A Different Level of Caring: Navigating the Intersections of Perception of Care in Teaching

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Abstract

This study sought to predict teacher's perceptions of caring. We surveyed 457 educators using the Caring Abilities Inventory (Nkongho, 1990). Due to the ever increasing diversity of American classrooms, it is critical to determine how to best recognize, recruit, and prepare the next generation of teachers. Findings indicated differences in caring among gender and race. Implications for teacher preparation programs could be a need to gain insight into gendered and racial notions of care.

Keywords: caring, gender and teaching, race and teaching special education, teacher recruitment

Introduction

Noddings (2013) said, "As human beings we want to care and to be cared for" (p. 7). Caring is a crucial characteristic for classroom teachers at every level (CAEP, 2016; Demetrulias, 1994; McComb, 2015). For decades, scholars reported the lack of caring in our nation's schools and the critical need for caring educators who can effectively teach in diverse classrooms (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Delpit, 2012; Noguera, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). More than any time in American education, increased pressure is now placed on educators to be all things to all students. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

and now the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) raise expectations for success, and a continual push for all students, regardless of exceptionality, to be included in high-stakes testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). However, teachers in special education (SPED) are facing a crisis. Although the demand for fully certified and highly qualified teachers in SPED is growing, there is a rapid decline in people entering, or remaining, in the profession (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2015). This current shortage of highly qualified teachers in SPED negatively impacts students with disabilities and at-risk students, along with their families.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study examined perceptions of caring between men and women teaching in general and special education settings. Identifying these perceptions will determine if there is a quantifiable difference in caring between gender, race, and area of teaching. We addressed three questions: 1.) are there differences in perceptions of knowing, courage, and /patience based on area of teaching? 2.) Are there differences in perceptions of knowing, courage, and patience based on gender of the teachers? and 3.) Are there differences in perceptions of knowing, courage, and patience based on race/ethnicity of the teachers?

Utilizing the Caring Ability Inventory (CAI) (Nkongho, 1990), this study sought to predict factors of care involved in decisions to work in various fields of education. This pilot study may be useful to teacher preparation programs and SPED administrators in recruiting caring teachers.

Review of Literature

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) aligned with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) lists *caring* as a characteristic of efficacious teachers (CAEP, 2016). Myriad research studies support the idea that caring is essential to effective

teaching practices, especially when teaching a diverse group of students (Gutshall, 2011; Noddings, 1988). However, it is crucial to understand caring in relation to gender and race and how this has impacted self-perceptions of care.

Gendered Notions of Care. The predominant face of teaching is white and female (Sargent, 2004; Skelton, 2012). Historically, researchers documented how occupations may be identified in gender specific terms dictated by what type of work is deemed appropriate for a man and a woman. Currently, men represent about 25% of the total teaching force across the country (Lepi, 2013). MenTeach (2014) reported that 42% of men in teaching are located in secondary levels as compared to 18% in elementary levels, and a scant 2% teach in pre-school and kindergarten areas.

Researchers showed that boys need more male role models in their educational experience if they hope to better develop academically and socially (Johnson, 2011; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012). This is especially true for marginalized young men eligible for services in special education classrooms. Weaver-Hightower (2011) found that despite research showing more men are needed in teaching fields, there are still numerous challenges keeping men from becoming teachers. Caring, as an occupational description, is historically accompanied by a decrease in pay and in status. "Labor that generates perceptions of rapport, supportiveness, congeniality, nurturance, and empathy – in other words- 'mom' behaviors – does not register on the wage meter" (Guy & Newman, 2004, p. 293). Despite educational reforms and curriculum modifications seeking to incorporate multicultural and gender equity, conceptions of gender difference in relation to occupations is still an ever present issue (Hardie, 2015).

Race and Occupational Choice

Intrinsically bound within issues of gender and class, race plays an important role in occupational choice for both boys and girls. Historical racial segregation in American society has, in some ways, followed the same lineage as gender discrimination. Notions of masculinity are often defined by the dominant racial group in a particular culture. In America, white middle class ideals of what it means to be a man are thought to be superior compared to constructs of masculinity found in other races (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Researchers have noted a strong reluctance for a young man of color to enter a female-dominated occupation for fear of being labeled as less than a man. Occupational selection for minority males is a highly complex issue (Sayman, 2009).

Theoretical Frame

This study is framed in Noddings (2013) Ethics of Caring theory to determine if those who teach in special education exhibit a different level of care than those who teach in general education. In what Noddings described as the starting point to an understanding of caring, she approached the concept of caring as crucial to action and reciprocal relationships to others. Specific to education, caring for others is the means to create a truly democratic school that allows for social justice. A long-held fundamental assumption of education is that care will assist in the production of a moral citizen (Dewey, 1938; Noddings, 2013). Social changes in this country over the past few decades have been dramatic, but schools have not responded to these changes (Noddings, 2013). Indeed, Gardner (2000) observed that, "with the possible exception of the church, few institutions have changed as little in fundamental ways as those charged with the formal education of the next generation" (p. 30). Especially in light of the nation's increasingly diverse classrooms, researchers of multicultural education indicate that "establishing caring relationships with every student may be the most important thing a teacher can do" (Grant & Sleeter, 2011, p. 95) to closing the achievement gap.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were chosen using a simple random selection (Creswell, 2014). A total of 457 people participated in the survey. Participants for the study were teachers in public, non-charter schools in both general and special education at all grade levels, including alternative education and career/technology.

Measures

To explore issues of care and to determine difference of perceptions of care, it is first necessary to quantify the notion of care. Literature suggests "caring is partly learned" (Nkongho, 1990, p. 10). The measure used to answer the research questions is the Caring Abilities Inventory (CAI) (Nkongho, 1990), which is based on Mayeroff's (1971) indicators of caring. It employs four assumptions: a) caring is multidimensional, b) all people have the ability to care, c) caring can be learned, and d) caring is quantifiable. The CAI is a Likert-scale instrument containing 37 items.

The CAI has a long history of use within the field of nursing, primarily with nursing students. In this present study, the researchers attempted to determine if there is evidence of validity and reliability of the instrument in education. While the CAI has a strong record within the medical field, only one previous study, which examined pre-service undergraduate teaching students, has used it in an education field (Gutshall, 2011).

Results

Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were used to measure the differences in reported levels of caring among demographic variables, as well as to decrease the likelihood of committing Type 1 error (Warner, 2014). In all, 457 educators completed the inventory. Several demographic data

(e.g., gender, race, discipline) were examined. As shown in Table 1, the majority of participants identified themselves as female (79%), Caucasian (89%) educators. The results also demonstrated the majority of respondents were general education teachers. These statistics mirror the literature base regarding teacher demographics within the fields of general and special education (Duncan, 2009; U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2015).

Perceptions of Caring

    Area of teaching. *T*o answer Research Question 1, a 3 (caring/knowing, caring/ caring/courage, and caring/patience) x 3 (general, special, and vocational/technical educator) MANOVA was conducted. Results from the MANOVA do not indicate a main effect for area of education with Pillai's Trace = .019, F (6, 904) = 1.428, p = .201 and Wilks' Λ = .981, F (6, 902) = 1.426, p = .201.

    Gender. *R*esearch Question 2 required a 3 (caring/knowing, caring/courage, and caring/patience) x 2 (male and female) MANOVA. A main effect did emerge from this analysis with Pillai's Trace = .039, F (3, 449) = 6.035, p < .000. Prior to conducting follow-up ANOVAs, Levene's F tests were run to test the homogeneity of variance assumptions on the three subscales. Homogeneity assumption was met for all three subscales (i.e., Knowing, p = .540; Courage, p = .097; and Patience, p = .701).

    Race/Ethnicity. A main effect emerged when a 3 (caring/knowing, caring/courage, and caring/patience) x 6 (white/Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and other) MANOVA was conducted. Specifically, Pillai's Trace = .055, F (15, 1335) = 1.677, p = .049. Levene's F test suggests the assumption of homogeneity of variance was satisfied. A series of follow-up ANOVAs on each of the dependent variables yielded a statistically significant effect for caring/knowing and race/ethnicity, specifically for African American educators. Post-hoc analyses (Fisher's LSD) indicate

that African American educators perceive themselves as more caring/knowing than their Asian, Native American, and Caucasian counterparts. No significant differences were found between African American educators and their counterparts who identified as Hispanic (p = .078) or Other (p = .097).

To identify mean differences between the groups demonstrating statistically significant mean differences, t-tests for independent samples were performed for the aforementioned statistically significant mean differences. The most significant effect was on the *knowing* subscale for African American educators and their Caucasian counterparts, t(418) = 3.34, p = .001. Statistically significant mean differences were further maintained on the knowing subscale for African American educators and their Asian counterparts, t(19) = 2.69, p = .015, as well as their Native American counterparts, t(17) = 3.34, p = .004. Thus, African American educators perceive themselves as being more caring/knowing than their Caucasian, Asian, and Native American educator counterparts.

Results and Implications

Results from the data suggested that there was no difference in regard to area of teaching. Although the CAI indicated no difference in the perceptions of care between those teaching in general and special education, we believe that this may be the result of socialization within their occupation. Perhaps as circles of support tell educators in general how caring they are, they may begin to internalize this characteristic and perceive themselves as caring regardless of their area of education. Societal constructs reinforce the notion that the teaching profession is one founded on care. Viewed through the Ethics of Care lens, the teachers who participated in this study do consider themselves as agents of care. This ethos has been cultivated traditionally, as teachers are commonly viewed as responsible for the moral education of children: "Schools have always been considered as incubators for acceptable citizens, and citizenship has not always been defined in terms of academic achievement

scores (Noddings, 1988, p. 216). The results of our present study do seem to confirm that teachers in all areas of education perceive themselves to be caring.

The second research question sought to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in perception of caring/knowing, perception of caring/courage, and perception of caring/patience based on the gender of the teachers (i.e., male or female). Results from this study indicated that there is a difference in perceptions of care between men and women in the teaching profession.

The final research question sought to understand if there is a statistically significant difference in perception of caring/knowing, perception of caring/courage, and perception of caring/patience based on the race/ethnicity of the teachers (i.e., Asian American, black, Latino, or white). Our analyses indicated that African American educators perceive themselves as more caring/knowing educators than other racial categories. Results of this study suggest that caring, as perceived by the African Americans in this study, could be rooted in Joseph's (2014) reflections of care and teaching: "Care as I have come to conceptualize it is inextricably linked to issues of authority and how one enacts that authority in the classroom. (p. 188). This could point to an ability for women self-identified from an African American racial identity to see beyond Western notion of care entrenched in patriarchy and, instead, embrace a more communal ideal of caring (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

Conclusion

Results from the CAI indicated significant differences in self-perceptions of care in relation to gender and race. Females indicated that they perceived themselves as more knowing, courageous, and patient. African American educators perceived themselves as more knowing than their Caucasian, Asian, and Native American peers. We may never be able to measure the extent of emotions and

feelings of care, but the CAI may provide teacher preparation programs and school districts with one

tool to indicate perceptions of care in educators. This may help in both the recruitment and retention

of teachers. Additionally, since women perceive themselves as more caring than men, perhaps this

speaks to the overarching need in education to emphasize a gender neutral approach to caring.

Teacher preparation schools could utilize the CAI, along with dispositional data, for "the successful

preparation of reflective teachers who are well prepared to engage in and cultivate caring and

supportive relationships with their students" (Gutshall, p. 36).

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California Press.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Data

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Female	359	78.6
Male	94	20.6
Racial Background		
White/Caucasian	407	89.1
African American	13	2.8
Hispanic	14	3.1
Asian	8	1.8
Native American	6	1.3
Other	3	0.7
Area of Emphasis		
General Education	296	64.8
Special Education	145	31.7
Career/Vocational	15	3.3
Music/Choir	16	3.3
Technology	14	2.8
Foreign Language	14	2.8
Physical Education	9	1.8
Art	6	1.2