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HISPANIC STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES
ON THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES:
IMPLICATIONS FOR EQUITABLE EDUCATION
IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY

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HISPANIC STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR EDUCATIONAL
EXPERIENCES: IMPLICATIONS FOR EQUITABLE EDUCATION IN
A DIVERSE SOCIETY

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Abstract

One of the most pressing issues related to our society is the failure of schools to adequately serve minority populations, including Hispanic students. Not only does this situation have harmful consequences for the students, it also negatively affects teachers who work with them and has implications for society at large, as well. In light of this problem, I sought to learn more about the nature of the problem and what could be done about it. I wished to understand the perspectives of Hispanic students regarding their education. Specifically, I wanted to better understand the views of my Hispanic students regarding their own educational and life needs and how they perceived the education they received from United States schools and teachers. My expectation is that these kinds of insights will help foster better understanding and stronger relationships between students and teachers, especially between my students and me.

In this study I explored my own relationship with my Hispanic students as a means to gain insight to not only my own practices. I also wanted to understand the current situation of Hispanic students and the historical problems between people of color and the European American educational system in general. I then considered implications for diverse populations in today's schools, particularly Hispanic students. This study used aspects of critical ethnography, narrative inquiry, and teacher action research to investigate ten purposefully chosen Hispanic students' perspectives concerning their educations.

I employed Noddings' ethic of care and Freire's problem-posing education for raising critical consciousness as my theoretical lenses. The findings suggested the mechanistic, fragmented, and hierarchal structures of dominant culture invisibly affect teachers' and students' relationships which often results in an educational experience of social reproduction. I propose that, through problem-posing education, it may be possible to begin to recognize and transform society's invisible structures. I further suggest that teachers who acknowledge the inequities of dominant culture and help their students become conscious of the invisible inequities through problem-posing education have demonstrated true care.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A Brief History of Oppression through Education

The United States is made up of a wide diversity of ethnic groups who have, in theory, combined into a fabled "melting pot" society. Education is the official means used to meld these peoples into "Americans." Szasz (1983) defined education as including training in all of those aspects of living that are prerequisites for maturity. This involves a mastery of economic skills required for survival as well as a full awareness of one's cultural and spiritual heritage. While formal education typically seeks to teach the values and behaviors young people need to succeed in society and to change them from outsiders into citizens, it can also effectively erase newcomers' traditional and ethnic heritages[1]. What may be viewed by the dominant population as a benign and beneficial process has, nonetheless, been historically problematic for many immigrants and people of color because the primary educational focus has been from a European American[2] perspective.

Centuries before European explorers placed foot upon the shores of the North American continent, indigenous inhabitants had been instructing their young in the ways of becoming fully functioning social members. It was not

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[1] The term "citizen" has been traditionally linked with education as a way to describe – or legitimize – the curriculum. But does citizenship education guarantee insider status for all students who go through United States schools? Would those who belong to marginalized groups as Muslims or illegal immigrants agree that they enjoy full inclusion implicitly promised by such education?

[2] Throughout the paper I have used the words "European American" and "white" and "African American" and "black" interchangeably and stylistically.

unusual for Native peoples to completely involve children in the daily events of adults. Because of this education was a naturally occurring process integrated into everyday activities. Children were often included in the environment where they would use their acquired knowledge and skills. Thus, Native education seems to have been a holistic process in which every situation provided an opportunity for learning (Neegan, 2005).

From the earliest encounters between Europeans and indigenous people, attempts were made to educate the young in the contact language. Europeans felt their languages and societies were morally superior to those of Native peoples; therefore, Franciscans and Dominicans in the Southwest taught Spanish conventions, Jesuits in the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes regions educated Indian children in French language and customs, while Anglicans and Puritans in New England and the Atlantic seaboard attempted to replace Native languages with English outlooks, attitudes, and traditions (Berkhofer, 1972).

The early years of Spanish contact with Indians in the southwestern areas of the continent were characterized by a philosophical struggle between priests in the Americas and officials in Spain. Many priests undertook to learn the languages and customs of the natives they encountered to better convert them to Christianity, while Spanish officials often viewed the Indians as "natural slaves" who were not totally human and fit only to be exploited for their labor (Hanke, 1963, p. 87). Eventually, frustration over the Indians' lack of enthusiasm in embracing Roman Catholicism resulted in many priests deciding they were

dealing with people who were like animals without reason or of no more mental capacity than a parrot (Seed, 1993). In time, the priests and officials came to use education as a "means of socialization and control, a mix of paternalism and repression designed to mold the hearts and minds of workers, fostering acceptance of the status quo, and insuring general acquiescence to the ruling class" (Hart, 2005, p. 119).

As with the Spanish, the French also understood that religious education played a significant role in their colonial policy of achieving social and cultural dominance, and so the educational practices of French colonizers were primarily overseen by the Roman Catholic Church (Robenstine, 1992). "Possessed with medieval concepts of social order and holy harmony, Jesuits hoped to create Indian converts who were both Christian in belief and European in social patterns" (Ronda, 1972, p. 385). Teaching local populations French was seen as key to detaching the Indians from their "savagery" (p. 386). Jesuit priests sent glowing accounts to their superiors in Paris reporting their progress in changing their students into "entirely new beings" (Clark, 1979, p. 380).

Differing, ostensibly, from the Spanish and French clergy's goal of religious instruction and conversion of the Indians, early English interests in America were primarily for economic gain. Despite that intention, in 1609, just two years after English colonists landed in Virginia, British investors in Jamestown colony instructed Sir Thomas Gates to begin educating Native youth. This command implied that Indian children had not been educated by their own

peoples. What began, perhaps, as British concern for the academic and spiritual welfare of Native youngsters evolved into a complicated agenda of proselytizing and cultural obliteration.

First among the ways proposed to "civilize" and Christianize the "savages" was to remove Indian boys from their tribes and bring them into the colonies for the purpose of teaching English and the principles of religion to them (Robinson, 1952, p. 154). This removal of children from their homes eventually evolved into the Indian boarding school system.

For European Americans, the real strength of boarding schools was the ease with which the students' entire environment could be controlled to such an extent that moral and social training took precedence over academic studies in those institutions (Havinghurst, 1965). Children were much more susceptible to the missionaries' methods of persuasion without the mitigating influence of their parents and tribal leaders to contradict the training.

Institutionalized education of Indian children was replete with watered-down or non-existent curriculum. Many boarding schools stressed manual labor training and physical work almost to the exclusion of basic education due in large part to the prejudicial belief that Indian children were uneducable in the traditional European American sense. Manual labor instruction was thought to suit their "limited talents" far better than reading, writing, and arithmetic (Rayman, 1981, p. 399). The children's industrial training amounted to little

more than slavery with days typically consisting of sixteen hours of labor (Whiteman, 1986).

When Indian children were brought into boarding schools, the European American policy was to change the students' appearance as much as possible. The school entrance procedure included a new suit of western clothing, along with instructions on how to put it on and remove it. In addition to a boy's new outfit, his long hair was cut short, signifying the "killing of the inner Indian" (Axtel, 1981, p. 59). Speaking to one another in their native languages resulted in harsh physical punishment for the children. The final blow schools administered to a child's Indian identity was the bestowing of a new, school-assigned, English name. When these youngsters were forced to dress and act "white," they were taught to hate the Indian inside themselves, to feel ashamed of their customs and beliefs, and to reject their parents' traditions (Starnes, 2003). To experience such systematic destruction of their identities must have created dramatic emotional trauma for Indian children.

Unlike the strategy for Native populations, white slave owners withheld education from the African slaves brought forcibly to America. With enslaved Africans, illiteracy was a form of control. To this end, it was a criminal offense to teach a slave to read or write. Southern state legislatures imposed harsh penalties on white people who made an effort to produce literacy among slaves and on slaves who tried to learn to read or write. The reasoning behind anti-education

laws was summed up during an 1831 debate by a representative in the Virginia House of Delegates:

> We have, as far as possible, stopped every avenue by which light might enter the slaves' minds. If we could extinguish the capacity to see the light, our work would be completed; they would then be on a level with the beasts of the field and we should be safe. (Danger, 1999, p. 19)

Although emancipation brought freedom to the slaves, the prohibition against education remained a functional reality if no longer a legal one. After the Civil War, shattered Southern states built new schools for white children but made only the barest of provisions for black children. Few black youngsters remained in school past eighth grade, and high schools for black adolescents were rare. The education available to African American children in the South was abysmal in both quantity and quality, even though the economic reconstruction of the South depended on appropriate education for all, both black and white.

Appropriate education for black young people, though, meant industrial and agricultural education, manual training, instruction in hygiene, and other kinds of training to prepare them for jobs as laborers and domestic servants (Ravitch, 2001). While the Jim Crow laws of the South ensured inferior black education, in the northern states separate schools were established for black students even before the Civil War was fought. Substandard education for African American children continued as a by-product of residential segregation and housing discrimination.

World War II made nominal inroads to integration. While black and white inductees were often trained at the same military bases, they were kept in segregated units and housed in separate barracks. Many African Americans, especially those from rural areas of the Deep South, had received substandard educations and were, therefore, denied specialized training. However, other men who were "capable of doing electrical or mechanical work [were] still doing stevedoring" (Bailey & Farber, 1993, p. 832). There were African American officers, but they commanded troops consisting exclusively of black men.

At the conclusion of World War II, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act, more commonly known as the G.I. Bill was enacted. While providing excellent new schooling opportunities for white veterans, this bill actually had the effect of increasing inequality between whites and blacks. The vast majority of enlisted black men were residents of southern states, and those states maintained rigidly segregated and unequally funded systems of higher education. Without exception, the large, flagship universities were closed to African Americans in the post-World War II period. Consequently, many black veterans used their G.I. Bill money to pursue vocational training (How the G.I. Bill, 2003).

In 1954, Brown vs. the Board of Education I ended the official, but not the effective, segregation of schools. Because African American families tended to be located in poor neighborhoods with limited access to good facilities, teachers, supplies, and technology, forced busing was eventually used to desegregate schools and bring black students into better schools. However, there were

practical problems with assigning pupils to schools a great distance from their neighborhoods.

Partially due to this hardship for children and families, parents of all races called upon school district leaders to consider alternatives to accomplish integrated schools. In response, many school districts came up with solutions like new school construction and magnet schools to reduce extreme transportation distances and encourage voluntary participation in racially-balanced schools. Despite such innovative approaches, inadequate and outdated materials and low teacher expectations for minority students were still widespread problems. Additionally, the majority of teachers were white and school curricula overwhelmingly presented the Western viewpoint of the world, reinforcing the historic pattern of education in the United States in which European Americans emphasized the *otherness* of their students.

As with other minority groups, the historic pattern of European colonization and domination has had long-lasting effects among those of Latin ancestry living in the United States, even though the mismatch of cultures has changed from Spanish rule to American government. Hispanic citizens have been added to the population of the United States in two ways. Many who lived in the Southwestern areas found themselves within the borders of the United States as new territories were annexed to the Union and subsequently became states. Others voluntarily relocated themselves to the United States. Because of history

and proximity, the Southwestern states still have the greatest concentrations of Hispanic populations, but every state of the union has Hispanic residents.

After much consideration, I have used the term Hispanic to refer to people of Latin American backgrounds for several reasons. In *Affirming Diversity,* Sonia Nieto, who is from Puerto Rico, called herself and other Latin Americans "Hispanic" as did many of my participants in their interviews. Because people of Latin descent already refer to themselves as Hispanic, I did not feel that I was arbitrarily labeling this group of people. Second, although the majority of my participants were from Mexico, others were from South or Central American countries. It is no more appropriate to assume all students of Latin descent are Mexican American in this paper than it is to do in society. Hispanic is not country-specific. Finally, Hispanic is a gender neutral word. Therefore, I did not have to qualify the word as both male and female with each usage as I would if I had used Latino/Latina or Chicano/Chicana.

A large amount of the Southwestern area of the United States came at the end of the Mexican-American War. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the terms of which were largely dictated by the United States, ended the invasion of Mexico. As a result, one half of Mexican territory was forcibly annexed by the United States. "This treaty, among other things, guaranteed the linguistic, cultural, and educational rights of the Mexican people who found themselves in conquered territories" (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 418).

However, in the more than 150 years since the treaty was signed, it has been broken numerous times. Recently proposed state and national anti-immigration legislation such as Oklahoma's House Bill 1804 and English-only legislation, including Oklahoma's Senate Bills 163 and 1156 and Federal House Bill 123, also known as the English Language Empowerment Act (Library of Congress), are in direct opposition to that treaty and make even those who have lived in the United States for generations feel unwelcome in their own country.

In an explanation of how schools are agents of United States imperialism, Villenas and Deyhle revealed that, in order for the processes of domination to be more effective, "they required the domination of the mind, of the worldviews and way of life of the people. This form of genocidal domination [of indigenous peoples in the Americas] has fundamentally been educative in nature" (1999, p. 417). Villenas and Deyhle further believed that dominant cultures take on the job of

> disciplining the immigrant Other – that is to teach Latino immigrants how to 'behave' in White society. This 'disciplining' ranges from teaching the do's and don'ts of living in the United States to teaching 'correct' thinking (submissiveness, assimilation, English only) about their place in United States society. In this matter, Latino immigrants are the recipients of the fury of a xenophobic nation, and yet their children must develop positive identities under such a cultural assault

In the schools, the colonization of the mind is continued

through the instilling of a historical amnesia that renders

Latino/indigenous peoples as 'immigrants,' foreigners who have no claim

to the Americas, while European Americans are constructed as the natural

owners and inheritors of these lands. The rich knowledge, beliefs, and

worldviews of Latino and Mexicano/Chicano communities are not

validated, let alone taught. (1999, p. 420-421)

It seems that having a majority of teachers who are members of the

dominant culture might be one way that the "colonization of the mind" could

continue to be enacted in schools. Conservative estimates suggest that

black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American children presently comprise

almost 30 percent of the school-age population….Furthermore, by some

estimates the turn of the century will find up to 40 percent nonwhite

children in American classrooms….Most teachers who teach today's

children are white; tomorrow's teaching force will be even more so.

(Delpit, 2006, p. 105)

This racial disconnect between teachers and students in classrooms

implies the educational experiences of minority young people may continue to be

oppressive and ineffective. In a study of 892 school campuses in Texas, Weiher

found the "Hispanic teacher shortfall is a symptom of a lag on the part of districts

and schools in adopting practices appropriate for Hispanic students" (2000, p.

894). He also found that "minority students [both African American and Hispanic] perform better in schools that have more minority teachers" (p. 893).

Based on the historical record, it seems that indigenous "minority" groups have been ill-served by Eurocentric American schools. Swanson (2006) reported that only 53.2 percent of Hispanic students graduate from high school. The dropout rate may indicate the "education" these students are receiving at school is either not meeting their needs or not giving a sufficient pay-off for them to remain in school until graduation.

However, Erickson suggested that "schools 'work at' failing their [minority] students" (1987, p. 336). He believed one way in which schools may enact hegemonic practices with immigrant and minority students is through the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Not all literature presents a completely negative view of the ways Hispanic students viewed their educations, though. Gasbarra and Johnson's presentation of opinion survey data suggested the young people they studied had many positive things to say about their teachers and their schools (2008).

Thus, it seems that literature presents mixed perspectives on Hispanic students. While not every study paints a bleak picture of Hispanic students' experiences in United States schools, a substantial amount of studies do so. It is also important to note that my study was not an attempt to present the experiences and perspectives of all Hispanic students. Instead, it presents my own Hispanic

students' educational experiences and perspectives so that I might understand the implications of these perspectives for me as a teacher of Hispanic students.

A Personal Journey

As we have seen, from the earliest days of European contact, education has been used to subjugate minority groups. But discriminatory educational practices did not exist only in the past. Nor are they restricted to gritty, urban schools in major East and West Coast cities. I, too, have observed them in my own medium-sized Midwestern city.

I taught for nine years in inner-city schools which had high Hispanic enrollments. I grew up, however, in wealthy, predominately white, southern Tulsa. My graduating class of over 600 had fewer than ten black students and no Hispanic students. Teenagers attending other high schools in town called the people who went to my school "cake eaters" because of our feelings of entitlement and perceived elitism. Like many of my peers, I held prejudicial and unkind views toward people of other races.

When I began teaching at my first school and drove there through neighborhoods of tiny, dilapidated houses, my feelings of superiority were reinforced. But my feelings were also mixed with "pity" for the "unfortunate" children who came from those homes. I was certain I had come to this school so that I might show my students a better way: if they paid close attention in class and worked very hard, they might one day be like me.

As I gradually came to know my students as individual people, however, I began to realize they and their families did not need me to teach them how to function in the world. The majority of the children had strong and loving family bonds. Their parents worked long hours to support their children. Many adults also managed to send money to Mexico or other countries to support extended family. In time, my smugness and self-assurance that I had all the answers for Hispanic students began to falter and then to slip away.

The change from thinking of my students as a group needing my help to knowing them as unique individuals came slowly; after all, it was not my students' perceptions that had to change but mine. I had to stop focusing on how the children in my classes lived and look at how I lived. This meant examining and questioning facets of my life, my beliefs, and my culture as never before. Many of my realizations involved aspects regarding views of myself and my concepts of reality which I had never acknowledged until that point.

It was not until my third year at the middle school that I finally learned to loosen up and began to enjoy my students. Relaxing allowed me to let go of the pessimistic attitudes I had held toward the children and to start forming relationships with them. My students responded favorably to the change which encouraged me to open up even more, and my approach toward my students grew more positive every year. Although I still struggle with ingrained biases, I am aware I hold those attitudes and continue to work at overcoming them.

Even as I strove to build relationships with my Hispanic students, I realized there was a possibility they might experience feelings of disengagement from a middle-class, white teacher. This concern was reinforced by my impression that other adults in the school seemed disconnected from their students, and I saw many cases of ineffective and unprofessional pedagogical practices.

For example, there were examples of poor administrative practices. An assistant principal at the middle school, herself Mexican American, told me I expected too much of my Hispanic students. She claimed my background caused me to have expectations that were too high for "these students" and said I should make my lessons easier so the students did not have to work so hard. Looking back, it seemed she may have "adapted to the structure of domination in which [she was] immersed" (Freire, 2006/1976, p. 47). In other words, she appeared to have internalized the attitude of white society which often holds the opinion that minority students do not need to be challenged academically. I wondered if she had, as Freire expressed, become an "oppressor" of Hispanic people by encouraging assignments that did not push students beyond doing just enough to get by (p. 45).

Whether they were deliberate or unwitting, I thought the assistant principal's attitudes were harmful for my students. What are teachers, who believe their students are capable people, to do when they receive official instructions to not give students work that might challenge them? How can

teachers in this situation do what they know is best for their students without running afoul of administrators? These were among the questions that occurred to me as I considered the assistant principal's views regarding my educational goals and approaches.

Another example of poor administrative practice involved the African American dean of students at the same middle school. She gave the impression she did not want teachers to instruct in such a way that students' educations became a connected web of ideas but, instead, to present essential facts for each subject matter as discrete bits of information. The dean suggested that, instead of giving traditional tests or having students do projects or write essays to check comprehension, we purchase large, many-sided dice, roll them, call out the numbers they landed on, and have students would write whatever fact happened to match that number. Thus, the object of learning would no longer be the ability to understand concepts or have skills mastery but, rather, simply being able to identify, for example, that a noun was number four on the die.

I also saw many instances of poor curricular and classroom practices. For instance, when I became the middle school English Language Learner (ELL) English teacher, the European American teacher I replaced advised me to go to the special education department and choose the lowest level textbooks available because the students I would be teaching were not "smart enough" for regular textbooks. She also suggested that I buy a lot of coloring books because coloring was one thing Hispanic students were able to do.

A former student in the same school came to me in a rage as I stood by my door during passing period. His English teacher that year refused to read his essay and gave him a zero grade because he had not followed her format in the way he wrote his heading in the corner of his paper. He was outraged upset that his words and ideas in the essay were not evaluated and that his effort in completing the assignment was not assessed. All that the teacher seemed to take into consideration when giving the score of zero was the one inch space of identifying information in the upper right-hand margin.

A group of three teachers whose rooms were at the end of the hall farthest from the administrative offices routinely put on a movie or handed out worksheets then congregated in the hall to chat. While the white head principal occasionally wandered down to that end of the school and shooed them back into their rooms, his attitude was usually one of tolerant resignation over their lack of classroom interaction and supervision.

There were also occasions of poor inter-personal relationships. Colleagues confided to me that they no longer cared whether or not their students learned anything, and that they were merely going through the motions of teaching. All they really wanted was for the kids to be quiet while in their rooms. Others felt they were wasting their time teaching Hispanic children because they believed the students would either drop out of school in a few years or soon move back to Mexico where education is not compulsory.

During class one day, a student raised his hand and asked why I never cursed at my classes. I told him I appreciated being spoken to respectfully and, if I expected that from my students, I should return the favor and speak to them respectfully. He thought about that for a minute, and said, "You know, you're the only teacher here who doesn't curse at us when you get mad."

The examples of poor relationships with students I observed were not isolated to this middle school, however. I also taught at a high school that drew students from the entire metropolitan area but, because of its location and the majority of its enrollment, was designated an inner-city school. The white founder and CEO of the school explained to students in virtually every one of the monthly assemblies that they would never amount to anything unless they learned how to conduct themselves like the middle class. She publicly advised them to look to her as their example for "correct" behavior.

In the assemblies, which were attended by both students and their parents, the founder often spoke disparagingly about the parents who held low paying jobs or came to school in unstylish and overly casual clothes or who drove old cars. There were few words of encouragement for working class parents who were concerned about their children's education and made the effort to establish communication with teachers and administrators. She gave the impression that she believed lower class parents were not as good as those who were visibly more affluent or better educated. There was a large population of Hispanic and

international students at the school, and the founder's behavior toward the parents who spoke no or broken English was brusque and dismissive.

After years of encountering attitudes of low expectations and hopelessness and trying hard to resist absorbing the negativity I found so prevalent, I began to wonder just how well United States schools serve our largest minority group. How would high school seniors and recently graduated Hispanic young people rate their educational experience? Would they feel as if their schools had adequately prepared them to take their place in society as adults?

Research Questions

Bearing these issues in mind, I came up with two guiding questions:

1. What are my Hispanic students' perspectives toward their educations?

2. What are the implications of these perspectives for me and other teachers of Hispanic and minority students?

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL LENSES

United States schools do not appear to be meeting the needs of Hispanic students. Valencia (as cited in Donato & de Onis, 1994) contended that school failure among Mexican Americans[3] is persistent, pervasive, and disproportionate such that wherever Mexican American communities appear, school failure is certain to be widespread. This suggests the problem is not localized to one particular school or school system but applies to the way in which the United States' entire educational structure approaches the Hispanic students it serves.

Although the United States no longer has legal racial segregation, schools are still frequently segregated on the basis of social class. It is not uncommon for schools to serve primarily, or even exclusively, upper class, middle class, or working class students. Language-minority students tend to group together geographically. Consequently, "the majority of Hispanic students attend schools that serve predominantly minority populations" (Sleeter & Grant, 1988, p. 26). Bearing in mind that there seems to be a cultural or societal discrepancy between United States schools and Hispanic students, I chose to employ the lenses of Noddings' (1992) ethic of care and Freire's problem- posing education for critical consciousness to analyze the findings of my study.

Ethic of Care

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[3] While this citation specifically mentions "Mexican Americans," much other literature discusses the academic problems faced by "Hispanic" students.

Noddings (1992) claimed the need for care is universal, and that young people suffer when schools become less caring places. Those most severely affected are often those who can least afford to be in an uncaring environment; that is, those students whose social background and academic history puts them at risk for school failure or of dropping out of school prior to high school graduation. According to Noddings "the structures of current schooling work against care, and at the same time, the need for care is perhaps greater than ever" (p. 20).

When Noddings (1992) formulated her theory of care, she recognized that care requires two components: a care-giver and a cared-for. Using the premise of giving and receiving care, she identified six themes of care. "Caring for self" acknowledges that people have physical, spiritual, occupational, and recreational sides that must be tended to (p. 74). "Caring in the inner circle" is broken into two groups: equal relations and unequal relations (p. 91). An equal relation refers to mates and lovers, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. An unequal relation involves care for children and students. "Caring for strangers and distant others" discusses the difficulties of caring at a distance, both geographically and emotionally, and how to prepare to care at a distance (p. 110). "Caring for animals, plants, and the earth" addresses the responsibility people have toward non-human life and the environment (p. 126). "Caring for the human-made world" discusses the moral implications of Americans' obsession with acquisition and unbalanced use of the world's resources (p. 139). Finally, "caring for ideas"

looks specifically at mathematics and art, but the larger message is how to provide the best possible education for individual students with different capacities and interests while also meeting our needs as a nation (p. 150).

In contemplating an alternative view of how education might be presented, Noddings (1992) recognized that most adolescents struggle with important issues of character development along with their intellectual development. They may question the validity of issues they had always taken for granted, such as whether they still agree with their parents' view of religion. They wonder if they will ever find someone who will love and accept them as they are. They consider various options for their futures and worry they might not make the right choices. In addition to these concerns most teenagers face, working class children may also be surrounded by detrimental distractions such as gangs and drugs. They see how hard their parents must work to make ends meet and often question what they can do so their lives will be better.

However, Noddings (1992) further recognized that schools rarely address students' anxieties in caring, personal ways. Guidance counselors have commonly been turned into class schedule builders instead of being able to act as listeners and advisors. Teachers are under pressure to follow lesson plans and meet district curriculum requirements. It sometimes seems the people who are very reason schools exist have somehow gotten lost in the pressure of our duties. We adults working in education are often so busy being good at our jobs that we have lost a human relationship with our students.

A caring relationship, according to Noddings, is "a connection…between two human beings" (1992, p. 15). True care is not a casual acquaintanceship with near strangers. It is filled with personal meaning between people who have worked at establishing bonds of knowledge and trust. Noddings supported the significance of connected relationships with Martin Heidegger's description of care, which he referred to as "the very Being of human life" (p. 15). Noddings explained Heidegger's perspective on relationships as being "immersed with care; it is the ultimate reality of life" (p. 15). In other words, it may be that life's primary goal is to form relationships of care.

Noddings also believed teachers have an obligation to form interpersonal relationships with their students which carries a moral purpose perhaps even more important than the job of academics. It was Noddings' view that a large part of teachers' responsibilities should be to help young people develop new capacities of care and trust. This responsibility comes with the dual charge of developing bonds of care and trust between teachers and students because "there is a genuine form of reciprocity that is essential to the relation" (1992, p. 17). The attitude of care must be received by students and returned back to the teacher. There is give-and-take in the relationship, not a one way flow of care.

Noddings expanded upon her definition of care by noting that "caring is a way of being in relations, not a set of specific behaviors" (1992, p. 17). Thus, caring is not a procedure or a series of steps to be followed. People do not do

actions a, b, and c and then end up with "care," nor is caring a prescriptive action that can be displayed in exactly the same manner from student to student.

By caring for our students, we come to know them as distinctive people. We demonstrate care differently toward different individuals according to their personal requirements and the conditions of their lives. When teachers are able to see students as unique individuals and view them distinctive people rather than as test scores or assigned spots in the seating chart, one may say that person has begun to care for students.

Because genuine care is attuned to individuals and their needs, caring practices are necessarily flexible rather than fixed or prescribed. In an approach that blended theory with practice, Rauner (2000, p. 7) described caring as "an interactive process involving attentiveness, responsiveness, and competence." In agreement with Noddings' theory, Rauner, too, believed care to be more than mechanistic behaviors. Instead, it is a deeply human context for healthy development. Care in school promotes social connections between fellow teachers, between teachers and students, and between students. True care can create possibilities for students that may lead to positive outcomes. It does not diminish students' options in life.

Freire would probably concede that creating possibilities would be a good start. He would go further than that, though. Freire would claim that, instead of possibilities, schools should prepare students to understand and transform their

worlds by helping them "critically recognize [oppression's] causes, so that

through transforming action they can create a new situation" (1970/2006, p. 47).

Quinn was equally critical of the existing social structure and the role of

education in maintaining this structure. He proposed that the current mission of

schools is not to teach students to be critical thinkers or even to teach them the

skills they will need at their jobs. Instead, Quinn argued the real mission of

schools is to keep "fourteen-to-eighteen-year-olds off the job market…[and] to

keep them at home as non-wage-earning consumers" (1997, p. 136). Like others,

Quinn believed public schools exist to "produce workers who have no choice but

to enter [the] economic system" of society (p. 144).

But social institutions simultaneously reflect and reproduce society.

Because of this Freire argued that there is no "neutral educational process"

(1970/2006, p. 34) because education either subordinates the young into society

or encourages them to "deal critically and creatively with reality and discover

how to participate in the transformation of their world" (p. 34). Schools rarely do

that, though. As an agent of the larger "unjust social order" (p. 44), the institution

of education has a vested interest in keeping students from making those

challenges and transformations.2

Social reproduction theory is based on the work of Karl Marx to explain

how the ruling class, those in power who control society's means of production,

imposes its ideology upon the working class to keep them firmly and

complacently located at the base of production. According to this perspective, it

25

is in the best interests of the dominant group to create a system which guarantees and supports their position within society, thereby achieving hegemony over their followers.

Expanding on the theories of Marx and others, Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) used the term social reproduction to explain how social and cultural inequalities are perpetuated through the educational system and other institutions. People learn what behaviors and conditions support life at their own social levels. Much of what they learn begins in the home. Other institutions such as schools, churches, and employment reinforce the lessons people learn from their families and peers.

One way that schools may reproduce society is through "banking education" (Freire, 1970/2006, p.72), in which students are viewed as empty depositories and teachers as the depositor of knowledge.

> In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those they consider to know nothing….Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. (p. 72)

With banking education students are considered passive learners who have little active role in constructing their own knowledge. Their only responsibility is to accept information presented to them by the teacher. They are not encouraged

nor, it seems, even allowed to critically relate to their own education. Students are encouraged to remain in the submissive role they have been taught to assume.

Banking education stagnates both teachers and students. The perception of the teachers' role of supreme authority of knowledge is continually reinforced, while students are not challenged to actively engage themselves in learning. "Banking education maintains and even stimulates the [teacher-student] contradiction…which mirrors oppressive society as a whole" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 73) because of its vertical alignment of power. Knowledge becomes fragmented, not constructed, just as the members of society remain fragmented into rigidly divided social classes.

Banking education has all the appearances of true education, so the structure of domination is concealed from the participants. Young people who never learn to question a teacher's absolute authority may become adults who never think to question an inequitable social system. Freire noted that "the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them," the less likely they are to develop critical consciousness that allows them to become transformers of their worlds (1970/2006, p. 73). Educators who fail to interact with students beyond simply teaching fragmented bits of information can help assure those students remain passive observers *of* the world instead of interacting *in* and *with* the world.

An added problem is that the process of social reproduction is largely invisible. In Anyon's study of schools from different social levels, she found the ways teachers instructed and interacted with their students worked in nearly

imperceptible ways to reproduce the social classes the children came from. She

called the combination of teachers' behaviors, attitudes, and instruction "hidden

curriculum" because those who are involved in social reproduction are often

unaware that their behaviors replicate unequal social relations for their students

(1980, p. 89).

The majority of teachers in United States schools are European American.

This further compounds the invisibility of an inequitable system. McIntosh

(1989, p. 10) identified that white teachers' "schooling gave [them] no training in

seeing [themselves] as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a

participant in a damaged culture." McIntosh noted that white people are typically

taught to "think of their 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'" (p. 10).

But it is not white *people* that are the problem. The persistence of white

invisibility and white hegemony are only examples of the larger problem of

domination in *general*. Invisible beliefs' underlying ideal (i.e., Platonic)

structures of domination in general are continually reinforced by the specific

actions of individuals and societies (Gaarder, 1994).

In examining the ways teachers interact with students, Nieto (2004)

related many incidents of racism and sexism. She acknowledged "unintentional

discrimination is practiced by well-meaning teachers" (p. 45). She cited Kavel's

belief "that most teachers were not prejudiced" but that he also "longed for more

awareness and understanding from them because, for the most part, they failed to address these issues [bigotry and prejudice]" (p. 45).

It seems contradictory for Nieto to note, in her observations of teachers' racist or discriminatory behaviors, that those who displayed such behaviors were "well-intentioned and otherwise excellent teachers" (2004, p. 40). How could teachers who may claim to have their students' best interests at heart simultaneously exhibit bias and racist actions, as well? One explanation could be that the mechanistic, hierarchical, and competitive structures of dominant cultures have become so invisibly imbedded in societies and institutions (such as schools) that both white and minority members are unconsciously shaped and influenced by those same structures (e.g., Capra, 1996; Greene, 1988; Nieto, 2004; Quinn, 1992, 1997).

Ideal structures of inequity can be felt by many teachers, as well. Teachers may receive contradictory messages from school hierarchy that they are professional educators, yet are not qualified to make even the most basic decisions about how their classrooms are run or what curriculum they teach (Freeman, Jackson, & Boles, 1983). But it does not stop there. Administrators, too, are affected by these larger social and political structures. In this way entire nations (such as the United States) can be shaped by individuals who are, for the most part, "good people," but who have historically been (and who continue to be) influenced by an invisible, largely indiscernible, oppressive structure of ideas that influence the lives of whole populations.

Aspects of Care

My theoretical lenses are Noddings' care theory and Freire's problem-posing education to raise critical consciousness as a means for social transformation. They do not each receive their own headings, but are included together under aspects of care. As I thought about what it truly meant to care, I came to realize that helping students become critically conscious so that they might achieve social transformation was a significant act of true care. Thus, caring for students and critical consciousness and social transformation are not mutually exclusive acts. Rather, they become extensions of one another.

There are conceivably hundreds of ways to develop and demonstrate care for people. However, the realization that otherwise good teachers may harbor attitudes of bias and discrimination toward minority groups suggests that one way to begin caring for students may be for teachers to "suspend judgment" toward their students.

Suspending judgment is a term that dates to the ancient Greek Stoics and refers to "skepticism about the possibility of achieving certain knowledge of the world (Sharples, 1996, p. 9). The Stoics held the view that "knowledge is ultimately based on sense-experience" (p. 11). Extending this idea to apply to human interactions, opinions of people should be based on personal experiences with them rather than on certainties established from previously developed ideas.

If European American teachers are able to resist drawing conclusions about students – including minority students – they may be less likely to form

premature judgments. Instead of acting upon initial assumptions, generalizations, or other kinds of incomplete information, when one suspends judgment there is an attitude of "I don't know" involved. We wait for people to inform us about themselves instead of imposing our pre-formed ideas onto them. Teachers allow students to demonstrate who they are rather than believing we know everything about the students because they are one of *them*.

One definition of prejudice is making categorical judgments about others without knowing anything about them (Locke, 1992). Personal prejudices allow people to put other groups at an emotional distance. We can ignore them. We can blame them for the circumstances in which they find themselves. We can treat those we hold at a distance in ways we would not consider treating people we care about.   Noddings proposed that "creating a psychological distance is a powerful mechanism of moral disengagement. We can, with spurious good conscience, permit acts against those distanced that would appall us within our chosen moral community" (1992, p. 112).

One outcome of suspending judgment is that teachers can connect with students by accepting them as they are. Acceptance and understanding allow people to hold others emotionally close. If teachers can do that, the psychological distance and moral disengagement of which Noddings warned has no place in their minds or hearts. Teachers can act in ways that are best for students. Teachers can begin to believe in students rather than to prejudge them. Minority students may have social, historical, geographical, or linguist differences from

white teachers. But this does not mean they are inferior people. Nonjudgmental acceptance of students can keep teachers from using young people's differences to bolster bigotry and intolerance. This is what suspending judgment can stop.

To develop care for students, Thompson suggested, teachers must pay attention to them. "To be attentive is to listen, watch, and notice" (1995, p. 129). When teachers pay attention to students, they suspend preoccupation with the self, focus the heart and mind on others, and monitor how others are faring. Yet it is not unusual for teachers to pay attention to Hispanic students but still see them in stereotypical and prejudicial ways, treat them as interesting, exotic *others*, or blame them for their own distress and disadvantage.

Teacher attentiveness should not be confused with paying attention to student behavior and monitoring comprehension, however. Most teachers already display great awareness *toward* their students. They pay attention when looking for signs of understanding or confusion on children's faces. They keep a constant eye on the class to observe off-task activities and correct those actions before they become disturbances. They move around the room as they talk so they can establish eye contact with each student. They circulate while the students work and are available when someone needs help. Teachers already do all these things. But these monitoring skills do not necessarily mean a teacher is attentive *to* students. Good classroom management is not the same thing as caring for students.

One possible contributor to the development of caring relationships might be to incorporate Thompson's (1995) components of attentiveness – listening, watching, and noticing – into our classroom behaviors. Rather than simply observing *what* students are doing, we might go further to observe *how* our students are doing. We might strive to: hear the nuances behind their words and tones of voices; listen for happiness, anger, or distress; know their habits and facial expressions well enough to see when something is amiss, or when something is better than usual; notice when students exhibit signs of joy or annoyance or sadness. We might strive to be *fully present* with students. According to Thompson, this is what it means to be attentive to students.

Attentiveness is a way of being fully present in a relationship. When teachers are attentive to students, there is a state of "consciousness of the carer as characterized by engrossment and motivational displacement" that Noddings used in describing attentiveness (1992, p. 15). In other words, teachers display full receptivity to students and their needs.

Care is central to the shaping of relationships that are meaningful, supportive, rewarding, and productive. That is to say, caring teachers truly connect with students in a personal way. When we connect with our students, we can begin to bond with them. We show our true selves and look for what is true and authentic in students. A relationship of care is, indeed, challenging and profound. As Hannah Arendt expressed, with care "diverse human beings can

appear before one another as the best they know how to be" (cited in Greene, 1988, p. xi).

For people to be the best they know how to be means they give up pretensions, drop defensiveness, and become "vulnerable" before one another (Behar, 1996). There is an intimacy involved in being with students like that, without the façade we teachers can often hide behind. By doing this we give students the opportunity to see us as we really are, judge us and, perhaps, use those judgments to their own advantages. That is a risk, of course, but deep possibilities often come from deep risks.

Another important component in Noddings' concept of caring education is dialogue. Dialogue can be viewed as a common search for understanding. "It connects us to each other and helps to maintain caring relations. It also provides us with the knowledge of each other that forms a foundation for response in caring" (Noddings,1992, p. 23). Just as dialogue is important in constructing scholarly learning, dialogue is also a necessary tool for teachers and students to get to know each other. When we understand our students and their needs, we are better able to care for them. Continued dialogue maintains our connection with our students and keeps care active and alive.

Teachers sometimes allow students to voice their opinions and insights on a topic, and then tell them what the *right* answer is. This is not dialogue in Noddings' sense of the word. Rather, "dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or

imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for

something undetermined at the beginning" (1992, p. 23).

In agreement with Noddings, Freire believed the power of dialogue was

"an act of creation" (1970/2006, p. 89). However, Freire warned that "it must not

serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another" (p. 89).

Teachers, in the course of caring for their students, can help them name their

worlds through dialogue, thus helping them discover the power to transform their

worlds.

In a similar perspective, Greene (1988) viewed dialogue as the way people

named alternatives to their present situations and as the first step in achieving a

better state of being. Through dialogue, teachers give students the opportunity to

voice their hopes and aspirations as well as their worries and fears. Students learn

how to react thoughtfully and critically with information rather than accepting it

at face value or rejecting it out of hand. It is students themselves who construct

the manner of rising above and beyond the low expectations that may have been

assigned to them by schools and society. Thus, caring dialogue can be a basis of

transformative education.

Dialogue may become a meeting ground to reconcile students and teachers

who have been separated by the unilateral authority of the teacher in traditional

education. Dialogue is "a mutually created discourse which questions existing

canons of knowledge and challenges power relations in the classroom and in

society (Shor, 1992, p. 87). Educational dialogue is a student-centered, teacher-directed process to develop critical thought and democratic participation.

Dialogic classrooms take advantage of human nature. Human beings are naturally inquisitive and communicative. According to Freire, "human existence cannot be silent" (1970/2006, p. 88). Classroom dialogue makes the most of the tendency and inclination people have to reflect together on the meaning of shared experiences and knowledge.

Problem-posing education, Freire's term for dialogic education, breaks the vertical pattern of traditionally run schooling and rejects transmission-style education (1970/2006, p. 80). Through problem-posing education, teachers can help students explore, identify, and begin to transform the invisible ideas that structure society. Freire realized that schools may only be one piece of the greater, systemic societal inequity, but they are an important piece. Schools can reflect and perpetuate the hierarchical structure of many societies. But Freire understood that schools were also a place to begin structural transformation.

In the democratic and transformative style of problem-posing education, teachers do not present hypothetical questions and require students to guess at a pre-existing answer. Students are no longer called upon to simply recall information but rather to help construct class-wide understanding. "Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienating" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 81). Students'

responses evoke new challenges, followed by new understandings. Gradually, students come to regard themselves as committed members creating the process of learning.

Incorporating problem-posing into classrooms helps to break the dichotomy of right-wrong, good-bad, true-false that comprises so many educational encounters and reinforces the tendency to see the world in absolutes. In helping to construct reality, students may begin to understand there are options and choices they can make on their own behalf. Their acts of cognition are powerful because they may allow young people to be "critically aware of oppression" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 51) and to transform it in their lives. When people can transform their own lives, they also begin to transform society.

Correspondingly, it appears that teachers who care about their students take the risk of becoming vulnerable and forming reciprocal relationships with them. However, the opposite of caring teachers is not just uncaring teachers. It is a complex combination of teacher attitudes and behaviors which fails to teach or to relate in such a way that students become critical thinkers and, thus, helps to assure that students' places in society are reproduced.

In a similar vein, Delpit asserted that if "schooling prepares people for jobs, and the kind of job a person has determines her or his economic status and, therefore, power, then school is intimately related to that power" (2006, p. 25). Accordingly, it seems likely members of ethnic minority groups would be disproportionately and negatively influenced by economic social reproduction.

This includes working-class Hispanic students who receive an "education" which prepares them for jobs that have few intellectual challenges, are low paying, menial, and marginally-skilled, and are based on repetitive tasks, such as bus boys, dishwashers, lawn maintenance, housekeeping, child care, roofing, and road construction.

Conscious of this educational trend, Anyon (1980) studied whether schools offer different sorts of curriculum among the social classes. She discovered that in the highest socio-economic level school, children were expected to produce work based on increasingly creative and abstract concepts. Their work was often collaborative in nature. In addition, teachers addressed students pleasantly and respectfully. In this manner, children from executive elite families are gradually prepared to take their place among those who own and control physical capital and the means of production in society.

However, as the socio-economic level of the schools fell to the poorest schools, which Anyon (1980) called working class schools, students were frequently spoken to sharply or sarcastically. Perhaps even more striking than the way Anyon's teachers interacted with students was the shallowness of the work they assigned. There was little to no collaborative or group work. Teachers gave assignments that were fragmented, mechanical, and routine. Anyon concluded the teachers' attitudes and treatment of students, when combined with often meaningless work, could result in students becoming resentful and disengaged from school.

Anyon believed that these differences in teacher/student relationships, which she called the "hidden curriculum" of schools, served to reproduce socio-economic levels of students (1980, p. 89). Hidden curriculum refers to the skills, knowledge, ideas, behaviors, and attitudes learned in school that helps to replicate students' places in society. These situations are ultimately not beneficial to young people in any social class or to society as a whole.

Like many other minority students, the reward system experienced by Hispanic children in school both reflects and perpetuates the reward system experienced by adults in the larger community. In the adult world, women and members of minority ethnic groups are frequently not hired, paid, or promoted on the basis of education and ability (e.g., Catanzarite, 2003; Ogbu, 1987; Sleeter & Grant, 1988).

Overwhelmingly, minorities are employed in occupations of service or in jobs that are deemed too dirty, demeaning, or strenuous for the dominate group. Schools may help contribute to the lack of academic success of Hispanics in that their actions tend to reflect and reproduce society's view and treatment of people of color. Could the futility of such a system work to eventually drive Hispanic students out of school?

Many times teachers and administrators, who mistakenly view students' lives and homes as inferior, believe they can help mold students into successful people by teaching students to become just like them. This "false generosity" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 44; Noddings, 1992, p. 116) is full of contempt for the

receivers of "help." The purveyors of this attitude assume their way of living is

not only best for themselves but best for everybody. They imagine their students

must secretly yearn to have the same experiences, the same knowledge, the same

attitudes and customs, the same beliefs and ways of worship they themselves

have.

Uncaring teaching can cause a paradoxical consequence to arise from a

lack of consciousness. Teachers who believe they should be the ones to help

make students' lives better may act upon this desire in ways that do more harm

than good. Freire called this type of impulse "false generosity" (1970/2006, p.

44). False generosity invisibly benefits the oppressors by reinforcing the ideal

structure of superiority in the consciousness of the population at large. In so

doing, it also reinforces the oppressor's particular position of superiority over the

oppressed. Those in power are able to bestow token acts of charity upon the

disadvantaged rather than considering the possibility that others may want the

power to create their own meanings and explore their own possibilities, or it is a

substitute for the taking of real action and making changes in the ideal structure of

dominant society.

When people attempt to show care without first building relationships,

they can only act on assumptions, abstractions, or prejudices. Noddings

cautioned:

> we often fail to treat the recipients of our care as individuals. We may
>
> also mistakenly suppose that they want to live exactly as we do – that they

want the same knowledge, the same kinds of work, the same forms of worship, the same daily customs. Or we may mistakenly suppose that they do not want any of these. Because we are not in relation, our acts can easily degenerate into acts of false generosity. (1992, p. 116)

Those who assume they know best and take it upon themselves to change their students see themselves as liberators rather than oppressors. But, because they have not engaged in caring dialogue with their students, teachers can only impose their own ideas of help upon unconsulted and, quite possibly, unwilling people. Any students who do not eagerly embrace their teachers' or administration's vision for their lives are told through attitudes or expectations or, perhaps, words that they will never amount to anything.

Despite the appearance of care, gestures of false generosity actually benefit only those who are in a position of power. Sincere care consists of more than merely giving students hugs or pats on the back. These gestures are often empty of real, personal connections and can imply condescension. They can be substitutes for conversation, an attempt to understand, or empowering students to take effective action with their lives.

Symbolic actions of care make the dispenser feel as though he or she has done something to enrich the life of the receiver. Performances of false generosity can be given anonymously and from a distance – no need to actually mingle with the "down-trodden." They can be conscience-soothing alternatives to fostering relationships with, being deeply attentive to, or engaging in dialogue

with the beneficiaries of their performances. When those with power attempt to help the underprivileged, all too often the help is given as a mere gesture of generosity so the powerful feel better about themselves for lending a hand to the disadvantaged. Ultimately, even the most compassionate gestures, such as feeding the hungry and homeless, can be acts of false generosity if they do nothing to change the shared societal ideas that influence the recipients' lives and the ongoing conditions of society.

True generosity, on the other hand, strives to allow poor and minority people to "transform the world" (Freire, 1970/2006, p. 45). It does not dispense tokens of kindness into their extended, pleading hands but endeavors to empower those hands. People take control of their lives and present and future circumstances and shape the world to support their found humanity. Marginalized people would make claim to the privileges (no, it is not just about them claiming "our" privileges. It is about them—and us, together—gaining the voice to challenge the existing idea structure that says a system of privilege for anyone is okay at all) available to full members of society rather than remain pushed to the side or relegated to the background.

Educators who truly care teach in such a manner that they challenge "the real and imaginary worlds brought to school by students, contributing to the life-world of the students in such a way that the world can be understood and reinvented by the student" (Fischman & McLaren, 2000, p. 172). With transformative education, knowledge is not exclusively "owned" by teachers to be

doled out in specific amounts to learners. Students learn to think critically about

themselves, their worlds, and their options in life, and because of these skills, they

can begin to develop the tools to transform their worlds.

The lack of care in schools is not felt only by children. Teachers can also

experience "burnout…widespread feelings among teachers of inadequacy,

listlessness, and decreased dedication to teaching" (Freeman, Jackson, & Boles,

1983, p. 3). Social reproduction, when used by administrators against teachers,

takes the joy out of what many once saw as a life-calling. Unfortunately, while

teachers usually can recognize when they are treated unjustly, they may not

realize when they pass that same treatment on to their students.

Noddings pointed out that teachers, too, can be worn down by the lack of

completion in classrooms that do not have a relationship of care. In such

> situations [they] are worn down by the lack of completion – burned out by
>
> the constant outward flow of energy that is not replenished by the response
>
> of the cared-for. Teachers…suffer this dreadful loss of energy when their
>
> students do not respond. (1992, p. 17)

Nowhere are the consequences of hierarchical, reproductive educational

approaches more glaring than in urban classrooms serving low-income children of

color. However, a consistent theme throughout the literature is the premise that

all students can benefit when their teachers truly care about them. It is those

benefits that lead Noddings to suggest there is a moral responsibility for teachers

to create caring, interpersonal relationships with their students that could be even more important than the job of academics (1992, p. 15).

Some of the ways teachers can show care for their students are to suspend judgment, show attentiveness to students, form deep relationships with students, and to engage students in meaningful dialogue. When these attitudes of care are present in classrooms, they may combine to give students genuinely profound and transformative educational experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach: Critical Ethnography

This qualitative study combined aspects of critical ethnographic research, teacher action research, and narrative inquiry. It included the critical qualitative tradition of educational inquiry and individual interview methodology in an attempt to discover and understand my Hispanic students' educational experiences. Specific findings were analyzed within a larger context of knowledge and power (e.g., Quantz, 1992).

The study also involved teacher action research because it sought to promote change in American schools as well as my own perspectives and practices (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Greenwood & Levin, 1998). While interviewing students and hearing their perspectives on their educational experiences, I also examined my own beliefs and practices regarding caring student-teacher relationships. My goal was that this reflection would lead not only to theoretical insight but also personal and practical change within the educational community.

Finally, the study included narrative inquiry in that the data were presented in the form of "stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). This format has been used effectively by many ethnographic researchers (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1999; Behar 1996; Erwin, 2002). Because the participants and the researcher were from the same educational context, there may be shared

experiences and perspectives. These have been interwoven throughout the study

and are often presented in narrative format.

All three of these traditions tend toward relativist rather than absolute or

objectivist epistemological assumptions. That is to say, they seek perspectives,

insights, and understandings rather than striving to identify and generalize

absolute truths. Typically, qualitative research methodologies are combined with

each other in order to provide comparative results. A triangulation of methods, as

used in this study, is common and can provide a more complete understanding of

the behavior of the group being studied.

The intent of qualitative research is to gather an in-depth understanding of

human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. "The discipline

investigates the *why* and *how* of decision making, not just *what, where, when*.

Hence, smaller but focused samples are more often needed rather than large,

random samples" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. v). Thus, qualitative research is

often used in the social sciences in contrast to quantitative research.

Teacher action research is "disciplined inquiry in the context of focused

efforts to improve the quality of…performance and practice" (Calhoun, 1993, p.

14). The work centers on the practitioner, and the research is done by teachers

and administrators. This type of research allows educators to investigate areas of

concern and meet the challenges within their classrooms and schools.

Narrative inquiry involves the process of gathering information for the

purpose of research through storytelling. As Clandinin and Connelly noted,

narrative inquiry "research is a collaborative document, a mutually constructed story out of the lives of both participants and researcher" (2000, p. 22). Based on the data, the researcher writes a narrative account of the experience. In explaining the importance of the narrative format, Clandinin and Connelly suggested that "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p. 20). In other words, people's lives consist of stories.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection included the following procedures. First, I conducted two in-depth semi-structured interviews with each of ten purposefully-selected Hispanic students. Five of the students were high school seniors and five were attending college; five of the participants were female and five were male. I was acquainted with the participants as being either current or former students of mine.

The first interviews lasted from 45 minutes to one hour. The interview questions served to acquaint me with the students' lives away from the context in which I usually interacted with them and told me about their places of birth, their families' home language and education levels, their own educational and vocational aspirations, as well as non-academic activities such as their hobbies and current jobs.

The second interviews lasted from one to one-and-one-half hours. The questions I asked during these interviews related directly to my research topics.

My structured questions asked the participants to recall their favorite and least

favorite school memories, their favorite and least favorite teachers, and what

qualities and practices make for effective and ineffective teachers.

I was aware these questions presented a dualistic option to the participants

regarding their experiences with school and teachers. However, I made the

decision to frame our discussions by asking them to relate memories regarding

favorites and least favorites because I thought this could naturally lead to

recollections that would allow students to illustrate how teachers showed or failed

to show care without my prompting them explicitly to focus on relationships of

care.

Other questions asked in the interviews arose spontaneously in response to

the experiences students described. In addition, I asked some participants follow-

up questions either in person or by email to fill in information gaps.

All interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Initial analysis involved reading and rereading the transcripts so as to understand

the students' answers and nuances of emotions imbedded in their answers. Later

analysis started with the coding of data in the margins of the paper which was

followed by theme development.

As I read through the transcribed interviews, I felt great sadness at the

treatment some of the students had experienced and the sense of inferiority and

lack of worth the students had internalized. I sincerely hoped that over the years I

had not unwittingly caused similar feelings in my students due to my own

unconscious, prejudicial attitudes and behaviors. Although I held the belief that

my classroom fostered and was led by democratic ideals, I wondered whether I,

too, might have been guilty of teaching with a hidden curriculum resulting in

social reproduction. I worried that I, too, might have been an unconscious

participant in the transmitting of information through a banking-type education

that stifled my students' curiosity and aspirations.

Reliability and trustworthiness are essential components to all research.

To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is

crucial. Rolfe (2006) identified four issues in relation to research trustworthiness:

credibility, which corresponds roughly with the positivist concept of internal

validity; dependability, which relates more to reliability; transferability, which is a

form of external validity; and confirmability, which is largely an issue of

presentation.

However, Sandelowski (1993) regarded reliability/dependability as a

threat to validity/credibility, and questioned many of the usual qualitative

reliability tests such as member checking (returning to the participants following

data analysis) or peer checking (using a panel of experts or an experienced

colleague to re-analyze some of the data) as ways of ensuring that the researcher

has analyzed the data correctly.

Whereas Guba and Lincoln regarded member checks as "the single most

critical technique for establishing credibility" (1989, p. 239), Sandelowski argued

that if reality is assumed (as it generally is within the qualitative paradigm) to be

"multiple and constructed", then "repeatability is not an essential (or necessary or sufficient) property of the things themselves," and neither researchers nor respondents should be expected to arrive at the same themes and categories as the researcher (1993, p. 3). Put simply, any attempt to increase reliability involves a forced or artificial consensus and conformity in the analysis of the data, which can come at the expense of the validity or meaningfulness of the findings.

Participants and Settings

My study involved personal interviews with ten purposefully-selected Hispanic interview participants[4]. The participants were all current or former students of mine. In the following discussion, I introduce the participants in the order of their first interviews.

The first five interviews were conducted with 18 year old high school seniors enrolled in my English classes. The interviews were conducted individually with the students in my classroom either during lunch or after school. This room was where the students and I usually interacted, and I sensed the students were comfortable with the environment and at ease with me. During the interviews the students and I were seated next to each other in student desks with the audio recorder placed on the student's desk surface.

The first interview was with Angel, who was born in Mexico but lived in the United States for nine years. Eight of those years were spent in California, where he began attending school in the fourth grade. The youngest of four

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[4] This may not be a representative sample of Hispanic students because, with the exception of Angel, all of the participants expressed the expectation of being college bound.

children, Angel was the second person in his family to graduate from high school. Neither of his parents have a high school diploma. It was interesting that, despite the family's seeming lack of academic achievement, when they moved to the United States, Angel was put into two after-school English classes; consequently, he is the primary English speaker in the family.

While in California, Angel belonged to a gang, and this involvement led to trouble both in and out of school. He eventually realized his gang membership had alienated him from many friends, and he was able to disassociate himself from the gang. Angel, his sister, and their parents moved to Oklahoma the summer before Angel's senior year in high school. His two older brothers have moved back to Mexico. Angel was considering attending trade school at some point in the future, but he knows his opportunities are limited because his family is here illegally.

The second interview was with Miguel, who was born in Oklahoma City. His mother is European American, and his father is Mexican. Miguel considered himself to be Mexican and felt closer to his father's side of the family. He is fluently bi-lingual. Miguel plans on attending college and majoring in architecture.

The third interview was with Maria who was born in Mexico but has lived in the United States for nine years. Maria's family is well-educated. Her mother taught English in a Mexican elementary school, and all the children in the family have graduated from high school. She has a sister who serves in the United States

Navy. Maria's English skills are excellent, but she feels very self-conscious about her slight accent. Maria plans on attending university and majoring in nutrition.

The fourth interview was with Janie. She was born in Mexico but has lived in the United States for 11 years. As a child she was enrolled in ESL programs and functioned as the family's primary English speaker. Eventually, though, everyone in her family became conversant in English. Janie is very involved in her church, and most of her out-of-school friends and interests are centered on church activities. Janie is considering attending college in Mexico because an uncle advised her that college there is cheaper than in the United States and, therefore, better.

The fifth interview was with Juan. He was born in Oklahoma City to a Guatemalan family. The family returned to Guatemala from the time Juan was two until he was four years old. His next younger sister was born while the family was living there. Juan learned English very quickly in school, although Spanish is still spoken primarily in the home. He plans on attending university and majoring in either architecture or engineering.

The sixth interview was with Diego, a 19 year-old college sophomore at a four-year university majoring in computer science. I was Diego's teacher when he was in eighth grade, the year he moved with his family from Peru to the United States. Diego was graduated from high school as class salutatorian despite having lived on his own away from home and working full time to support himself from the time he was a junior. Our interview was held in the coffee shop of a

bookstore. The atmosphere in the coffee shop was quiet, but shoppers browsed and talked in conversational voices in the bookstore several yards away from where we were sitting.

The last four interviews were with students enrolled in my developmental reading classes at a two-year branch of a state university. Our interviews were held in the student union at tables located next to a wall of glass that overlooked a green lawn. Because we met in the morning while most students were in class, the union was mostly empty and quiet.

The seventh interview was with Rosa. She was 26 years old and was born in northern California. Her mother is European American, and her father is Mexican. Rosa's parents separated when she was a baby. She grew up not knowing her father, and her mother did not inform Rosa she is half Mexican until she was 12 years old.

Even though she does not speak Spanish, Rosa was put into an ELL kindergarten when she began school because of her dark complexion, black curly hair, and dark brown eyes. She spent a week in that class before her mother became aware of the situation and had Rosa transferred into an English-speaking kindergarten. Although she is half Caucasian and non-conversant in Spanish, Rosa classifies herself as Hispanic because that is how she is labeled by society.

Rosa is a single mother of seven-year-old and eight-month-old daughters. The youngest child's father is African American and is in the home. Rosa dropped out of high school when she was pregnant with her first child. She

qualified for a General Education Degree at twenty-two after attending Youth Build, an alternative high school in New Mexico. Rosa is majoring in business management.

The eighth interview was with 18 year old Luisa. Luisa was born in Oklahoma City, but her parents both came to the United States from Mexico with their families as adolescents. Although her parents did not graduate from high school, Luisa and her older sister did. In high school Luisa was junior class vice president, senior class secretary, and student counsel secretary. She plans on majoring in elementary education.

The ninth interview was with 18 year old Eddy. He was born in Oklahoma City, but his parents both came here from Mexico as teenagers. Because they only have sixth grade educations themselves, it was very important to his parents that both Eddy and his older brother did well in school, graduated from high school, and attend college. Eddy's favorite part of school was sports. He played on his high school baseball team as short stop and pitcher.

The tenth interview was with 19 year old Ana. Ana was born in Mexico and came to Oklahoma when she was ten years old. She began working as a waitress when she was 14 years old to help her single mother support her two younger brothers. She now works as a manager at McDonald's in addition to attending college as a business management major.

In conclusion, the data for this study were drawn from personal interviews with ten purposefully-chosen students. Five of the participants were male and

five were female; five were in high school while five were in college. Each of the

participants was either a current or former student of mine. In the following

chapter, I will give an account of specific incidences the students related to me

during the interviews to try and explain my Hispanic students' experiences in

United States classrooms.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explain the perspectives of ten Hispanic students with whom I have worked, regarding their educational experiences. I also wanted to more closely examine my own relationships with Hispanic students and to offer insights for other European American teachers who may work with children of color.

When I asked the students about their school experiences, I found they were really not so different from many other young people I could have been talking with. I was not surprised to hear that a few only attend school because it is compulsory. Many others attend school because they – or their parents – believe that education is the key to getting a good job and is their best opportunity for a better life.

Like almost all other young people, their main enjoyment in school came from being able to socialize with their friends during the day. And, just like other students, over the years they have had some teachers who truly seemed to care about their students. What might be particular to my Hispanic students, though, is that every one of the participants related many accounts of teachers who appeared not to care about them.

I began the interviews by asking students to tell me about their favorite and least favorite teachers. I purposely did not ask obviously leading questions to steer them toward stories about teacher care or prejudice because I did not want

them to tailor their responses to meet my questions' criteria. As they shared stories about their educations, though, they naturally came up with examples of what teachers did that demonstrated care and good relationships with students as well as teachers who treated their students badly or singled out Hispanic students for unfair treatment. The students already knew when they were being treated kindly or harshly without my prompting.

I expected to hear stories of teachers who were favorites because they gave "easy" work or allowed a good deal of free time in which students would be able to talk with friends. I thought there would be examples of least favorite teachers who were very strict with their classes or who gave large amounts of homework. None of the students indicated these behaviors were what made a teacher most or least favored. Instead, it was most often feelings of acceptance or rejection, of understanding or unfairness that students remembered and related. In this chapter, I will explore these findings through the students' stories.

More Caring Teaching

As the students related stories about their favorite teachers, their body language echoed the good feelings they remembered. Their posture was relaxed. Most sat up tall and leaned toward me as they spoke. Some of them made open and expressive hand gestures. Many of the students smiled frequently and nodded their heads as if affirming their own words and memories.

One pleasant memory was shared by a student when recalling a high school English teacher who was very helpful to her. Ana was the 19 year old

college student who also worked as an assistant manager at McDonald's. In her last two years of high school, she had to get up at 5:00 every morning to catch a bus that took her to a local technical school. After morning classes there, she took another bus to finish the day at her regular high school. Additionally, while in high school, she worked until 11:00 most nights. Despite this grueling schedule, Ana felt she had no choice but to keep her job so she could help her mother support the family.

Ana said her English teacher was always glad to see her when she walked into the room. The teacher greeted Ana, asked how work was, and how things were at home. The time they had spent talking resulted in the teacher knowing Ana as an individual. As Ana put it, "She knows everything about me, everything about my life." Because she felt so comfortable with the teacher, Ana confided that she was thinking about dropping out of school since it was so hard for her to keep up with both school and work. The teacher encouraged her to not to drop out. Through their conversations, she motivated Ana to finish high school and continue on to college. Ana credited that teacher with her being in college today.

In a similar situation, Eddy also had an English teacher who supported him and his abilities. Eddy was the 18 year old college student who had played baseball in high school. He told me about a middle school English teacher who was "probably the best teacher [he] ever had." He described her as being "very dedicated to her job." She routinely came to school early in the mornings and stayed late to help students with work they did not understand. She "always

wanted to teach anyone who needed help. She never turned anybody down."

Eddy thought the attitude of wanting to help students was what "put her over the

top as a teacher."

After he moved on to high school, Eddy continued to keep in touch with

this teacher. He said she taught him a lot of things about himself that he would

not have known without her guidance. She made him realize "that if you want

something out of life, you've got to go get it. You can't just sit in the back and be

quiet; you've got to go get it. To push yourself. You can always do a lot more

than you think." I asked if she had a generally positive attitude toward all her

students that made them believe in themselves, or if she said those words to him

directly. Eddy told me she said it to him directly, more than once, during the

times he spent in her room before and after school talking with her.

Both Ana and Eddy's teachers gave up their non-class time to nurture

relationships with their students. Some teachers may consider this beyond the call

of their duty. The teaching contracts in some school districts, including the one in

which I worked, specify times when teachers do not have students in their rooms

unless they are compensated monetarily or with additional non-student time.

Thus, the teachers described by Ana and Eddy seemed to have put their students'

needs ahead of contractual stipulations.

Other of the students related stories about teachers whose duties included

after school activities with their students. Angel was the 18 year old high school

student who had been involved in gangs when he lived in California. He told me

about his eighth grade computer teacher who started a Robotics program after school. Angel became involved in the program, which grew from a group of six students to more than twenty. The teacher began entering the students in local Robotic contests.

At the end of the school year, the team went to San Diego for a ten day long competition, and Angel and his partner won the second place prize. Angel described the teacher as someone who "went beyond the call of duty" for her students.

Because the Robotics meetings were held after school, the students who participated missed the afternoon school buses. So that the children did not have to walk home through dangerous neighborhoods of their California town, she gave rides home to the students whose parents were unable to pick them up. After he moved on to high school, Angel and three others from the Robotics program returned to visit this teacher at least once a week.

Similar to the story Angel told about his teacher, Juan had a coach who was very involved with students after school because of sports. Juan was the 18 year old high school student whose family moved to the United States from Guatemala. He told me about his high school computer teacher who was also the soccer coach. Juan called this man "a friend" of his. He said many of the students liked the man as both a teacher and a friend.

Juan felt the teacher achieved "a good balance" between classroom management and fair treatment of students. I asked Juan to describe to me how

he did this. Juan said the teacher could talk to the students like they are just normal people, but when he needed the students to get something done, he talked to them seriously and got it across that it was time to work. Because he got along so well with the students, Juan believed he was a good example to them. Juan knew he could call the coach on his cell phone if he had any questions about school or soccer, but more importantly, if he needed to talk to him as a friend.

The pleasure Angel and Juan derived from their relationships with these two teachers was evident as I spoke to them. Both boys smiled widely as they recounted what it was that made these their favorite teachers. Angel laughed fondly as he described his Robotics teacher to me. It was apparent to both boys felt their teachers cared about them. Juan's coach came to Oklahoma from Nicaragua, so Juan was able to speak with him in English as well as in Spanish. I assume this gave an extra level of closeness to their friendship.

Another student also had a special memory of an exceptional teacher. Rosa was the 26 year old college student with two young daughters. When she was in ninth grade, Rosa joined the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) program at her high school in a suburb of Albuquerque, New Mexico. She described the leaders as treating everyone in the unit strictly but fairly. What Rosa especially liked was that the members' gender, ethnicity, and race were not factors in how they were treated. The leaders simply viewed the members as human beings and members of the program. Rosa felt she had the same opportunities in JROTC as all the other members did, whereas in school or

society, she felt she was often denied the same opportunities as everyone else. When I asked her what that feeling did for her, she said she finally felt as though she belonged to a family.

There were other positive effects gained by Rosa's participation in JROTC, as well. She brought her grades up and was doing better at home in her interactions with her mother and sisters. She said she had learned lessons in independence, discipline, and leadership from the leaders. During her first year as a member, Rosa could not afford the spring JROTC trip and was very sad she would miss out on it. She told her master chief that, even though she wanted to go on the trip, she would not be able to attend.

The master chief gave Rosa several ideas for ways she could earn the trip money. She emphasized that, while he suggested fund raising opportunities, he still "made it my responsibility. He didn't say, 'Here let's do this.' He said, 'You can do this or you can do this.' He told me how to do it, but he didn't do it for me. And I think that helped us a lot." Rosa said she appreciated that, while she had to take the initiative to do the work, she was also the one who got to feel satisfaction in being able to achieve her goal. She said she related to the master chief as a fair authority figure.

It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that Rosa's favorite JROTC leader was also of Latin heritage. But I believe the master chief meant much more to Rosa than a respected leader whose appearance resembled her own. He gave her the tools to change her condition and, because of that, she was able to be part of the

spring trip. Instead of recommending some ways Rosa might raise the trip money, the master chief could have taken control of the situation himself and made sure she would be included on the trip. However, that would have been a gesture of false generosity, and I wonder whether Rosa would have remembered the incident as one that gave her power over her circumstances.

Another influential teacher in Rosa's life was her Youth Build math teacher. Rosa had dropped out of high school when she was a junior because she was pregnant. She returned to a private high school at 22 to earn her General Education Degree. She and her young daughter lived in Albuquerque with no other family in the area. Rosa became very ill, was hospitalized, and then convalesced at home for a month. Her math teacher visited regularly and brought Rosa's schoolwork along with bagels and coffee and friendship. While the teacher did discuss the math assignments (the official reasons for her visits) even more important than that was she became a friend Rosa could talk to and rely on. Rosa said this teacher was "just there when I needed her."

At this vulnerable time in her life, Rosa had need of a support system even more than she needed help earning her degree. Hearing Rosa recount how frightened and alone she felt during that time, I realized that many young, single mothers are not as lucky as Rosa was to have had a caring mentor who acted as a strong role model.

These examples of teacher-student relationships may have different details, but the outcome of each of these stories is that the young people felt cared for by adults who were special to them.

Less Caring Teaching

Again, the Hispanic young people with whom I worked were similar to other students in many ways. There were, however, some significant differences that seemed to be directly related to race. Although several had teachers who expressed care for their students and made efforts to establish relationships with them, each of the Hispanic young people I spoke with had unpleasant experiences with teachers. While it is not unusual for any student to have had a teacher or two they did not get along with, these memories of "least favorite" teachers were different in that racial prejudice appeared to play a part in so many of their stories.

Many of the students seemed eager to tell me about teachers who had treated them unfairly. As they related the incidents, I could see and hear their anger and hurt over past injustices. Some students frowned frequently, and the corners of their mouths turned down. Rosa wiped tears from her eyes as she remembered herself as a misunderstood, shunned eight-year old. Many used accusatory gestures to accompany their stories, such as making jabbing motions in the air or on the desk top with an index finger or shaking their heads as if in disbelief over how they had been treated. Still others seemed to display defensive body language. Some huddled against the back of the chair, almost as if they were cringing from the memories they were revisiting.

A few students, however, seemed reluctant to share their experiences, perhaps thinking I would take offense or refuse to believe them. I frequently reminded my students that I would not be angry or that my feelings would not be hurt if they told me unpleasant things about a white teacher. I did not ask them to use the teachers' names, and I assured the students that I would not divulge what they had confided to their former teachers. When some tried to minimize their experiences by adding disclaimers such as, "But that's just what I think," or "Maybe it's not like that in other schools," I emphasized these stories were valid because they were *their* experiences. What they said to me mattered because it had happened to them.

One story of a teacher who did not respond to her student's needs was related by Rosa. When she was in third grade, her family lived in the San Francisco area. She related that "none of the children" in her class that year would talk to her. The only explanation Rosa could come up with was that, as the only Hispanic student in the class, she looked different than the other children and this caused them to avoid her. She said this made her feel simultaneously "singled out" and "ignored." At the time the only way Rosa knew to protect herself and cope with these contradictory feelings was to sit beneath her table every day and refuse to participate in class. Rosa said that when she went under the table, she hoped the teacher would ask her what was wrong so she could explain how miserable and alone she felt. But the teacher never asked, and Rosa said that made her misery worse.

At the end of the year, Rosa was advanced to the fourth grade. I asked if she had been doing her work and handing it in from her place under the table. Still outraged over her treatment, Rosa tersely replied, "Nope. Just sat there. And they passed me. They passed me without doing any work the whole year."

Rosa's feelings of being both "singled out" and "ignored" are remarkable in their dichotomy. It seems strange that a person could the object of everyone's attention at the same time those very children made a point of avoiding her. Rosa's choice of words painted a vivid mental picture for me. I could imagine a child being stared at because of her distinctive appearance, yet also picture the other children refusing to talk to her or sit by her for precisely that reason. That is the kind of attention that can cause a person's cheeks to burn from the shame of being so obviously different.

It was hard for me to imagine a teacher who would allow a little girl to retreat under her desk an entire year and never stop to ask if she was sick or upset or worried about something. I wondered where the phone calls and notes home or the requests for a parent-teacher conference were in response to a child who consistently refused to turn in any work. I recalled that my own children's elementary teachers would call me if they missed turning in just a few assignments. But my children are white. Could that be what made the difference?

In our conversation about the helpful English teacher, Ana concluded her story in a way that indicated to what degree she had been conditioned to think

badly about her place in school and the attention she was worthy of. Ana said, "She really believed in me, even though I'm Mexican." When I pointed out her choice of words, Ana sat back in her seat with a shocked look on her face. I asked her why she thought she did not deserve help because she was Mexican. She gathered her thoughts and replied, "I think there still exists some racism about Mexicans like me. I think that affects our education by – it discourages us from keeping on in school." I asked if she had felt that attitude from teachers herself, and Ana said, "Teachers? Oh, yes, I've had some teachers like that." I asked her to explain what those teachers did. She said, "In class they used to have their favorites, and they were white. Instead of picking me, they would always get another student instead of me."

This memory lead Ana to recount teachers who had allowed students to do little or no work in their classes. Ana told me that, when she was in high school, more than one teacher allowed her and her group of Hispanic friends to sit in the back of the classrooms most of the time and do nothing but talk together. She said those teachers never made an effort to stop the students from talking or asked them move closer to the front so they could participate in what the class was doing.

Ana thought the teachers did not seem to care that the students were talking instead of taking part in the lessons. She said the teachers made her "feel like we didn't need to be there. So they would never make an effort to tell us to come to the front row and listen to what they were saying. Some of them

wouldn't care if we were talking or not." The teachers allowed the students to exclude themselves and continued to conduct class as if they were not there. Ana continued, "These teachers who would ignore me, they wouldn't care about my grades or say anything and wouldn't pay attention to me. It happened to all the Hispanic students." I asked how it made her feel to think back on how she was treated. Ana said, "It makes me feel sad, really. It makes me feel sad to think that there was that discrimination against us."

Although the non-involvement of Ana and her friends freed them from what was, perhaps, tedious and mundane work, it did not liberate them. They were still caught up in a system that did not seem to value them or prepare them for the outside world except as people who would continue to be excluded from the privileges enjoyed by the dominant members. Who can blame students who decide to leave an institution that treats them with thinly-veiled contempt in order to seek employment where they are, at least, given monetary reward for their efforts, even if they may only be earning minimum wage.

On the other hand, it is interesting to wonder, if these students had not been Hispanic, whether their non-involvement would have been tolerated. Such teachers might argue that they did nothing to make Hispanic students believe they have less worth than others in the class. But that is the point: they did nothing. Allowing students to exclude themselves from the learning process is a subtle way of replicating their place in society. Had there been care for these students and

the desire for a relationship with them, teachers would have insisted they become part of the class instead of allowing them to waste a year's learning opportunity.

At the time, Ana was may have been happy the teacher did not bother her and her friends as they sat in the back of the room and talked. With the perspective of time and distance that comes with young adulthood, though, Ana realized what a disservice the teacher did to her. Now, she is determined to finish her college degree and believes education is important for her future opportunities. I found it touching that she concluded her story about the teachers who allowed nonparticipation by contrasting them with her English teacher's attitude. She said, "I think, if there were more teachers like her, there would be more Hispanic students now in college." That is a very telling corollary for her to draw: caring, involved teachers could result in more Hispanic students in college.

In contrast to teachers who excluded their students, some teachers excluded themselves from the young people in their classes. Luisa was the 18 year old college student who had been Student Council and senior class secretary. She told me about her freshman English teacher who did not get involved with her classes. The teacher gave students their assignments and then retreated behind her desk for the rest of class. Luisa did not know "if there were too many students for her to get to know or care about, but she didn't act like we were important, so we didn't feel any connection with her, either. We just showed up and did our work." I asked Luisa how that made her feel. She said, "It felt like the teacher

didn't care about us because she didn't bother to get to know us. There wasn't any relationship with her."

Luisa was not the only student who reported that teachers did not form positive relationships with their classes or try to actively involve them in the learning process. Eddy said that "more than half" the teachers in his high school used worksheet handouts exclusively as their way of teaching. He said there were no lectures or explanations that went along with the worksheets. I asked him what he thought the reason was for their conducting class that way. Eddy supposed, "It made it easier, I guess, on the teachers 'cause they didn't have to do any work. Just hand out the worksheet, and you did it." Some of his teachers did not grade the worksheets. Eddy reported that if students handed them back with any writing at all on the papers, they received an A. Eddy thought this style of teaching gave off the attitude that the "teacher didn't want to be at school," that they "didn't like the kids in their rooms," and that they did not "care about helping the students do better."

Because Spanish was Eddy's first language, I wondered if there had been problems with understanding his teachers. He said, "No, not that I remember. I've seen it toward the other kids, I think. 'Cause I've helped kids that don't speak English in my class that the teacher can't communicate with them." I asked what the teachers' attitude toward these students seemed to be. Eddy replied, "I would say on the negative side. Just kind of indifferent like they didn't really know what

to do, you know. Just kind of stuck in a bad situation, I guess. And I don't think they knew kind of how to react to it. Just a bad situation."

Luisa and Eddy were both aware that their teachers did not seem to display care toward their students or form positive relationships. They also expressed definite opinions as to what they thought proper teaching practices should be. We teachers sometimes forget how attuned students are to our attitudes. They can tell the difference between teachers who come to work excited about their jobs and the ones who have come to regard their work as an unendurable burden. The young people who felt their teachers were burdened by their jobs naturally take such attitudes personally because students see themselves *as* the job.

Other students observed that their teachers seemed to like some of their students – but the students who were their favorites were almost always white. Juan remembered teachers who regularly spoke "condescendingly" to their students. I asked him to define what he meant by condescend. In his explanation he made a clear distinction between teachers who explained information in detail and the teachers who talked down to students as if they were not intelligent or spoke to students as if they were speaking to very young children.

Juan was insulted by this kind of treatment.   He thought it helped the teachers reinforce the power they have over students. Additionally, he stated that the condescending teachers had their favorites, usually white students, who received distinctly preferential treatment, while the teachers behaved rudely to the

rest of the class. I asked how the preferential treatment was shown. Juan said the teachers were much nicer to the favorites. Teachers saved their small talk and jokes for those students. Compared with their attitudes toward the less-favored students, they "were really cool with them."

Diego recalled a similar example of white favoritism. There were two physical education coaches at his high school; one was African American and the other, European American. According to Diego, "Everyone who ditched would go to the Field House, that's their room. You could always see the whites hanging out with them. I don't remember if they used to get on to the black guys, but it definitely wasn't the white kids. They would just turn in the non-white kids." The coaches allowed European American students and, to a lesser extent, African American students, to stay with them when they skipped class; however, the coaches either made Hispanic students go back to class or wrote referrals and sent them to the office for ditching.

White favoritism was also apparently demonstrated by one of Maria's teachers in the way he called on students in class. Maria was the 18 year old high school student who came from a well-educated family. She said, "If I looked back at who he picked, it was first, I'd say, Caucasians, and then the Asians, and then the Hispanics. We had, like, five Asians, and they were always picked second, and the Hispanics or the blacks were picked last." I asked if there was always a definite preference ranking of students in his class. Maria responded, "Yes. It's weird saying he was a nice teacher, but he was doing all this stuff. I

mean, he never treated me badly or anything. He never singled me out, or

whatever. But he didn't help as much as he probably should have been helping

because, you know, because I'm Hispanic, and I was still learning English then."

Frustrated, Maria turned to her parents for support in dealing with the

situation, but when she told them about the problems of not being called on in

class and not receiving the help she needed, they dismissed her concerns, saying

she was "imagining it." Thus, it appears Maria's parents may have internalized

what Freire (1970/2006, p. 47) has referred to as the consciousness of the

oppressor.

Another account by Maria recalled white favoritism expressed in a

different way. She told about wanting to try out for a part in the fifth grade

musical. Earlier in the year, the music teacher had praised Maria for having a

good singing voice. When it was time to cast the musical, the teacher did not

allow her to audition. Maria remembered the teacher telling her, "[You aren't]

going to be able to memorize because [you are] Hispanic and, having a different

language, [you] wouldn't be able to pronounce all the words." The teacher

assigned the part of understudy to Maria, and she never appeared on stage. The

girl chosen for the part Maria had wanted was European American.

Years later Maria still expressed disbelief that her teacher admitted to not

giving her a chance to try out for the musical role because she is Hispanic. Many

teachers are not so explicit in the way they express their prejudices, however.

People can be quite adept at putting across their feelings of bigotry in much more subtle ways.

There were still other examples of unmistakable white favoritism. One such story was told by Janie. Janie was the 18 year old high school student who considered attending college in Mexico. She described a time in middle school when her lack of English proficiency allowed other students to use her as their scapegoat. She said, "I wasn't used to the language. And I always got blamed for things that I didn't do, you know. And I would try to explain."

In one incident, someone in the class threw a piece of paper at the teacher while she was writing on the board. I asked her to describe how the students blamed her for this. Janie clarified, "The other students would say, oh, it's her, 'cause they didn't think I really understood. And the teacher fell for it. I got mad at her and I was, like, why don't you let me explain myself, you let them explain."

As punishment, the teacher told Janie to pick up all the papers lying on the floor. Janie would not accept a punishment for something she did not do and walked out of the classroom. The teacher followed her into the hall and ordered her back into the room. Janie again tried to explain that she was not the one who threw the paper, but the combination of low English ability, frustration, and anger made it impossible for her to express herself. The teacher took her behavior as defiance and sent Janie to the principal.

After that incident, Janie began acting up in the teacher's class. I expressed surprise at that because in my class Janie was quiet and never acted out.

Janie explained that, since teacher had low expectations of her, she decided she might as well behave the way the teacher expected her to act.

Yet another experience of misplaced blame was related by Angel. He prefaced his story by describing the teacher involved. "She was, like, the meanest teacher to me at all times. I'm not sure if it was just to me, but she wouldn't take no time to listen to you. She would just tell you to do something, and if you didn't do it, you were in trouble. I didn't talk much in the class, but I still got in trouble for a lot of reasons."

During this incident, one of his white peers grabbed Angel's pencil. As Angel related, "She saw that he took my pencil. And I didn't do anything to him. I just told him to give it back to me. And she saw everything, how I was just telling him to give it back to me." The boy pushed Angel. Angel pushed the boy back, and the boy fell. When it was over, the teacher said Angel had been the one who started the fight. Angel thought the reason he was the one who received blame for fighting was because the other boy was white.

The injustice of Janie and Angel's stories may seem obvious, but, unfortunately, their situations are not unusual. It is common practice for teachers to make up their minds about a student's guilt and then refuse to listen to any explanations from the accused child. All too often teachers fail to listen patiently or sympathetically when young people with low English abilities attempt to defend themselves against false accusations. The unfairness of situations like these was palpable to my Hispanic students.

Some cases of teacher oppression were quite nuanced. For instance, Luisa told me about her sophomore year computer teacher who would not pronounce her real name correctly. The teacher said "Luis" instead of "Luisa." I asked if he did this as a bonding-type of private joke between them, and Luisa assured me he did not. She tried repeatedly to teach him the correct pronunciation of her name. Nevertheless, he did not say her name the right way. He finally settled on calling her by her last name, something he did not do with any of the white students in his class.

As I listened to Luisa's story, I thought this teacher did not act as though he cared about her feelings. He did not put forth what little effort it would have taken to say her name correctly, even though Luisa attempted to teach him time and again. Luisa gave the impression of being bewildered by the teacher's inability to say her name.

The consequences resulting from the negative experiences my students described to me were summed up by Diego in a poignant observation about life at university as a Hispanic student. He noted that, while he often encounters other Hispanics in society, on campus his is the only Hispanic face he sees. He described this absence as making him "feel like a freak." I asked him to explain what he meant by feeling like a freak. He elaborated, "If you're the only one who looks a certain way, you're the black sheep. If there's another black sheep, you can be friends with that black sheep."

As a member of the dominant group, I see international and minority students walking around campus or in my classes and think how diverse the student body is. That the majority of the faces I see look like mine is largely invisible. It is an uncomfortable thought to ponder what it might feel like to be the only European American amid thousands of Others.

These stories pointed out some of the obvious and the subtle ways teachers have ignored Hispanic students. The teachers described by my students excluded Hispanic children from their groups of favorites, overlooked them when choosing students to respond in class, and belittled them because of their language abilities. My students were aware of their teachers' discriminatory treatments. They felt it deeply when teachers consistently neglected or snubbed them in favor of white students. The students might have not put such a harsh label as oppression on the way they were treated, but the teachers they described nonetheless appeared to use their authority in a way that excluded or marginalized their students of color.

Interpretations

What are we to make of these stories? Based on my students' perspectives, some of their teachers appeared intensely devoted to their jobs and their students. They encouraged, befriended, and supported the young people in their charge. In response, my students felt understood, empowered, and cared for. They enjoyed the time they were able to spend with these teachers both in and out of class. The caring relationships that had been formed between the students and their teachers gave them confidence in themselves as learners and as people.

On the other hand, many teachers apparently had not formed relationships of care with students in general or Hispanic students in particular. They seemed to resent the duties of their jobs and the students they were responsible for teaching. Because of this, my students felt unimportant, misunderstood, and discouraged. They recognized when teachers did not appear to have a strong investment in their academic or emotional well-being. There did not seem to be reciprocal relationships between them and their teachers that could foster the students' sense of self-worth or their curiosity and desire to learn. My students were offended by those attitudes and, as a result, often disengaged themselves from both their teachers and the learning process.

How do these findings relate to the aspects of care Noddings and others identified? Did the stories illustrate how caring behaviors such as suspension of judgment, attentiveness, reciprocal relationships, and dialogue – or the lack of those behaviors – affected students?

One attitude in developing care with minority students, suspending judgment, involves a degree of uncertainty rather than a predetermined certainty about others. In suspending judgment, we wait until we get to know a person to make decisions about his or her character, personality, and abilities.

Suspension of judgment was shown in Rosa's JROTC leaders' interactions with their members. Those leaders were apparently unwilling to use gender, ethnicity, or race as impediments to accepting the members. Rosa believed everyone was given the same opportunities for advancement within the

organization because advancement was based on how much effort a person put into achieving a goal.

On the other hand, Maria's fifth grade teacher decided that Maria would not be able to memorize the words for the songs in their class musical and, consequently, did not give her a chance to try out for the part she wanted. Instead, the teacher made Maria understudy for the starring role, and she did not appear on stage. In a different case, a middle school colleague of mine judged that ELL students were "not smart enough" for grade-level work and recommended I use coloring books and the lowest-level special education material with them.

In their defense, it could be argued that Maria's teacher cared about Maria's feelings and was saving her from embarrassing herself on stage and that my colleague gave ELL students work they could successfully complete to set them up for future successes. But even if this were true, such judgments would have precluded a real understanding of the feelings and perspectives of the people they purported to serve.

Perhaps the invisible and hierarchical structure of society influenced the teachers' decisions to limit choices open to the Hispanic students with whom they worked in such a way that the students became used to limited options in their lives. When minority young people encounter those attitudes in the world outside of school, it might become harder to resist because they had often already come to accept that treatment. Perhaps these two teachers, as well as others in this study,

did care about their students, but the power structure of dominant society prevented them to see their students as people who did not have the same intellectual potential as their white peers.

In accordance with those examples, several young people mentioned having teachers who conducted class in ways that implied they did not display care toward students. Luisa's computer teacher consistently failed to say her name correctly. Instead, he eventually resorted to calling her by her last name.

It seemed odd to me that Luisa's teacher persisted in mispronouncing her name. To say a name is an action that requires little apparent effort yet is a minimum display of care. Here again, the persistent underlying structure of domination and fragmentation may help explain what was happening. The mindset of many people may be that difference is wrong. European American culture, including proposed government legislations in the United States, backs up those notions of what is correct. Given that sense of reality, Luisa's teacher's behavior was not extraordinary.

Still other teachers allegedly did little in the way of instruction beyond handing out worksheets that they often did not take the effort to grade. Ana's teachers allowed students to absent themselves from class by sitting in the back of the room and talking while the teachers ignored their lack of participation. If the students internalized that message, the teachers would have "successfully" reproduced the attitude of white society that Hispanic people have no place in "our" world.

Another example of less caring practices was when Janie's and Angel's teachers assigned blame for classroom disturbances on Hispanic students instead of on the children who were the actual initiators of the commotions. What could be an explanation for the teachers' seemingly unfair reactions? The dichotomous structure of society (us-them, right-wrong) might have been an influence in their actions. They may not have taken the time to listen to children who had difficulty in expressing themselves and, instead, given full credence to those who were easily able to explain their versions of the events. This type of scenario would seem to echo the inequitable dealings sometimes found between dominant and minority members in adult interactions.

On the other hand, a number of students told about teachers who took time to interact with, encourage, and support them outside of their assigned class time. As a result of their relationships, the students continued to remain in contact with those teachers after they moved to the next grade or even changed schools. Rosa had described her JROTC squad as "belonging to a family." This feeling was made evident when she visited her old high school to show off her new daughter to the master chief. He introduced the baby to the JROTC students as his "granddaughter."

However, a sense of reciprocal relationship with Hispanic students seemed to be missing in the accounts of teachers who treated students condescendingly and had their few favorites to whom they showed preferential treatment. The coaches who allowed white students to cut class and stay in the Field House but

sent black and Hispanic students away appeared to have exclusive relationships

with favored students.   Other teachers allowed Hispanic students to sit in the

back of their rooms and talk instead of joining in the class. These teachers

permitted the youngsters to segregate themselves from the students who may have

been developing reciprocal relationships with the teachers. In still other cases it

was the teachers who appeared to keep themselves apart from the students and

failed to form relationships with them.

This fragmentation and exclusiveness assured that some students remained

separate from the class's learning activities and interactions with the teachers. It

sent the implied message that the excluded students' participation and

contributions were unwelcome and unnecessary to the favored others. It was an

invisible form of oppression; no one had forced Ana and her friends to sit in the

back of the room. But it was also a persistent reminder of the ways minority

groups may be marginalized by white society.

When teachers and students connect in a caring way, there is a sharing of

self and coming to know each other. I believe this kind of connection is why

Ana's and Eddy's favorite teachers were able to make such positive impacts on

their lives. The teacher valued them as both individuals and as people who are

connected to a larger community. A comfortable, dialogic relationship with

students seemed to be shown by the computer teacher-soccer coach who allowed

his students to call him outside of school on his cell phone with school questions

or personal problems. Rosa's math teacher became more than just an instructor

when she brought work to Rosa while she was recovering at home from a severe illness. They spent more time talking as friends than they did about assignments, and Rosa came to regard the teacher as a life mentor.

The positive effect academic dialogue can have on students was made evident to me at the graduation ceremony of the charter high school where I taught. I was one of people the salutatorian thanked by name in his speech. He said, "Ms. Kuelzer has taught me to truly think about the way I see the world."

As the "opener" to my high school classes, each class had a different philosophical quote on the board every day. Students had the first five minutes of class to record their thoughts in journals, and then we discussed their reactions to the quotes. I acted primarily as facilitator, frequently as devil's advocate, and occasionally as referee.

As the classes expressed their responses, the point was not to find the "right" answer. This was difficult for me because I often had strong opinions of my own. Instead, as a group, we attempted to construct personal meanings and understandings to what were, sometimes, deep, abstract concepts for high schoolers to think about. More than one student told me they had never been in a class that allowed them to say what they really thought; their teachers usually told them what to think. I asked which taught them more: being told what to think or learning what and how they thought. The students always indicated the latter taught them more. This is what dialogic, problem-posing education is meant to do.

In contrast to these examples of deep dialogue was the third grade teacher who never stopped to ask if there was something wrong with Rosa when she withdrew beneath her desk and stopped doing class work. As an eight-year old, Rosa coped with her situation in the only way she knew how: she retreated from her tormentors. Ignoring the situation did not make it go away, and Rosa developed the belief that school was a bad place for her.

These mechanistic approaches bring to mind my former student whose teacher refused to read his essay. Instead, she gave him a zero grade because he did not write the margin heading on his paper according to her specifications. I have heard many people, including the high school founder, assert that strictly following procedures for such things as paper headings help working class students develop habits of self-discipline and orderly thinking. I believe, instead, these kinds of mechanistic practices suggest how strongly social reproduction practices are established.

On the other hand, possessing the skills to think critically, recognize problems as they are encountered, and determine ways to overcome or change those problems could transform the immediate circumstances and, possibly, the larger conditions of a person's life. Because societies are composed of individuals, when people's lives are transformed, they have begun the transformation of the larger society.

These preceding stories have illustrated ways in which my students' perspectives of their educational experiences were influenced by caring

relationships with teachers or a lack of caring relationships with their teachers. Students remembered teachers more positively if there was a caring relationship with them, but they held negative memories of teachers with whom there were few feelings of care.

It was often the Hispanic students themselves who detected the ineffectiveness and hopelessness inherent in their school experiences. While most of their teachers may have been well-meaning, in the majority of their stories the young people indicated they felt alienated from their teachers and educations. Although it is doubtful the students would claim that what they are experiencing is an educational experience which will result in social replication, it is certain they do know when instruction is boring and meaningless or when teachers behave contemptuously toward them.

Young people are often exquisitely aware when adults belittle them or waste their time with assignments beneath their abilities. As Delpit expressed, "those with power are frequently least aware of – or least willing to acknowledge – its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence (2006, p. 26)."

Why were there so many examples related of teachers who did not seem to show care to Hispanic students? Are United States' schools primarily staffed by people incapable of care? I do not believe this is so. It would, perhaps, be more accurate to say schools are staffed by many caring people who are entrenched in a lack of consciousness and critical thinking about an invisible yet inequitable

system, which is continuously reinforced by the larger society in which they must operate.

If asked whether they care about their students, the seemingly less caring teachers might reply that they do care, but they do not know how to relate to Hispanic students, or the students need more help in class than the teachers know how to give, or some students are so obviously disinterested in what goes on in class that the teacher concentrates on the people who do want to participate. These reasons do not excuse teachers' apparent lack in attempting to form reciprocal relationships with their minority students. It is, though, a way to begin understanding and to think about how we could change.

CHAPTER FIVE
IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

The purpose of this study was to understand my Hispanic students'

perspectives of their educational experiences, examine my relationships with my

students, and consider implications for educators. The data suggested that, while

some of the young people's experiences were positive (e.g., Angel's Robotics

teacher; Rosa's feeling of family with her JROTC group; the teacher who

encouraged Ana to remain in school), the majority of their experiences were

viewed as negative (e.g., blatant white favoritism; ignoring Hispanic students in

class; the teacher who did not ask Rosa what was wrong when she went under the

desk).

During our conversations about their educational experiences, my students

related many stories that illustrated how they and their teachers interacted.

Several stories involved teachers who appeared to have taken the time and effort

to connect with them. Most of their perceptions, however, indicated the majority

of their teachers had not cultivated reciprocal relationships.

The word students most commonly used to describe their teachers'

attitudes and behaviors was the term "care." Care is a construct that has positive

and negative sides to it, and my students used "care" to illustrate both aspects of

their experiences. The young people were able to feel and identify which adults

cared about them, and they responded positively toward those teachers and those

feelings. Conversely, they intensely recognized the behaviors attitudes that made

them feel as if there were no attitudes of care. Although some of the stories they shared had occurred years ago, many of my students still seemed to have feelings of hurt, sadness, confusion, or bitterness over those memories.

Care is not a specialized word utilized only in academic circles. It is a common word that describes a fundamental human need. But why is care so important to us?   As Noddings (1992) noted the need for care is universal. Care is one of the capacities that shapes us as humans. We readily show those who are important to us – family and friends – we care about them. One challenge for those of us in education is to develop reciprocal relationships of care with people who will, in many cases, be in our lives for less than a year.

A further challenge to care is added when white teachers have children of color in their classes. Feelings of distance from minority students can be compounded. Even so, Noddings believed these young people may be the ones who need to receive care more than any others. Because of the human tendency to "draw circles around groups to which we belong and attribute uncomplimentary qualities to people outside our circles" (1992, p. 117), minority citizens have frequently been pushed outside the circle of care by members of the majority, such as white teachers. The feelings of *otherness* they experience in larger society can too often carry over into school. Yet, young people outside teachers' circles of care long to be cared for, too.

That Hispanic students are failing in United States schools nationwide implies our schools may be failing in the way they educate these children.

Perhaps it is our entire school structure which needs to be reformed. How, though, is it possible to restructure such a wide-spread and disparate institution as education? Attempts have been made. Curriculum alignment within districts has been implemented, yet that does not appear to have solved the problem. National programs such as No Child Left Behind seem to have only compounded the crisis. These efforts appear to be more of the same, more mechanization and further hierarchy, rather than a radically different restructuring.

I suggest further institutionalization is not the change we need in our schools. Adopting each year's most recent program as the newest policy is not a long -term solution. Instead, as Noddings (1992) suggested, one way to transform education is for teachers to develop caring, interpersonal relationships with their students. She thought that developing deep, reciprocal relationships with students is a way of instructing that may be even more important than the duty of academics. I believe this is a way our schools could be changed. They could become places of caring relationships.

Caring Relationships

In recommending that teachers form caring relationships with students, Noddings did not mean to imply teachers should throw out the textbooks and spend the school year simply "loving" students. But it seems that children who do not feel a caring connection with their teachers may also have trouble accepting academic information from them. On the other hand, when teachers

show students they genuinely care for them and believe in their abilities, young

people may become more receptive to their teachers and lessons.

To show sincere care for students involves educating young people in such

a way that they become critically conscious (Freire, 1970/2006) of the inequities

inherent in all dominant cultures, including the United States. Many people feel a

sense of dissatisfaction with the way things are, but they are unable to put a name

to the source of their discontent. Still others seem to be totally unaware of the

power imbalance hidden in the structure of society. Helping young people

develop a critical consciousness so they can recognize and name the problems

with the social structure and, if they choose to, confront and transform society is

an act of true generosity. Teachers who deeply care about their can help them

come to this level of awareness.

At the same time teachers show their students they are safe in the

classroom and are respected and have worth as individuals, they are also helping

the students themselves develop new capacities of care. Thus, a reciprocal cycle

of care is formed.

When teachers interact with interested, receptive students, they often feel

invigorated because their messages are received. They may feel validated both as

people and as educators. As a result, they may tend to put even more of

themselves into their teaching. Youngsters who are comfortable with their

teachers and lessons can be more cooperative and approachable, so teachers have

an increased desire to form relationships with these accessible people. In this

way, care becomes a self-perpetuating cycle that continually strengthens and renews itself.

However, as Noddings (1992) cautioned, care is not a prescriptive behavior. It is not a set of directions or steps to be followed. In this study, I have chosen to examine four aspects of care: suspending judgment, attentiveness, reciprocal relationships, and dialogue, as ways of building care, but there are many other components to care that could be utilized, as well.

The difficulty in establishing care is that the care-giver, in this case the teacher, must get to know each student and discover how best to connect with each student as an individual. One way to begin developing care with minority students is through suspending judgment of the young people and their differences. Before I was able to do this, I could only see my Hispanic students as peculiar "others." That resulted in my feeling disconnected from and somewhat hostile toward them because they were so different from me. It was not until I could let go of my prejudicial attitudes and my feelings of being somehow better that I could truly start to know the children as people. I had to risk becoming vulnerable with them (Behar, 1996).

I suppose many people might be afraid that students would view teacher vulnerability as weakness and exploit that to their own benefit. If there is no ground work of care, young people certainly may do so. However, instead of taking advantage of me when I exposed my feelings, my students were unfailingly generous in their responses. When I dropped my shield of defensiveness, the

children were able to lower their own distrustful, protective façades and receive the care I offered them.

The advice to "suspend judgment of others" is easy to suggest but difficult to do. Beliefs in the superiority of a dominant culture are so imbedded into our ways of operating in the world that they are often invisible (McIntosh, 1989). White hegemony imperceptibly supports and promotes our lives as being as normal. Racist and prejudicial terms hide in everyday idioms and clichés. We are surrounded by often unperceived affirmations that being European American is correct, while other ways of living are usually seen as wrong.

If we can admit to our known prejudices, it may become easier to develop an awareness of unacknowledged biases and to counteract those influences on thoughts and actions. Nevertheless, we should never become so self-satisfied as to assume all bigoted attitudes have been recognized and banished. (From such individuals we hear phrases like, "Some of my best friends are *those* people.") It is important to realize that, even though we may have made great progress in suspending judgment, dominant culture constantly and invisibly continues to subtly reinforce our perception of "rightness," and those feelings can easily reestablish themselves in our minds.

Another way to cultivate care is to be attentive to students. Thompson (1995) explained attentiveness as combining the actions of watching, listening, and noticing. In this way, our attention to others serves as a way of shifting focus off ourselves and observing how someone else is doing.

Thompson further noted that attentiveness to minority students "means recognizing prejudice, discrimination, and racism" (p. 129). When we recognize the prejudicial, discriminatory, and racial attitudes we may hold, we have a better chance of overcoming those attitudes and accepting minority students as individuals rather than by assigning to them the labels that come from attitudes of prejudice.

As teachers suspend judgment and become attentive to students, they can begin the work of forming reciprocal relationships (Noddings, 1992). Relationships that are reciprocal have an attitude of care that is received by students and returned back to the teacher. Thus, the flow of care is back-and-forth rather one directional.

Teachers and students who have begun to trust each other in reciprocal relationships can go further to nurture their relationships with dialogue. At its essence, dialogue allows us to connect with each other. As teachers, we can use dialogue to understand our students' needs and the history of those needs. By talking with students, we build up our knowledge of them as people, and that can serve to guide our responses to them.

Teachers who lecture students but do not allow them to contribute their thoughts or insights are not engaged in dialogue. This is what Shor (1992) identified as teacher-talk and is little more than a one-directional monologue. Instead, dialogue must be a two-way, reciprocal exchange of ideas and opinions

that can result in the participants forming new understandings and awareness of each other.

Having a casual conversation with students is not interacting dialogically with them. Dialogue does not remain at a superficial level. Participants in dialogue open up and become vulnerable with each other. In this sense, the "knowing" which comes from dialogue can allow us to appreciate young people as individuals with distinct personalities, experiences, opinions, and requirements. They become much more to us than just names on a seating chart. It is through increased familiarity that people can strengthen caring relationships.

Through repeated academic dialogic encounters, students are able to give voice to their thoughts and build upon ideas. In many ways this allows teachers to develop a more complete picture of a student's thought processes and abilities than by relying solely on worksheets or other closed-ended responses as comprehension tools. If these instructional dialogic encounters are incorporated into teachers' growing relationships with minority and low socio-economic level students, they are less likely to project their own low expectations onto young people that may be one way to keep them located in oppressive situations.

It seems there is considerable overlapping of behaviors in these four aspects of care. This is supported by Noddings' (1992, p. 17) assertion that care is not made up of prescriptive, isolated steps. The actions that build caring relationships are a progression of intertwined actions and attitudes. They support

and build upon each other and are all necessary components in developing

reciprocal relationships of care.

Recommendations

Noddings and others have advocated teachers should form close,

reciprocal relationships with students. It appears that suspending judgment and

becoming attentive to young people are essential to forming relationships of care,

and that using dialogue can help to build stronger connections and acceptance in

teacher-student relationships.

Why, though, should we invest so much of our limited time and energy in

our students? Why should we take on the risk required to engage with students in

relationships? While it is true that young people may look fondly upon the

teachers they have had close relationships with and count them as among their

favorites, there must be a larger reason behind all this than just being well-liked.

What sense can be made of these findings in light of the literature on care? What

implications do these findings hold for theory and practice in educating Hispanic

and other minority students? These are the questions to which I now turn.

The students who participated in my study indicated they had more

positive attitudes toward themselves as learners and their educational experiences

when they had caring relationships with teachers, but their assessments changed

to negative perspectives when they felt their teachers did not care about them.

This supports Nodding's (1992) claim that young people suffer when schools

become less caring places. Their stories suggested they were more responsive to

academic interactions if they felt accepted, heard, important, validated, respected, and cared for by their teachers. Relationships based on care can be one way to meet those needs.

Both my experiences and those related by my students suggested that Anyon's (1980) report of the negative behaviors of teachers in working class schools toward their students was neither an exaggeration nor isolated to a single school. The hidden curriculum in many schools could result in lowered opportunities for young people due to the shallowness of the course work and dictatorial relationships between teachers and learners. These hegemonic practices can infiltrate and frame the school experience of students who are members of stigmatized social groups.

However, the domination and alienation of people of color does not happen by the anonymous workings of abstract social structural forces. These practices are enacted by individuals. They are the results of choices – although not necessarily deliberate – to cooperate with the reigning ideological definitions of what minority students are capable of, what type of curriculum they should be taught, and how teaching practices are enacted.

The problem is found in the domination and fragmentation which persist in societies and are replicated every time people act in ways consistent with dominant beliefs. But those beliefs are largely invisible, so even caring, well-meaning people may unconsciously operate in a manner that recreates an oppressive system. The teachers mentioned in my students' stories may not have

intentionally acted in ways that were hurtful to Hispanic young people, but they were products of the same hierarchical power structure they are helping to reproduce.

Attitudes of domination are not exclusive to European Americans but may be present in any members of a dominant culture.   The dilemma is made worse when racist and prejudicial beliefs are reinforced through actions that support the divisions between dominant and minority society members.

One way to overcome the invisible patterns of thoughts and actions which strengthen each other is to identify their existence and disrupt the process through critical consciousness. Critical pedagogy such as problem-posing education can result in recognizing and taking action against the oppressive elements in people's lives that have been illuminated by critical understanding. Taking action includes identifying and transforming oppression. Care is potentially a way to do this.

Action against an oppressive structure is an act of true generosity (Freire, 1970/2006, Noddings, 1992). True generosity fights to destroy the visible and invisible structures and systems which reinforce actions that oppress fellow human beings. Oppressive structures are made up of the invisible yet taken for granted benefits that come from belonging to a dominate group. Because they are invisible, they are also elusive and difficult to name but easy to ignore. Many minority members of society learn how to cope with the invisible structures of society; however, multi-culturists (e.g., Delpit, 2008; Nieto, 2004; Ogbu, 1987) have argued that coping can come with a great price. Those who belong to the

dominate group and, therefore, receive the greatest advantage from being part of a society might go as far as to claim those structures *are* the society.

Breaking the tyranny of domination and fragmentation does not require a revolutionary overthrowing of the government. It requires a revolution of a different type: a cultural, structural, and perceptual revolution. It calls for those who have lived lives of unearned privilege to examine themselves, their beliefs, and their culture as never before.

The very act of questioning "why?" can begin to break the grip of dominant cultures. No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to question the system because, through questioning, people claim the ability to recognize and name instances of oppressive fragmentation and domination. They begin to make visible the invisible and to distinguish the inequity that is hidden within and serves to support domination.

Some might protest that transforming inequitable societies, such as the United States, may weaken and undermine a fundamentally good system. They are right in their belief that the United States is arguably one of the best, most generous countries in the world. Nevertheless, there still exist many inequities within the structure of our country. But members of the dominant culture could only grow and become better if they were to critically examine the structural inequities in the hierarchical system and choose to transform their culture to benefit all members.

Teachers who change their attitudes and practices by critical assessment of themselves and the structures they live in and transmit can become true educators. Rather than telling students that *they* are the ones who need to look within themselves and make changes, teachers who admit that the system is unfair, own their part of the problem, and begin dialogues to explore how society is structured and ways it might be transformed can relate to students through these acts of care. This is true generosity. This is true care.

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