions can sometimes serve as a barometer of thoughts and feelings. Service experiences impacted these eighth graders' thoughts and feelings, which in turn impacted their actions. Several examples demonstrate the interrelated impact that students' caring, critical thoughts had on their actions.

The first instance occurred after students viewed a documentary on West African child trafficking. Many of the students at our sister school were featured in the video, having been rescued from the rampant child slavery trade. While already aware that their friends in Ghana did not share their economic, health, and educational privileges, the eighth graders were visibly and emotionally moved by the plight of so many children who are destitute, enslaved, and powerless. Horrified that this abuse was rampant throughout the world, students spontaneously began to brainstorm about what they could personally do to solve this problem. Several students wondered how young, inexperienced eighth graders could address a problem of this magnitude. We reflected that the relationships they were building with their pen pals demonstrated that while one person cannot do everything, one person could do something. From that discussion, a group of students developed a feasible plan to affect a small but practical difference in the lives of their pen pals: providing art supplies to enrich the learning experiences of the students at Hope Academy. All of the eighth graders voted to raise funds to furnish the supplies, which I then took with me to

Ghana to teach an art enrichment camp. The students' empathy and compassion spurred them to action.

Several other students also translated their "compassion into action" (Sontag, 2003, p. 90). For example, after the service trip to the preschool Sally wanted to continue her relationship with her young partner. She applied and was accepted to serve as an intern at the preschool. In addition, the following fall after the conclusion of my study, Joleen (by then a high school freshman) asked me to write a letter of recommendation to serve as a special needs aide at her high school. Another eighth grade graduate of Elmwood organized a fundraiser at her high school to donate supplies to an orphanage in Haiti. Nineteen of the 52 eighth graders voluntarily continued their relationship with their pen pals at Hope Academy in Ghana after moving on to high school. Jeremiah became very involved as a representative on the service committee in Student Council at his high school, while three others volunteered to raise funds for its annual service project. On their own initiative, several students wrote and produced an "anti-bullying" video that was shown to their peers in an assembly. However, while most students wanted an active "voice" in decision making and planning, several did not maintain a sustained interest in service to others.

In summary, my findings indicated that service experiences could have an impact on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of some of these eighth grade students. The students' motivations to serve, attitudes toward relational caring,

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reactions to the responsibility required of service, and responses to need seemed to be significant indicators of the impact of service on their thoughts. In several instances, the impact of service on the students' thoughts and attitudes resulted in action. Further analysis of the findings and implications for my teaching practice and education in general will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Types of Service that Influence Critical, Caring Thought and Action

In addition to the first finding, the data also suggested a second finding. The second finding indicated that specific *types* of service experiences impacted students' critical, caring thoughts and actions. While the degree of influence that encouraged caring, critical reflection and action varied, based on assorted, contributing conditions and relationships, four basic themes emerged. The second finding indicated that four different types of service activities influenced critical, caring thoughts and actions. These included service experiences that were:

(1) personally relevant

(2) relational

(3) real opportunities to share responsibility, and

(4) authentic.

The data revealed that eighth graders valued being given options of service that were *personally relevant*, instead of being required to serve. Findings of the study also indicated that *relationships* not only motivated participation and engagement in serving others, but were also instrumental in establishing worth

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and validation: conditions that could lead to caring. Allowing students to share in the *responsibility* for their own decisions inspired a feeling of ownership in service experiences. Finally, Elmwood eighth graders were most impacted by service experiences that they considered worthwhile and *authentic*.

Personally Relevant Service Experiences

The first type of service activities that seemed to influence the development of caring in some eighth graders was options that were personally relevant. One of the hallmarks of adolescence is that experiences and issues that directly apply to their own lives are perceived as the most meaningful to them: this can certainly be said of Elmwood adolescents. Since these particular characteristics of Elmwood's eighth graders informed their perspectives and actions, my findings are relevant in relation to this singular developmental stage and particular demographic. As with any group of young teenagers, Elmwood's eighth graders had a wide diversity of interests and abilities, based not only on aptitude and personality, but family dynamics, social and economic status, gender, and religious background. As mentioned in Chapter Three, academic achievement was a significant priority to Elmwood's higher income, professional families. These children were also exposed to various extracurricular sports, music lessons, travel opportunities, and tutoring. Students from lower income or migrant families often spent their free time working to supplement their family incomes or taking care of younger siblings while their parents worked two and

three jobs. The majority of these students were involved in religious youth groups. Because of its small enrollment and a discretionary budget that offset students' activity fees, Elmwood students had many opportunities to exercise their varied interests. They participated in sports, acted in school theater productions, performed vocally, produced the yearbook, or played in the band. Whether working, practicing, studying, or serving, Elmwood eighth graders had very full lives, and were mindful that their time be used in ways that were personally relevant.

These findings offered significant insight regarding these eighth graders' possible motivation for participation in service experiences. Analysis of the data revealed that most students, irregardless of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, based their primary motivation to participate in *any* type of activity on whether it was "fun", allowed them to "be with their friends", or "provided a choice based on our interests or what we're good at." Participation and engagement in service activities that could encourage caring seemed to be motivated by students' *personal interests, peer relationships*, and *abilities*.

First, Elmwood eighth graders considered service options personally relevant when their individual interests were addressed. Evidence that eighth graders based their participation on their personal interests was reinforced by their applications for various committees and chairmanships. For example, eight boys and two girls applied for the dodge ball fundraising committee. Their rationales

for applying for this activity ranged from "I love sports", to as one boy honestly expressed himself, "My favorite part of eighth grade is...dodgeball and basketball. Dodgeball is fun cause you get to hit people." Another male student applied for the advertising committee because "I'm very creative and I'm thinking about doing [marketing or advertising] some day." Two girls volunteered to perform in a reader's theater demonstration during Reading in the Park because of their love of drama.

Conversely, most students did not volunteer for, or were not engaged in, particular activities if their personal interests were not addressed. When asked in a journal prompt to reflect on their Reading in the Park experiences, one female student explained, "I sort of enjoyed it [Reading in the Park]. I don't really like kids but it was fun." Another student said, "It was okay. I liked the opportunity to get to be a leader, but I don't like reading…all that much." These students seemed to be much more engaged and interested in activities that were personally relevant.

Second, Elmwood eighth graders considered service options personally relevant when their peer relationships were considered. Most students – both boys and girls – were not interested in participating in activities unless their friends were also involved. While characteristic of most adolescents, the importance of peer relationships might be of particular relevance in this inquiry.

Elmwood eighth graders' emphasis on friendships might be notable as

a relevant, contributing factor to the findings in light of the context of this study. As mentioned in Chapter Three, although peer connections are significant to most adolescents, Elmwood eighth graders had particularly close relationships. Since Elmwood houses grades pre-kindergarten through eighth grade in one building, most eighth graders had attended school together for several years. Fifteen students had been classmates for nine years, since pre-kindergarten. Because Elmwood is such a small school, students interacted with almost every classmate on a daily basis, year after year, forging deep relationships. Jerry spoke for many eighth graders when he explained in his final journal reflection why his relationships with his Elmwood friends were so important to him, "My favorite 8th grade moment [was] just hanging out with friends. These people are really close to me! I am glad that I have been able to spend time with them. I hope next year [in high school] we will be close again." When determining interest in activities, these eighth graders' emphasis on friendships could therefore be somewhat magnified predicated on Elmwood's particular demographic.

While most students markedly expressed their desire to help others, much of their motivation and enjoyment of any service activity was based on their peer interactions and relationships. Throughout the semester, students were given opportunities to participate in various service planning committees; often, groups of students collaborated on which committees to join. In two instances, students reconsidered their involvement in certain committees after the discovery that

other particular students were also included. One boy simply did not like and did not want to work with another student. In the other instance, two students mutually agreed that being on the same committee would result in conflict since their working styles were different. Two illustrative examples of the importance of peer relationships in the students' enjoyment and motivation to serve occurred during the Christmas adoptions activity.

In the first example, a conflict arose several days before the Christmas shopping trip. Students were allowed to assemble in small shopping groups of their choice. Tension erupted when Tony, who had signed up for a particular shopping group, had his name removed by another student. Normally reticent, Tony was visibly upset, explaining emphatically that his enjoyment of the experience hinged on his inclusion with that group of boys. Gathering Tony and the other boys together, I asked their opinions on the best way to resolve the issue to avoid hurt feelings. Tim, a confident, well regarded, young man willingly volunteered to leave that group and join another group of girls who needed an extra partner. Although the other boys grudgingly accepted Tony into their group, during the shopping trip they seemingly put aside their differences and worked together harmoniously. Tony wrote in his Exit Evaluation Survey that the Christmas adoption program was his favorite service activity of eighth grade because "it was fun and you new it was for an absoulutly great cause." Tony's desire for peer acceptance apparently greatly influenced his enjoyment of and

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motivation to participate in this service activity.

The second example of the importance of peer relationships to these students was also observed during the shopping trip. Each of the groups was armed with a shopping list for their adopted child and a calculator to help them stay within their allotted budget. Grabbing shopping baskets as soon as they disembarked from the school bus, each group intently sped away in search of their items. Two other sponsoring teachers and I took turns strolling through the store observing the students' progress. Each of the groups seemed to take their responsibilities seriously, poring over their shopping lists, and taking pride in selecting gifts that were meaningful and useful. However, some of the students also climbed into the shopping baskets, played with the toys in the toy aisles, bought candy, talked and laughed exuberantly – in other words, behaved as normal, young adolescents. The other teachers and I observed that while the eighth graders appeared emotionally engaged in serving, they seemed equally influenced by the fun they had with their friends. Terry spoke for several eighth graders whose pleasure in service was linked equally with peer relationships, "Christmas adoptions was great. I got to hang with my friends, we missed school and shopped at Wal Mart [and] got to eat at the food court. I had fun shopping for the kids." While seemingly emotionally impacted by this experience, eighth graders appeared equally impacted by the fun they had with their friends.

Friendships and peer relationships were included as a significant element

of most memorable, meaningful eighth grade experiences. Forty-seven students completed a final journal prompt that asked them to reflect on the most memorable or meaningful experience of eighth grade. Thirty respondents (63% of participants) – nine girls (45% of girls) and 21 boys (65.7% of boys) – mentioned peer relationships as a considerably important factor of any experience. Most eighth graders seemed to eagerly and willingly participate in service experiences, and 28 students (59% of participants) listed various service projects as among the most momentous events of their eighth grade year. However, mentioned in their final journal entries as other favorite experiences were band contests, eighth grade socials, participating in the school musical, sports activities, and constructing the yearbook. In relating why the experiences they selected were most memorable, enjoyable, and meaningful, most of the eighth graders again referenced their social relationships: they got to share these events with their friends and they were fun.

Finally, Elmwood eighth graders considered service personally relevant in light of their individual aptitudes. One student provided a pertinent insight when she wrote in the initial survey that she would like to select particular service activities because, "I have my stronger areas that I can help people in." Another student echoed this sentiment, writing that she would like to "choose what we'd be best at." Both of these students seemed to imply that while they were interested in contributing to helping others, they also wanted to be competent in

whatever areas they chose to participate. These two students were representative
of several students who also indicated that their interest and participation hinged
on feelings of confidence in their own abilities.

An experience with one young lady during the semester provides an
example that illustrates this finding. Julie was a quiet, unassuming young lady of
high academic and athletic abilities. While she did not seek attention or
leadership roles, she was nevertheless seemingly liked and included by her peers.
In her Preliminary Survey, when asked in what types of activities she liked to
participate, she wrote "I don't really think I'd enjoy anything with children that
much because I've never been very good with kids." However, during our
preschool outing, Julie willingly chose to participate and was paired with a quiet
three-year-old, outwardly a perfect match. They played with the blocks, chased
each other on the playground, and colored in a coloring book, apparently having a
great time together. Yet, when Julie reflected on this experience in her Exit
Evaluation Survey, she ranked the preschool trip as her least favorite service
activity of the semester, again explaining, "I don't really like little kids, and I'm
not that good with them. This wasn't fun for me." She opted not to go on a
spring return trip to the preschool because she did not feel comfortable or
competent with this service activity.

However, motivations to participate in service seemed to evolve beyond
personal relevance in some students over the course of the study. For example, at

the beginning of the semester, students were asked in an initial survey to reflect

on their opinions about caring, empathy, specific service strategies, connections,

and personal interests. In this survey, 45 out of 52 participants (86%) indicated

that they were interested in being allowed to choose what service activities they

would participate based in varying degrees on their personal interests, aptitudes,

and peer relationships. In contrast, after opportunities to engage in six diverse

service activities, their final journal reflections and surveys revealed a significant

shift in some students' thoughts and attitudes. Only 38 out 51 participants (74%)

responded on the Exit Evaluation Survey that their incentive to participate

remained primarily associated with personal interests, social relationships, and

aptitudes. Incentives for choosing service options also included "the ones with

more need", to "make sure we focus on helping others and have fun doing it", and

"I don't really mind, as long as it's *really* helping others." A student seemed to

speak for several eighth graders when she wrote, "…I think it would be great to

choose the ones I feel stronger about, but at the same time no matter what I'm

helping, so I don't care." The implication drawn from this young woman's

comment, as well as those of several other eighth graders, was that service to

others might possibly contain a meaningful, caring element that at times

transcended personal or social considerations.

In addition, the data seemed to indicate that some students became more

interested in exploring other service options after experiencing several activities.

In the initial survey, only two boys were interested in trying a variety of service

activities. The rest of the students chose activities largely based on their interests

and abilities. However, after the opportunity to participate in six different

activities, eight students wrote in their Exit Evaluation surveys that being offered

a range of service opportunities broadened their interests. One student reflected

that "…you never know until you try something", while another explained, "It's

just a way to learn things." Yet another student claimed, "I'd rather do them all

than just do ones that sound good." Finally, one young man wrote, "…it's good

to experience all of them." While clearly not a majority of students, for some

students trying a range of options was beneficial in discovering what types of

service they were most interested.

Interestingly, the only service experience that *required* participation was

ranked among the lowest on the Exit Evaluation's Likert Scale. Family Feast Day

had an approval ranking of only 4.05, (on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being very

enjoyable and beneficial). With only one exception, activities that were optional

had higher approval rankings (see Figure 1). Data revealed that while

experiencing a wide variety of activities might be beneficial in determining

interests and passions, the majority of students still wanted participation to be

optional. The inference seemed to be that if involvement were an option instead

of a requirement, students would more likely choose to participate in those

activities in which they were most interested, and thus be more engaged.

Figure 1 – Exit Evaluation Survey of Service-leadership Activities

Exit Evaluation Survey

Ranking:

+_____+_____+_____+_____+

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree
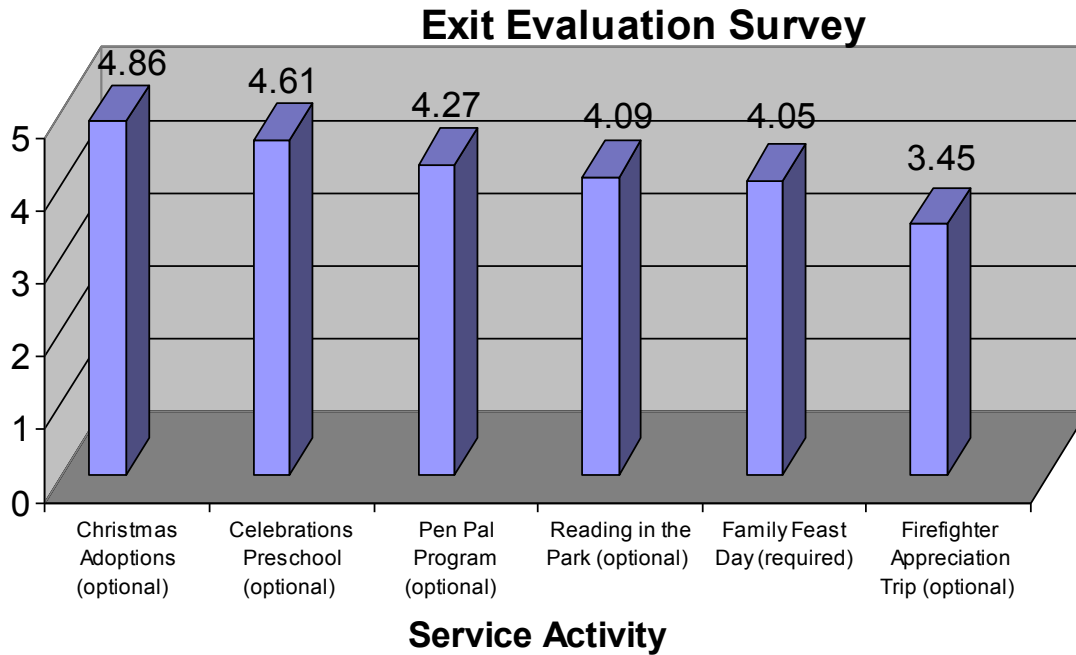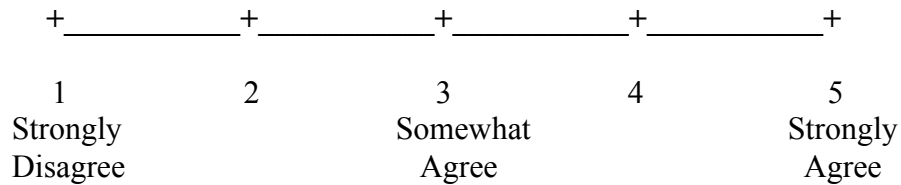
In summary, if service to others is to be a vehicle to caring and compassion, eighth graders should be given opportunities to practice personally relevant service. Based on analysis of my study's data, findings indicate that these eighth graders, irregardless of gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background, were more engaged in serving others, and perhaps more likely to

develop caring, if involvement in service was an option instead of a requirement.

In relating why the experiences they selected were most memorable, enjoyable,

and meaningful, most of the eighth graders were motivated by their personal

interests and activities, peer relationships, and abilities; they chose to participate

in those activities in which they were most interested and competent and thus

found most personally relevant, significant, and fun. These findings not only

reinforced understanding of common adolescent characteristics, but offered

significant insight regarding these eighth graders' possible motivation for

participation in service experiences. Further analysis of the findings and

implications – including implications based on the gender, ethnicity, culture, and

socio-economic status of the participants – for my teaching practice and education

in general will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Relational Service Experiences

The second type of service activities that seemed to influence the

development of caring were relational experiences. Relationship implies a

connection, a bond, a response between two people. According to Noddings

(2002), caring in the relational sense demands some type of reciprocal response;

for caring to occur both parties must contribute and thus both receive the benefits

of that caring. She explains:

> from the care perspective, a huge thank-you goes to the responsive
>
> children, the students glowing with new learning, the feeble elderly who

can do little more than smile a thanks for efforts at care. We know just

how great these contributions are when they are withdrawn. (p. 89)

When reflecting on the semester's service experiences, students appeared to

respond the most strongly in instances where they felt a relational connection,

establishing conditions of worth and validation in both the carer and cared-for.

Three examples illustrate the finding that caring requires a relational, reciprocal

response.

The first example involved a service trip taken in October to an urban,

economically deprived preschool to host a Halloween party. A volunteer student

committee designed the outing, which included activities and a budget. While

participation was optional, for planning purposes eighth graders were asked by the

committee to make a commitment if going on the trip. All eighth graders initially

chose to go on the trip, but two students were absent the day of the outing.

The value of a reciprocal giving and sharing – the essence of a caring

relationship – was evidenced during the outing, and in its aftermath. Eighth grade

boys and girls alike enthusiastically embraced this outing, showering hugs on, and

rambunctiously playing with, the preschoolers. After our visit, the young children

wrote letters and drew pictures that were sent to their eighth grade partners. The

happiness and excitement on the eighth graders' faces when they received the

preschoolers' letters and pictures spoke of that "reciprocal response" (Noddings,

2002) that could lead to a caring relationship.

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Mentioned frequently in journal reflections, interviews, and informal conversation, the reciprocal responses of the preschool children made an evident impact on several eighth graders. Seven out of 46 students (13.5% of participants; two boys and five girls) reflected in their final journal entries that the preschool children left the most lasting impression of *any* eighth grade experience during the first semester. One student poignantly explained, "It was so hard to leave because I could tell how much the kids loved our attention", while another eighth grader wrote, "Hearing that the kid I had was really shy and had never gotten used to someone new and played with *me*…I can't wait to go back." Yet another boy said that he was impacted by his trip to the preschool because when he played with the children, he "got to *know* them." In her final journal entry, Alice wrote,

> My favorite moment of eighth grade so far was when we went to the preschool. I had a great experience there and I want to go again. We got to spend time with younger kids and play with them. The kids don't have much, and to see them happy was priceless. We colored pictures with them, played outside, and read to them. I think about her almost every day. I always pray for her and hope she is doing okay. Just seeing her happy, puts a smile on my face. We go back soon. I can't wait!

Alice's reaction testified to the power of a reciprocal response with one "cared for."

The responses of the eighth grade migrant students to the preschoolers were especially interesting. Since the migrant students took care of their siblings and other young relatives on a regular basis, it might seem that serving other young children would be redundant and boring. However, these experiences were also among the most significant for the eighth grade migrant students. They not only were visibly at ease playing with and caring for the preschoolers, but later wrote of their desire to go back and continue a relationship with them. Ernesto was an eighth grade Hispanic boy who spoke fluent Spanish and was proficient in English. The preschool director paired him with Jose, a shy, Hispanic four year old who did not speak English. Typically quiet and reserved, Ernesto chattered and laughed uninhibitedly with his preschool partner. Ernesto told me later that if we returned to the preschool he should again be paired with Jose "because he needs me."

Developing a continuing, ongoing relationship with their preschool partners was important to several eighth graders. Five students spontaneously formed a committee to plan a spring visit back to the preschool. Based on several students' requests, the committee's focus for the return trip was to ensure that the eighth graders were paired up with the same preschoolers that had been assigned to them during the fall visit. One young woman volunteered as an intern during the summer so she could continue her relationship with her preschool partner.

Reciprocal, relational responses also appeared to contribute to the

validation and worth of the both the carers (eighth graders) and cared-for (preschoolers).   After visiting the preschool, one student reflected that she was moved by "the smile on my little friend's face", while another enjoyed his partner's enthusiasm: "he was jumping up and down when he saw me coming." One girl commented, "it made me feel so good when she crawled up in my lap."

While to several students the relational aspect of this experience was important, it was also evident that for others, the trip was just a good excuse to avoid the tedium of a regular school day. Almost without exception the eighth graders participated with enthusiasm while at the preschool, and on the exit survey students ranked the preschool trip as a 4.61 (out of a possible 5) on the Likert scale. However, only 14 students (27% of participants; four boys and ten girls) found the experience sufficiently meaningful or relevant to reflect on it specifically in their final journals or exit surveys. As noted earlier, one student opted not to participate in a return trip. Most eighth graders seemed to enjoy the experience while there, and for several the preschoolers' reciprocal responses were especially meaningful, but for others it apparently made no lasting impact.

A second example of how the development of relationships seemed to inspire caring in some students involved Elmwood's Sister School Program with Hope Academy. During their previous seventh grade year, students had been given the opportunity to select a pen pal from Ghana. At the beginning of their eighth grade year, students were again asked if they wanted to continue that pen

pal relationship. All but five boys opted to continue writing to their Hope Academy pen pals. On three occasions throughout the year, Elmwood and Hope Academy eighth graders exchanged pictures, news about their activities and interests, and small gifts. This mutual sharing hopefully encouraged a developing awareness of, and respect for, the rich culture, traditions, and family heritage of their Ghanaian peers. Two boys ranked the pen pal collaboration as their favorite service activity of the semester, one suggesting that we take a class trip to Ghana to "meet our friends, hang out and play games." This sharing hopefully encouraged a reciprocal relationship: learning *about* one another, but also learning *from* each other.

The final example of how the development of relationships could impact caring occurred during the reading exposition. Students who chose to participate in Reading in the Park were allowed to select their responsibilities. They could volunteer as group leaders to guide younger students to various book talk centers, or they could assist teachers in presentations. Every eighth grade student chose to participate.

An analysis of their journal reflections after this activity vividly illustrates that the relational aspect was, for many students, the most meaningful facet of this activity. The journal prompt asked the eighth graders if they benefited from the experience, and if so, to explain what aspect they most enjoyed. They were also asked to explain why they did not enjoy the experience if that was the case and to

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give suggestions for improvement. Mentioned frequently in their journals as significant aspects of the experience were simply having fun, the responsibility of being "in charge", missing school, and the nostalgia of remembering their own past experiences at Reading in the Park. Two students were apathetic about the experience and one girl, mentioned earlier, was not comfortable with young children and did not find it enjoyable at all. However, out of 48 students who completed a journal reflection, 35 (72% of participants) mentioned relationships – with their peers, the younger students, or teachers – as the most enjoyable and meaningful aspect of the experience.

That caring could be influenced by a reciprocal, relational response was also demonstrated in the students' journal reflections on the reading exposition. Fifteen eighth graders referenced a specific, overt, relational response as having the greatest influence of the experience. Examples included comments such as, "The children's happiness was what I enjoyed most," and "I loved seeing all the HUGE smiles on the kids!" Another student wrote, "I enjoyed all the 3rd graders wanting to sit by me." One young woman wrote,

> …it was extremely fun to be a teacher helper. It was nice getting to know
> Mrs. X in another way and feel like I was helping her. I also loved to help
> help the little kids make oragami and I loved watching their faces when
> me and my friend did Reader's Theater.

Another girl spoke for several eighth graders when she explained, "I loved

working with the younger kids and seeing what they were interested in…I got to see a lot of their personalities." Reciprocal, relational responses seemed directly tied to these eighth graders' enjoyment of this experience, and might possibly inspire caring attitudes.

Data analysis of the surveys also indicated that students' attitudes might be impacted if they felt a personal, relational connection with the cared-for. The Exit Evaluation survey asked students to rank each service activity on a scale from 1-5 (1 being very little enjoyment or benefit, 5 being very enjoyable and beneficial). With one exception (Christmas Adoptions received an approval ranking of 4.8), the highest Likert Scale rankings from the survey were reserved for the activities with the most personal, relational interaction (see Figure 1 on page 86). Celebrations Preschool received a ranking of 4.6, the pen pal program received a 4.24 ranking, and Reading in the Park received a 4.16 ranking. Family Feast Day received a ranking of 4.0 while the firefighter appreciation trip received an approval ranking of only 3.6 (only somewhat enjoyable and beneficial). The two activities with the lowest approval rankings – the Firefighter Appreciation trip and Family Feast Day – had the least personal, relational interaction.

When activities were not perceived as truly personal, relational, or reciprocal, quite a few students ranked these as their least favorites. For example, several students felt that while a good idea to show thankfulness to area firefighters, the lack of personal, relational interaction made this activity less

relevant and authentic. One student explained her apathy, "…we all didn't get to see a great reaction or even get to meet them. They just said thank you and that's all." Another student agreed, commenting, "I least enjoyed the Firefighter Appreciation trip, because each of us didn't really…get to *show* how thankful we were." One eighth grade boy ranked the Christmas Adoptions as a 1 on the Likert Scale (very little enjoyment or benefit) because "There was almost no interaction whatsoever" [with the sponsored children]. Another boy lamented that he "wished we could have seen and met the children opening their presents."   Two students explained that merely sending money to worthy causes did not inspire them because, as one boy wrote, "[I] want to *know* who we help, instead of just an organization." Noddings (1984) describes this impersonal feeling as merely "caring about" instead of "caring for":

> I can "care about" the starving children of Cambodia, send five dollars to hunger relief, and feel somewhat satisfied…This is a poor second cousin cousin to caring…One is attentive just so far…One contributes five dollars and goes on to other things. (p. 112)

While "caring about" is valuable in introducing issues and relationships that can lead to "caring for", Noddings believes that true caring is inspired through relational, reciprocal responses between the cared for and the carer.

Again, however, while the approval rankings may show common trends, the degree of influence of each activity on the students' attitudes and actions

varied, based on assorted, contributing conditions. For example, most students

voluntarily donated art supplies and participated eagerly in the Ghanaian pen pal

exchange. Forty-three students (84% of participants) ranked this service activity

as a "4" or "5" (out of a possible 5) on the Likert Scale on the Exit Evaluation

Survey. However, three students ranked the program as only a "2" on the scale,

one boy explaining of his pen pal, "Since I'll never get to meet him, I'm just not

that interested." The disparity in rankings demonstrates, once again, that interest

and motivation are based on personal, contextual factors.

In summary, establishing conditions that are congenial to caring seemed to

include service experiences where the students were able to receive a positive,

reciprocal, relational response. These experiences appeared to have the most

impact on personal growth, promoting feelings of worth and validation in both the

carer and the cared-for that could lead to empathy, compassion, and care.

Further analysis of the findings and implications – including implications based

on the contextual factors of the participants – for my teaching practice and

education in general will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Service Experiences that Allowed Shared Responsibility

The third type of service activities that seemed to influence the

development of caring were opportunities that allowed shared responsibility.

Sharing responsibility allowed students to exercise their own judgment, identify

problems, take initiative, and be in control of the outcomes. Shared responsibility

respected their contributions. They often felt a sense of competence, ownership, and belonging: attributes that appeared to arouse caring.

This sense of community, of belonging, of sharing the responsibility of a greater whole is the essence of citizenship. Citizenship implies a "network of power" (Capra, 1996) that respects and values everyone's contributions, sharing accountability for decisions. A network of power allows everyone to have a "voice." One of the most telling journal entries came from a girl who was rarely chosen for leadership roles, "The best part of our service projects was that I finally had an equal voice. All of our ideas were listened to. I felt like I belonged." Most of us want to be included, to belong, to have relationships with others (Maslow, 1968); most of us want a "voice."

The power of having an equal voice was demonstrated during the trip to the preschool. Another Elmwood teacher and I stood watching the eighth graders with their young partners on the playground: playing tag, digging in the sandbox, pushing on the swings, and just laughing and talking. Mrs. X remarked, "What's wonderful about this is that all of our students are on a level playing field. Every eighth grader can step up and be a leader, not just the popular kids. Look around – everyone's involved."

Students also expressed their desire to have a voice in their journals, surveys, and interviews. They enjoyed being leaders, being in charge, setting an example, or organizing an activity. One student explained that the aspect of

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service that he most enjoyed was "…being part of a group and learning how to be a leader in life." Lori, who chaired a service activity, wrote, "The service projects I think make all of us feel really good and proud of what we have done. It's also a great experience to be in charge of a service project, planning it, and getting it done is definetly an accomplishment." One young man most enjoyed the activities when he could "influence what was going on." Another boy wrote that he most enjoyed Reading in the Park because he "got to be the leader for once." One young man explained in an application, "I would love to chair a dodge ball tournament to raise money for our service projects because I love games and to be a leader. I am organized and very, very prideful. I like to have people put their trust into me. When I need to do a job I get it done *well*." Numerous students explained that their enjoyment of, and motivation to participate in, particular service experiences was often tied to whether or not they felt a sense of shared responsibility.

An example serves to illustrate the importance that shared responsibility might have on the development of caring attitudes. Tami was a talented, outgoing, warm young woman who excelled in a variety of academic and extracurricular activities. After the trip to the preschool, she instigated detailed, comprehensive plans for a return visit. In the group interview, Tami was one of the six eighth graders that I asked to frankly share any positive or negative opinions about their service experiences. Tami reflected:

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…choosing to lead a service project is a LOT of work! You are

responsible for every part of an activity – if it goes great, or if it flops –

it's on you. But you also know that you're doing something that matters.

It's so worth it, if you decide to take on that responsibility."

A conclusion that could be drawn from Tami's experience is that being given

responsibility could serve to create ownership, pride in doing something well, and

accountability for the outcome: attributes that may inspire caring.

While all 52 students (100% of participants) applied for inclusion in

various committees, 32 students (61% of participants) applied to be chairmen of

various committees. Of those 32 students who applied for chairmanships, 13

were boys (41% of boy participants) and 19 were girls (95% of girl participants).

The ten committees included planning and implementing each of the six service

projects, advertising, and three fundraisers. The application asked students to

explain why they were interested in that particular activity and what ideas they

had to offer for implementation. The application process served not only to give

the students practice in articulating their goals and ideas, but as a demonstration

of the effort required to assume responsibility. All of the students who applied

were given an opportunity to either lead or join a committee.

With only two exceptions, the students who were given the responsibility

of leadership embraced their duties conscientiously, eagerly, and creatively.

Andy was eager to accept responsibility, but was not dependable and thus unable

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to meet expectations. Timmy was diligent, but did not want to repeat the experience. Andy and Timmy's experiences serve as illustrative examples of how shared responsibility may not always inspire competence, ownership, and belonging.

Andy applied to chair a dodge ball tournament designed to raise funds to implement one of the service projects. While charming and likeable, he had distinguished himself in his years at Elmwood by his lack of initiative and dependability. He was seldom chosen to be another student's academic partner since he rarely contributed. Andy's rationale for wanting to lead the fundraiser was that "I like dodgeball and Mickey [a friend] wants to do it too." Hopeful that being given the opportunity to chair the committee would inspire responsibility and caring, he was selected as a chairman. He failed to follow through with his duties, requiring other committee members to take up his slack. The other chairman, as well as the rest of the committee, was openly frustrated with him and asked that he be removed as a chairman. Andy remained on the committee, but his duties were reassigned. In his final journal, he did not mention any service activities among his most meaningful or enjoyable eighth grade activities.

Timmy applied to chair the advertising committee. He was a conscientious young man with a quiet sense of humor who, while not actively disliked or excluded by his peers, was typically on the periphery of any group. His application contained a well-developed plan with creative advertising ideas,

and he was selected as a chairman. However, although Timmy completed most of his plans, he became disheartened at the amount of work his ideas entailed. In his exit evaluation survey, he wrote of his experience, "No, I don't want to chair any other projects and I don't have any more ideas. I already did advertising and it was a LOT of work." However, in spite of his less than enthusiastic response to being responsible for advertising he included it as one of his favorite eighth grade experiences in his final journal.

Students were markedly more excited and enthusiastic about activities that they thought of or planned. That responsibility could inspire confidence and initiative was demonstrated when many students listed a variety of their own ideas on their committee application forms and surveys. Reasons for suggesting certain plans ranged from marked interest or ability in certain activities to whether or not it truly benefited those in need. One young woman explained that she would be very interested in designing future service activities because, "Leaders are our role models and they lead us by taking the initiative and doing what is good for our community." Clarifying why she wanted the responsibility of leadership, another student stated, "If leaders don't serve people, then who will?" Creating conditions allowing shared responsibility may nurture confidence and ownership that could result in caring.

An illustrative example of how shared responsibility could generate caring transpired during a service-leadership class. During a discussion on how to

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finance our service projects, a group of boys who rarely took leadership roles offered a proposal. Gratified when the rest of the class enthusiastically endorsed their idea, two boys – Hari and Seth – volunteered to chair the project. Hari was a very quiet, shy, East Indian student. He was very hesitant to call attention to himself or volunteer for any type of leadership role. Seth was also quiet and reserved. Both hard workers, neither of these boys was particularly distinguished academically, athletically, or socially. After turning over the implementation of this project completely to them, they put together a small committee of three other interested eighth grade boys. These three boys were also quiet and typically not involved in or chosen for leadership roles, although they were generally liked and accepted by almost everyone.

Acting on their own initiative, the boys devised a plan to develop a coupon book of teacher services. They polled teachers to donate certain services, creatively designed each coupon page, and voluntarily spent most of their recess and free time putting the book together. The coupon books turned out to be a resounding success. In spite of this success, however, Hari did not indicate a willingness to repeat his leadership role. Although he reflected in his final journal that his favorite activity of the first semester of eighth grade was chairing the development of the coupon book, he wrote in his Exit Evaluation Survey that he had no desire to again lead an event or activity. Seth did not list the coupon book project as one of his favorite eighth grade activities in his final journal reflection,

but he indicated in his Exit Evaluation Survey that he would be very interested in designing a service project in the future. While their resultant attitudes differed, both boys expressed their pride in leading a successful activity that raised funds used to benefit others.

In several students, there seemed to be a demonstrable correlation between the confidence inspired by shared responsibility and interest in service to others. At the beginning of the year, eight students (six girls and two boys) applied for Service Chairman, a position that coordinated all of the service projects, fundraising efforts, and advertising committees. Each of the applicants was outgoing, academically motivated, well rounded, and successful in various interests, including band, religious youth groups, extracurricular sports, and internships. Two students, Mary and Gordon, were selected. Over the course of the semester, seven of the original eight applicants again applied and served as chairpersons of various committees. All but one of the applicants wrote that their most memorable, meaningful experience of eighth grade was leading a service activity. One of the Service Chairmen, Gordon, was most impacted by his participation as basketball team captain. The eight applicants not only retained their initial enthusiasm for service over the course of the year but, based on their particular interests and abilities, had specific plans to continue serving others, ranging from volunteering as a zoo docent to helping with Special Olympics.

Other students who did not apply for Service Chairman also demonstrated

that their caring was influenced in varying degrees by opportunities to share responsibility. For example, at the beginning of the semester, the parent of one eighth grade girl confidentially expressed her concern about her daughter's lack of self-assurance. The parent asked that her daughter be encouraged to participate in the service projects, not only to stimulate compassion but as a means to develop her confidence and responsibility. As the semester unfolded, this young woman applied to be a chairman of Reading in the Park, as well as served on one of the committees for Family Feast Day. She also wrote regularly to her pen pal in Ghana, participated in the school talent show, and was honored as a Valedictorian. At the end of the year, she wrote:

> I have loved…having service leadership this year. I have been inspired to be more of a leader every single day. At the beginning of the year, I did not think I would be able to get up and speak in front of everyone at graduation, but now I am excited to say my speech and share all of the memories I have had at Elmwood.

Perhaps her growing confidence helped inspire caring; she served as one of two freshman delegates to her high school's annual service project the following year.

Significantly, however, the data revealed that there was often a dichotomy between caring and shared responsibility. Over the course of the study, while the belief that *caring and service* was of great importance remained *constant*, interest in *leading* a service experience *decreased* appreciably. This dichotomy was one

of the most intriguing and unexpected findings of this study.

Analysis of the initial and exit surveys yielded surprising results regarding shared responsibility (see Figure 2). The students' belief that caring for others was of great importance remained constant over the course of the study. On the Preliminary Survey, students ranked the importance of serving others as 4.56% (out of a possible 5) on the Likert Scale, compared with 4.5% on the Exit Evaluation Survey's Likert Scale. However, both surveys also revealed that willingness to take responsibility for a service project decreased appreciably over the course of the study. A question on both the Preliminary Survey (given at the beginning of the study) and the Exit Evaluation Survey (given at the end of the study) asked, "Would you be interested in chairing/designing a future service activity? If so, what type of activity?" In the Preliminary Survey, 34 students (65% of participants) – 20 boys (63%) and 14 girls (70%) – expressed interest in leading or designing a service activity. Seventeen students (34% of participants) indicated that leading or designing a service activity did not appeal to them. However, after completing the six service activities, results of the Exit Evaluation demonstrated that only 23 students (20% fewer than at the beginning of the semester) were willing or interested in taking responsibility for a service activity. This Exit Survey revealed that 29 students (55%) – including several who chaired various projects – were not interested in planning or leading future activities.

Figure 2 – Dichotomy of Responsibility

	Preliminary Survey	Exit Evaluation Survey
High interest in leading a service project	65%	45%
Little interest in leading a service project	34%	55%

For assorted reasons, most students explained that while they wanted to have a "voice", they did not always want the responsibility of leadership. Some eighth graders were not interested in taking responsibility after finding that directing an activity was "too stressful", or "too much work". Several students were reluctant to chair an activity because they were "not brave enough." A number of students expressed their fears of being blamed or humiliated if something went wrong. Several students felt that they were too busy with all of their other activities. Culture, ethnicity, and socio-economic status were also contributing conditions that influenced students' confidence to take on responsibility and leadership. Sarah explained how her *desire* to serve conflicted with her lack of confidence in her abilities,

> I think that helping others is *extremely* important, but I don't usually take
> action. That's the honest truth though. I *wouldn't* put myself in charge of
> something like that. Someone more reliable, and dependent, I just don't

know how to run one or what to do. But serving others does involve leadership. How to stand up for things and taking charge. And helping. *You* decide. *You* create the flow…not go *with* it.

The implication of Sarah's reflection, as well as several other eighth graders, seemed to be that while they truly cared about helping others, they lacked the confidence of taking *sole* responsibility for leading service activities. While these students wanted their opinions to be heard and valued, to share in the decision-making process, and to be allowed opportunities to participate in service, they were conflicted regarding the responsibility of leadership.

Another example of the dichotomy involving service and responsibility occurred after Elmwood School was threatened from widespread grass fires. Area fire fighters worked tirelessly for several days and nights to save both the school and many of the eighth graders' nearby homes. Linnea proposed that we do something to show our appreciation for the fire fighters' efforts. Although she was reluctant to plan and organize the activity, I encouraged her to develop an action plan. When several students offered to help her, she agreed. Along with her committee, Linnea compiled a list of items needed for goodie baskets for the firehouses, solicited the items from her fellow students, and then filled the baskets. It is worth noting, however, that although Linnea did a fine job organizing this activity, she did not consider it to be one of her most memorable or enjoyable activities of eighth grade. She in fact commented that while she was

gratified that her idea was acted on, she was still not comfortable in chairing any other activities.

Culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and intellectual aptitudes were also contributing conditions that influenced students' confidence to take on responsibility. Several examples illustrate the influence of these contributing conditions. First, cultural and personal characteristics of the Hispanic students had to be considered when interpreting observational and written data. Generally self-effacing, cooperative, and influenced by authority, Ernesto and Carmen rarely offered opinions and while rarely volunteering for responsibility, seemed to be willing, eager participants in all of the service activities. Laura's lower socio-economic background, functionally illiterate parent, and academic struggles were contributing conditions that seemed to influence her confidence in seeking responsibility. She was cautious about seeking any type of attention and reluctant to volunteer for any responsibility. Although education was important to Hari's Pakistani, immigrant family, he seemed intimidated by the obvious wealth of his classmates. He was hesitant to offer opinions or volunteer for leadership roles. Devonn's learning disability seemed to contribute to a very low self-esteem. He was adamantly opposed to taking on responsibility, since he had no confidence in his own ability, opinions, or judgment. These various contextual factors contributed to several students' reluctance to take on responsibility, and thus may have inhibited a competence and ownership that could inspire compassion.

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Other students, such as the eight who applied for Service Chairmen, appeared to have an inherent confidence that might inspire caring. This confidence was evidenced in the multiple leadership roles they already fulfilled at school, religious youth groups, sports, and in various other extracurricular activities. For example, Fareeha was an immigrant, ethnic Pakistani who was outgoing, vivacious, high achieving, and innately confident, perhaps as a result of her privileged, professional background. She served ably as the chairman of several eighth grade committees and was involved in several leadership roles after she went to high school. Fareeha wrote in her Exit Evaluation survey that she wanted to "use all of her blessings to help others."

To summarize, providing opportunities for students to demonstrate and develop shared responsibility could influence caring. When students had opportunities to exercise their own judgment, identify a problem, take responsibility, and were in control of the outcomes, they often felt a sense of competence and ownership that seemed to inspire compassion. That desire for autonomous control and a "voice" however, was often in conflict with the realities of shared responsibility. This dichotomy could somewhat be attributed to a lack of assurance in their own abilities, in the perceived responses of their peers, and other contributing factors such as ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status. Further analysis of the findings and implications – including implications based on the gender, ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status of the participants –

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for my teaching practice and education in general will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Authentic Service Experiences

Finally, authentic service experiences appeared most likely to inspire caring. When reflecting on the semester's different service opportunities, students appeared to respond the most strongly in instances where they felt they were truly needed, making a positive, relational difference. If service was considered authentic – based on a perceived *need that was understood, concrete, and provoked an emotional response* – caring seemed more likely to develop.

Service was considered authentic if it impacted a perceived need that students considered legitimate and concrete. Students identified several forms of service that they considered authentic, and thus worthy of their time and attention. Service that influenced a real, concrete need included solving environmental issues, rescuing abused animals, going on mission trips, and aiding the poor, homeless, hungry, orphaned, abused, disabled, or refugees. More than 90% (46 out of 52) of the participants listed comforting or helping younger children as their most compelling interest in service. Several students mentioned that raising money for donations – even for worthy causes – gave them very little validation. One boy felt that "helping out around school [would be] my least favorite service activity – it just feels like work." These students determined legitimate need as something that allowed them to make a true difference in alleviating or serving

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perceived need.

The eighth graders' standard for determining authentic need was illustrated during the Family Feast Day service project. They served as hosts, parking attendants, and waiters for their grandparents and other guests. Their service also earned "tips" that funded the Christmas Adoptions. Several students wrote in their Exit Evaluation Surveys that while Family Feast Day was beneficial to the school and community, as well as valuable in funding the Christmas Adoptions, they did not feel they were making a relational difference. Since guests and grandparents were not considered needy according to eighth graders' perceptions, they did not feel the activity was as authentic and worthwhile as the other service activities. The implication seemed to be that service was only authentic if it included helping those truly "in need".

Service was also considered authentic if it was based on a perceived need that provoked an emotional response. Nel Noddings (2002) encourages teachers to use stories to inspire students to form personal, caring connections. The emotional response generated when I read aloud a destitute, single mother's letter that thanked the past year's eighth graders for providing a Christmas for her children verified Noddings' assertion. After listening intently to this mother's story, the students eagerly voted to "adopt" twelve children for Christmas. In their Exit Evaluation journals, fifteen students (26% of participants – six boys and nine girls) rated the Christmas adoptions as *the* most meaningful and special

experience of their eighth grade year. One girl explained, "I liked the Christmas adoptions the best, because I could really feel great about what I was doing, and knowing that I had just given a girl MY AGE her Christmas, was an amazing feeling!" In his final journal reflection, an eighth grade boy wrote,

> I most enjoyed the Christmas adoptions because every time you
> place an item in your cart, you know you are doing a great thing
> for a wonderful person, and you felt good by the end of the day
> because you gave someone an awesome Christmas. I least enjoy[ed]
> Reading in the Park because even though you are spending the day
> with a bunch of kids, I feel like helping kids who aren't fortunate
> enough to buy their own toys and clothes makes me happier!

The students' realization and acknowledgment of their own good fortune often provoked a caring response to an authentic need. Several students wrote and spoke of their desire to "give back" in gratitude for their many blessings. For example, Lisa explained, "I love helping others, and it's very important to me. Knowing how much of a sheltered life I have, and how fortunate and blessed I am really makes me want to give back to others who aren't as fortunate." Fareeha concurred,

> Helping others is important to me because people do so much for me.
> Teachers help us learn, doctors keep us healthy, firefighters/policemen
> keep us safe. Everybody is helping everybody in this world (whether

you get paid or not). I want to feel I like have accomplished something

in life.

In their Exit Evaluations, 41 eighth graders (79% of participants) referenced in

varying degrees their desire to serve those in need partially based on their own

good fortune. Two students who were economically disadvantaged made

intriguing responses regarding need, considering their apparent enthusiasm for

participating in service to others. Laura explained in her Preliminary Survey,

"Sometimes you need to help them in some situations but sometimes they need to

learn to do it thereselves", while Tim wrote, "You need to help others but you

need to help yourself." That the majority of these students partially defined

authentic need in contrast with their own good fortune should be considered in

light of Elmwood's high socio-economic, educated, conservative demographic.

In Summary

To summarize, service was considered authentic, and caring more likely to

develop, if based on a perceived *authentic need that was understood, concrete,*

and provoked an emotional response. Students appeared to respond the most

strongly with caring and compassion in instances where they felt they were truly

needed, making a positive, relational difference in someone's life.   "Helping

others makes you feel so good", "It helps me be a better person", "I want to feel

like I accomplished something in life," were comments repeated frequently.

"When I help others, I'm also helping myself," explained one girl. Several

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students mentioned that their service felt authentic when they were helping those served feel valued, worthwhile, and "good about themselves". One student liked visiting the preschool because "it makes me feel like I'm actually doing some service for others." Thus, authentic need inspired authentic caring that in turn inspired authentic service. Further investigation may be needed to determine if reflection tied to service increases caring for *all*, or just those who are in perceived need. .

Further analysis of the findings and implications – including implications based on the gender, ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status of the participants – for my teaching practice and education in general will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Implications

This inquiry investigated two questions. First, what impact, if any, did opportunities for service have on the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of my eighth grade students? Second, what types of service activities can help promote critical, caring thought and action? The intent of my study was to inform my own practice, as well as exploring possible implications for other educators, by determining if service might establish conditions and relationships that could influence critical, caring thought and action in my students.

After careful analysis of the data, my findings indicated that service did have an impact on the thoughts and actions of my students. Although the degree of influence that encouraged critical, caring reflection and action varied, based on assorted, contributing conditions and relationships such as gender, ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status, four basic themes emerged. Collectively, the findings could be categorized into four different kinds of service activities that inspired critical, caring thought and action in some students. These included service options that were:

    (1) personally relevant,

    (2) relational,

    (3) real opportunities to share responsibility, and

    (4) authentic.

Based on the evidence provided in this study, it appears that serving others

could possibly be a vehicle to encourage caring in middle school students. Analysis of the data revealed that these eighth graders preferred optional service activities that were *personally relevant*. Findings indicated that *relationships* not only motivated their participation and engagement in serving others, but were also instrumental in establishing worth and validation: conditions that could lead to caring. In addition, these students were more likely to be invested in the *practice* that caring requires if they are given real opportunities to take *responsibility*. Finally, the findings showed that Elmwood eighth graders were most impacted by service that they considered *worthwhile and authentic*.

What are the implications of these findings? How do these findings influence my own philosophy and teaching practices, as well as other educators who work with middle school age children? How can I use the insight derived from this study to promote and encourage a caring that hopefully seeks to impact and change the world? There seemed to be four principal implications that emerged from the findings of this study. For service to inspire caring, it should:

(1) be personally relevant,

(2) be relational,

(3) include real opportunities to take responsibility, and

(4) be based on needs that are authentic, redefined, and understood.

In this final chapter, I examined and analyzed these findings primarily through the lens of ethical care theory, bolstered by critical consciousness theory

and systems theory. Using these theories as the foundation to examine what conditions and relationships could likely encourage caring in middle school students, I then explored the possible implications of the findings relating to my own teaching practices as well as those of other middle school educators.

For Service to Inspire Caring, it Should be Personally Relevant

Analysis

If as Noddings (1998) suggests, the experiences that we practice develop attitudes and philosophies, then by extension, the first step of using service to inspire caring is to motivate students to actually *participate* in service. Taking into consideration their developmental and demographic characteristics, these students seemed motivated to participate in activities that were engaging, involved their peers, and addressed individual capacities or interests.   Offering a wide variety of optional service activities also seemed to encourage participation. One of the conditions that seemed to encourage student participation thus included personally relevant service experiences.

While Elmwood students were motivated to participate in personally relevant service experiences, they rarely considered *sustained* service a significant priority.   For service to develop into "caring for", it must be based on relations (Noddings, 2002): relationships develop over time.   However, committing to the sustained service that could inspire caring is in many respects counter to our busy, individualistic culture. Not unique to Elmwood adolescents, often the pressures

of school, extracurricular activities, and family commitments result in shallow, emotional impulses that "allows us to carve up our caring in little chunks that require only a level of giving that does not conflict with our needs and interests as individuals" (Wuthnow, 1991, p. 17). Service then becomes what John Eby (1998) calls "McService, service bites…or service in a box" (p. 2). It is also one of the intellectual developmental characteristics of young adolescents that while they have a wide array of interests, few are maintained (Kellough & Kellough, 2008; Scales, 2003). It is thus a challenge to motivate students to prioritize sustained service.

Motivating students to practice sustained service that could inspire caring seemed more likely if it was the result of a genuine *desire* to serve.   Data analysis indicated that Elmwood eighth graders, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic background, were more engaged in service if involvement was optional. Too often, however, in many educational settings service is relegated to required "community service." Community service is typically either a course requirement or assigned as the consequence of a transgression. If service is a course requirement, the students may serve merely to earn a grade. Requisite service can no more guarantee the development of ethical caring than being required to take geometry guarantees a love of mathematics.   Being forced to serve as a punishment could result in resentment, fear, and anger: qualities that are the antithesis of compassion and caring. Noddings (2002) considers community

service of value if used as an opportunity to introduce students to serving others. She argues, however, that coercion – whether in academics or service – is usually unnecessary if the student understands the purpose, worth, and value behind the task.

To summarize, the conditions that seemed to encourage participation in service by Elmwood's eighth graders included service activities that were personally relevant. These included activities that they found fun and engaging, included their peers, addressed particular capacities or interests, and allowed them to choose from a wide range of optional activities. Challenges to motivating students to participate in service included adolescent egocentricity as well prioritizing sustained service. Taking into consideration that results can never be replicated with exactitude with even the same children, perhaps some general implications may be drawn that could apply these same principles of motivation to other young adolescents.

Implications

The first implication for practice is that if service is to inspire caring, it must be considered a relevant priority in our students' lives. Motivation to participate in service experiences starts by appealing to their interests, needs, and abilities. In view of the diversity of our students, it follows however, that not all students will be interested or proficient in the same types of service activities. As Jaime Parker (2010) explained in her dissertation on the effects of service,

…participating in events deemed important by others may actually be

counterproductive in the sense of being in an inauthentic form of service.

Instead of advocating *this* form of service, the larger point is to encourage

participants to consider volunteering in *some* form of service that truly

relates to their own interests and concerns. (p. 77)

Just as Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences suggests that

learning is more relevant and effective if based on innate intelligences, service

might be more relevant and effective if children are encouraged to serve based on

their abilities and gifts. Noddings (2002) proposes that "children can contribute

useful service in a wide variety of ways; some have artistic talents, some

interpersonal gifts, some athletic or kinesthetic abilities" (p. 96). For service to

be considered a priority, students should be exposed to a wide array of well-

planned, rewarding, and enriching experiences relevant to their interests and

abilities.

A second implication for educators is that our school curriculum should

integrate themes of service and caring with our students' personal passions,

interests, and capacities. Noddings wonders "why learning to care is not at the

heart of the school curriculum" (2002, p. 32). While it may not be practical to

assume, considering America's high stakes testing culture, that caring will

become an integral part of educational programming, Noddings argues that an

emphasis on cultivating compassion does not have to negate the intellectual

dimension of our curriculum.

Numerous strategies and resources that could encourage themes of caring in our classrooms include cooperative learning, noncompetitive grading, service-learning, literature, role-playing, films, stories, and giving more attention to women's traditions of nurture and care. Linking emotional responses (a key facet of care ethics) to personal passions, interests, and capacities allows students to explore themes of service, justice, freedom, and caring through their art, poetry, music, drama, and writing. An emphasis on caring and compassion in the classroom can enrich our students' lives academically, socially, and emotionally, as well as allowing the extended time needed to adequately address key concepts related to caring. While methodologies, strategies, and pedagogy are not prescriptions to caring, educators can instead provide the *conditions* in our curriculum that hopefully encourage and support caring.

A third implication for educators is that if "caring for" is our desired outcome, participation in service should not be the result of coercion. As well as requisite service, coercion could include evaluating (grading) participation. Evaluating students' service in essence evaluates their compassion and caring. If we as educators truly hope to motivate our students to practice sustained service that could inspire caring, we should offer the respect inherently implied with true freedom of choice free from assessment.

To summarize, analysis of the study's findings implies that the first step of

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using service to promote caring attitudes is finding ways to motivate students to actually *practice* service. Optional service experiences that are personally relevant to students' interests, needs, and abilities may inspire caring. Our curriculum can also be a vehicle that not only addresses themes of caring, but uses students' personal abilities and passions as a catalyst to inspire service, empathy, and compassion.

Ultimately, "…we need to help students learn to treat *one another* ethically by giving them practice in caring" (Noddings, 2002, p. 100).

For Service to Inspire Caring, it Should be Relational

At its heart, according to care theory, caring is relational. Relational caring develops not only from the reciprocal responses of carer and cared-for, but through the realization that since all life is connected it should be deeply respected, and by modeling caring attributes. Using service to influence caring, critical reflection, and action requires establishing conditions that encourage sustained relationships.

Analysis

Fostering relational caring through service in an educational setting can be challenging. A school has constraints on service experiences enforced by its very nature: curriculum demands, students' extracurricular commitments, family obligations, liability considerations, and just the sheer logistics of planning and transportation. These constraints are not conducive to nurturing the sustained

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service that cultivates relational caring.

Additionally, if relationships are short term and superficial, service actually has the potential to be harmful. John Eby (1998) explains:

> What may be a casual relationship for a student [a "carer"] may be [a] very significant relationship for a child or young adult [one "cared for"] in the program. Breaking the relationship at the end of the service-learning assignment can be traumatic and can add to the fragmentation already typical of poor communities. Students may reflect ethnocentrism and racism in ways that are harmful. (p. 5)

As mentioned, students may not view sustained service that can develop relationships as a relevant priority. Short term, casual relationships rarely allow the reciprocal responses that can instigate caring.

Furthermore, relational caring can be an abstract concept to young adolescents, if they do not understand the systemic nature of relationship. For example, they are often moved to abstract compassion upon hearing about specific needs, but do not actually relate to those needs: they may "care about" instead of "caring for." Many systems/complexity theorists view all of life as related.

If all of life is related, it makes sense to nurture and care for one another, since in so doing we are also nurturing and caring for ourselves. Fritjof Capra (1996) describes this relationship as the web of life, which reaffirms the

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connections, relationships and context that all of life has: a living system that depends on its interactions with all of its parts to exist and thrive. While the orientation of school systems in most industrialized countries is based on a modernist trend of training students to meet the needs of business and the economy, Fleener (2002), like Noddings, believes that relationships should drive curriculum. She depicts "recreating heart" as giving "meaning, purpose, value, and care as the driving forces of the curriculum. It is the integration and holistic understanding that teaching, learning, society and the curriculum are different aspects of one basic meaning structure" (p. 3). Caring for others, then, can be one piece of the connected picture of life.

To summarize, caring is relational. However, fostering caring relationships in an educational setting can be challenging. Logistics, time constraints, and a limited understanding of the systemic nature of relations are barriers that can hinder the development of long-term, reciprocal relationships. Perhaps some general implications can be drawn to aid educators in motivating relational caring.

Implications

Educators could consider a two-fold focus on service to motivate relational caring: *exposure* and *engagement* (Levinson, 1990). *Exposure* to a range of service experiences is valuable in piquing students' interests or passions. *Engagement* is inspired by an "intensity" and "commitment" (p. 68) that could

lead to relational caring. The concept of exposure versus engagement is analogous to Noddings' (2002) distinction between "caring about" and "caring for." For example, as mentioned in Chapter Four, before Elmwood eighth graders started corresponding with formerly trafficked children in Africa, their caring was distant and removed: they abstractly "cared about" victims of child trafficking. After they started developing reciprocal relationships with these children, in several instances their compassion changed to a much deeper "caring for". There are several implications for educators to consider when attempting to inspire relational caring.

First, sufficient time and effort must be spent planning and implementing quality, worthwhile service opportunities that can build sustained, reciprocal relationships. For example, if time and logistics are an issue, a mentoring program with younger students at the same school might be the answer. Programs such as "book buddies" where older students partner with and read to younger students once a week throughout the school year builds reciprocal relationships that could inspire "caring for." Tutoring children at a preschool on a regular basis or adopting a "grandparent" at a nearby nursing home are other options for building long-term relationships. Relational care requires time; educators should try to plan at least one service activity that builds sustained, reciprocal relationships.

Second, time and attention must be spent helping our students understand

the systemic nature of relationships. We should continually and consistently help

our students understand that because all of life is related, all of life has worth,

value, and meaning: the essence of caring. Helping our students apply this

understanding to their lives may serve to combat bullying, alienation, and cruelty.

We can use specific examples that demonstrate the systemic cause and effect of

relationship: broken rules create penalties even for the innocent,

misunderstanding breeds intolerance, gossip can ruin someone's reputation. We

can also illustrate this principle by showing the principles of systems theory all

around the globe: deforestation in South America impacts global climate,

intolerance fosters terrorism, and overpopulation creates critical food shortages

and devastating social policies. One of the most important life principles that we

can help our students understand is that since all of life is related, what harms one

harms all, and what benefits one benefits all.

A third implication for educators is that modeling service and compassion

could inspire relational caring. Although serving and caring for our students

would seem a natural process, the practical demands of education often preclude

relational care. Since teachers in middle and high schools may teach over 100

students in multiple class periods a day, even getting to really know our students

takes a concerted effort. In addition, the pressure to "get through the curriculum"

is intense; most teachers feel as if we must continually stay on track to accomplish

our academic goals. Caring requires consistent attention and effort.

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Teachers can model caring and service by showing genuine concern and interest in the day-to-day lives of our students. Sometimes simply listening attentively implies respect. I must remind myself that conversing with students is not time "off task" or wasted, but may instead result in "trust gained, and trust gained means that the teacher acquires a partner in the effort to educate" (Noddings, 2002, p. 133). If we can serve our students by modeling kindness, respect, and tolerance through a sustained, consistent relationship, it is much more likely that they will treat each other the same way. "Actions are more precious than words" (Pym, 1628): serving our students demonstrates our care for them.

A final, but perhaps most significant, implication is that we should apply the ethics of care first and foremost in our students' relationships with one another. There are two aspects of peer relationships that may inspire caring. First, that friendship is especially important to middle school students must be taken into consideration when planning service opportunities. Almost without exception regardless of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, Elmwood students largely based their motivation to participate in service on their friends' involvement. Providing opportunities for young adolescents to work cooperatively together in mutually interesting and worthwhile service activities is one component of encouraging a camaraderie that could arouse caring. Second, through real life examples, stories, role-playing, simulations, and their own day to day interactions with one another, we can help our students develop caring

relationships with one another by teaching them how to compromise, disagree respectfully, and deal with conflict constructively. We should consistently, intentionally emphasize the importance of treating one another with kindness, compassion, understanding, and empathy. One of our most important responsibilities as educators is to help our students establish a "social norm [whereby] acts of compassion [are] viewed as signs of strength and character" (Roud, 2012, p. 39).

To summarize, relationships are integral to caring. There are several implications for building the relationships necessary to motivate caring. First, our focus on service and caring should be two-fold: *exposure* and *engagement*. Exposing students to a range of opportunities may pique their interest in various service options, but to encourage an engagement that could lead to caring, we must provide worthwhile, quality opportunities to develop reciprocal relationships. An understanding of the systemic nature of relationship is also essential. In addition, a foundation of trust, understanding, and service should be established with our students to model the relational caring that we hope to inspire in them. Finally, we should apply the ethics of care first and foremost in our students' relationships with one another.

> To build a foundation of caring, we must spend time "building relations of care and trust" (Noddings, 2002, p. 100).

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For Service to Motivate Caring, our Students should be Given Real Opportunities to Take Responsibility

We are likely to be more invested in something if we are responsible for its success or outcome. This practical principle can also be applied to learning about caring. Our students will be more likely to be invested in service to others if they are given real opportunities to take responsibility.

Analysis

First, providing opportunities to demonstrate and develop responsibility could inspire confidence and initiative. When middle school students are confronted with the grim realities of problems such as poverty, hunger, child abuse, and political discord, they often feel overwhelmed, helpless, or cynical, believing that there is really nothing they can do to influence positive change. Susan Cipolle (2010) observes that service-learning provides opportunities for students to address social problems. When students feel they are useful, needed, and competent, their resultant confidence can empower them to make a difference. Noddings (2002) concurs, encouraging educators to teach students that caring requires competence and confidence. Felicia George (1997) believes that service-learning can be a strategy that encourages confidence, initiative, and caring, explaining:

> Through service, young people are making positive contributions,
> engaging in activities that give them real responsibility and calling

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on the adults in their world to recognize their competence. In taking

responsibility, realizing that others depend on them, and following

through, young adolescents begin to see themselves as capable of

making a positive difference, to be change agents, even to see a future

in which they can have a place as active citizens. (p. 165)

Elmwood eighth graders seemed much more invested in service experiences when

they had opportunities to exercise their own judgment, identify problems, take

responsibility and initiative, and were in control of the outcomes. Responsibility

appeared to inspire competence, leadership, ownership, and belonging: attributes

that could arouse caring.

However, this study revealed that there was often a dichotomy in the

confidence required of responsibility. Most students explained that while they

wanted their opinions to be heard and valued, to share in the decision-making

process, and to be allowed opportunities to participate, they did not always want

the *sole responsibility* of leadership. The dichotomy of responsibility could be

related to the inherent developmental dichotomy in young adolescents.

Middle school students are at the stage when they are facing the

challenges of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual change. Since they are

struggling to define themselves as individuals and in relation to others, they often

find themselves in a transition between childhood and adulthood. While they

want the autonomy, respect, and control inherent in making their own decisions,

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they often lack the confidence to take initiative and responsibility. Also, peer

relationships are of vital importance to young adolescents. For many middle

school age students, how they are perceived in the eyes of their peers is the focus

of their identities. Thus, responsibility is often considered worthwhile only if

circumstances, setting, or peers are affirming and the student perceives himself to

be in a position of equal "power" so that there is little risk of ridicule or

humiliation.

To summarize, providing students real opportunities to exercise

responsibility, ownership, initiative, and leadership seemed to inspire a

confidence and initiative that could lead to caring. However, there was often a

dichotomy in the confidence and responsibility required of leadership. The

dichotomy of leadership could be related to the developmental dichotomy

inherent in young adolescents.

Implications

Just as caring takes practice, our students must be given real opportunities

to practice responsibility. However, how can service-learning address the

inherent contradictions in the desire for responsibility versus the confidence

required of responsibility? There are several implications for educators that

address this developmental dichotomy.

First, well-planned, quality, structured programming allows early

adolescents to take risks with fairly high chances of success. Some of the most

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negative comments on service given by the eighth graders in the study focused on the lack of predictability and organization during the Family Feast Day project. These eighth graders were given the freedom to plan and supervise the activity, but several students later reflected that it was "chaotic", unorganized, with unclear expectations. A better strategy may be to give our students freedom to plan, organize, and problem solve within the comfort and security of collaborative supervision. The structure of well-planned, organized service activities makes it possible for young adolescents to feel competent and successful: attributes that lead to confidence.

Service should provide opportunities to practice decision-making; autonomy and control also means allowing our students the freedom to make mistakes. Within the structured framework of well-planned programming, students should be allowed to make their own decisions, solve problems, organize the event, and select activities. If educators can model problem-solving strategies when mistakes are made, our students will learn flexibility, creativity, and adaptability.

A third implication is that young adolescents need planned, intentional, critical reflection exercises. Critical reflection includes both inward reflection and outward reflection (Cipolle, 2010). Inward reflection focuses on internal feelings, such as "values, racial-identity formation…racism, sexism, classism, White privilege" (p. 123), among other issues. Outward reflection centers on

societal problems, such as oppression, power, class structure, among other issues.

Critical reflection also allows students to examine needs and social problems at a

structural level, focusing on the causes of that issue. Reflection should occur both

before and after the service experience. As well as providing a focus on critical

issues, reflecting before an activity allows students to prepare for possible

outcomes or situations they may encounter. After an activity, students should be

guided through reflection that helps them examine their feelings as well as the

possible implications of the service experience.

To summarize, for students to develop the confidence needed for the

responsibility and competence that could impact caring, they need well-planned,

quality, structured service options that offer chances of success. Young

adolescents also need planned, intentional, critical reflection both before and after

service. Finally, our students need opportunities within a structured framework to

practice decision-making, problem solving, and organization.

"We need to give…students more responsibility to exercise judgment"

(Noddings, 2002, p. 100).

For Service to Motivate Caring, Need should be Authentic, Redefined, and Understood

Young adolescents are beginning to reflect on the meaning of life. While

largely focused on their own needs and interests, they also yearn to make a

positive, relational difference in someone's life. For Elmwood eighth graders, if

service was considered worthwhile – based on a perceived *authentic need that was understood, concrete, and provoked an emotional response* – caring seemed more likely to develop.

Analysis

First, these students based their desire to serve in large part on their perception of *authentic* need. The criteria that they used to determine authentic need were one of the most surprising and significant findings of this study. Students' perceptions of authentic need seemed to be defined as those "in need", such as the abused, neglected, disadvantaged, poor, or lonely. Using that standard to determine authentic need inferred that to these students need was somewhat viewed as an identity characteristic instead of a condition. While well intentioned, they largely understood need as deficiency instead of being the result of critical societal dilemmas.

If students see need as a deficiency that must be filled or corrected, their caring not only degrades the recipient but also fails to create an authentic "caring-for" that could lead to real, active societal change. The idea that we can give or serve to "fill" the need of an individual is analogous to Paulo Freire's (1971) portrayal of education's "banking" system. "Banking" education describes students as passive, empty receptacles waiting to be filled with knowledge by their teachers. Education then becomes just a transferal of knowledge from the teacher to the student instead of an active process. Through reflection and

dialogue, we must help our students understand need at a *structural* level by focusing on the *causes* of that need.

Second, perceptions of need were often based on contextual factors such as ethnicity, culture, geographic location, and social class. Based on stereotypes and misconceptions, affluent white students may assume that minority or lower socio-economic cultures are only in need of service, instead of viewing them as a valuable resource. At Elmwood, because the migrant, minority students were generally accepted and included as peers, their participation in most service activities was not considered exceptional or out of the ordinary. However, during the Christmas shopping activity, misconception of need was illustrated. A few of the white, affluent female students were concerned that their less affluent friends were participating in providing necessities and gifts for others when they were in such need themselves. While having the very best intentions, they in fact devalued the contributions of their less affluent, minority classmates, viewing them more as recipients of service instead of equal contributors.

If less affluent, ethnic minority students are seen primarily as recipients of service, they will not be empowered to contribute to either their own or others' welfare. Also, research on volunteering (Waterman, 1997; Wuthnow, 1991), "often undervalues or does not recognize some of the more informal expressions of care and service in communities of color…which can lead to the misperception that youth of color are not interested in service" (Roehlkepartain, et. al., 2012, p.

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5). This issue was evident in the contrasting attitudes and practices of the migrant

Elmwood eighth graders relative to their fellow students. When most of

Elmwood's affluent eighth graders expressed their desire to "care for" lonely,

abused, or poor children their caring was sincere, but partially what Swalwell

(2012) refers to as a romanticized stereotype of an exotic "other" (p. 25). When

the ethnic-minority migrant students explained their desire to care for young

children, they were drawing on actual, practical experience.   Childcare of

younger siblings, cousins, and assorted friends was a commonplace, everyday

occurrence for these eighth graders: they had been helping their families in this

way their entire lives while their parents or caregivers worked multiple jobs. So

for these migrant students, "caring for" and "taking care of" was synonymous.

Finally, young adolescents want to feel that their efforts are worthwhile

and meaningful. Although the eighth graders may have had an imperfect

understanding of need, their intentions and motivations seemed in many cases

pure. They wanted to "care for"; they wanted to make a true, relational

difference.

To summarize, while in many cases deeply caring and empathic, typically

students understood need primarily on an emotional level. Students wanted to

spend their time on "something that mattered", making a true difference in

someone's life, for the environment, or to better all mankind. They wanted to *be*

needed. The implications for the development of caring in young adolescents are

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significant in light of their perspectives of "need."

Implications

First, educators who want to motivate caring in their students must redefine need. If emotion serves to inspire caring, as Noddings suggests, we must take care that the emotion that is inspired is not pity or condescension because "we" are so much better off than "they" are. Through critical reflection and dialogue, we must help our students understand need at a *structural* level by focusing on the *causes* of that need.

Second, educators must also take care to design service projects that ultimately involve and benefit those that we are "caring for". While we hope to inspire caring in our students, activities must be planned that actually impact a community, societal, physical, or environmental need of the "cared-for". While students want to feel that their efforts are worthwhile and meaningful, John Eby (1998) points out that service-learning is often organized more around the schedule, interests, and agenda of the students than the needs of persons served. The service recipients should be included in the planning and implementation of their service to ensure a mutually respectful and beneficial relationship.

A third implication involves the contributions of young people from minority or poverty communities. Care must be taken to value and highlight the unique contributions of our minority students, without singling them out as exceptional. In light of these findings, our focus should be to discover and

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highlight the strengths that students of *all* ethnicities, races, cultures, and social classes can offer. For example, when selecting service activities, thoughtful deliberation should be taken in planning to expose students to a variety of activities that can draw upon their unique contributions. In addition, when redefining need, the informal expressions of care common in many ethnic communities (such as taking care of younger siblings or elderly grandparents) should be emphasized as valuable and valid expressions of service.

To summarize, understandings of need are the result of a learning process**.** Patient reinforcement, critical reflection, caring service activities, and modeling are components of that learning process.

"The main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, loving, and loveable people" (Noddings, 2002, p. 99).

Benefits of the Study

The crux of any study is to ask, "Are the findings of this study useful or helpful?" This inquiry addressed the question of what impact, if any, did opportunities for service have on my eighth grade students. I also hoped to discover what types of service can help promote critical, caring thought and action. While my inquiry was designed to investigate "big picture" questions, the principal value of qualitative research does not lie in the confirmation and generalization of universal truths, but in descriptions and explanations of complex practices and relationships (Houser, 1994). If my study is meaningful, interesting,

and relevant to my own life and practices, if the methods of gathering data are sufficiently detailed and trustworthy, and if the research provides rich descriptions (Merriam, 2002) that are helpful to others, then hopefully my inquiry will be "…a piece of good work others can use, and thus increase knowledge and understanding" (Becker, 2007, p. 140).

One Elmwood eighth grade boy expressed using service as a rationale to inspire caring with insight and wisdom,

> When you serve, you inspire others with hope…inspire them to be
> creative and just be themselves. Helping others helps make the world
> a better place. People become nicer and more willing to help others when
> someone helps them. The end result would hopefully be a world where
> where everyone is kind, helpful, and considerate to each other.

This study was an outgrowth of what I have come to see as *my* "big picture." There is no guarantee that the conditions that we establish will inspire caring. I do hope, however, that somehow my students through service to others will come to realize that they can make some kind of positive difference in how all people are understood, respected, valued, and "cared for."

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