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"There's No Big Book on How to Care": Primary Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences of Caring

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Abstract: This study investigated primary, pre-service teachers' experiences regarding their caring role, and the barriers they face when caring for students. Thirteen Australian primary pre-service teachers were individually interviewed. Within a qualitative framework, transcripts were thematically analysed, alongside member checks. While results indicated highly individualised notions of care, common themes included difficulties in navigating the caring teacher role, the caring student-teacher relationship and gaps in training around notions of care. A continuum of care was identified, mediated by student and teacher factors as well as school location. This continuum provides a framework within which pre-service teachers might explore boundary issues.

Introduction

Caring is a fundamental component in all interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990), and the student-teacher relationship in particular (Garrett, Barr, & Rothman, 2009; Teven, 2001). Although much has been written about caring in teaching, 'caring' remains a highly ambiguous term that is subject to different interpretations (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). In an environment devoid of signposts, teachers tend to generate and adopt their own maps (Kagan, 1992), which poses a significant issue for teachers as well as teacher educators. Little is known about caring from the perspective of the primary pre-service teacher (sometimes referred to as student teacher or trainee teacher). Accordingly, this study sought to identify primary pre-service teachers' perspectives on caring, their views on whether teachers should, and do, care about their students and, finally, how teachers might show care towards students.

Literature Review

While there are various ways caring has been defined, they usually involve a relationship between two people, a "carer" and a "cared-for", in which each contributes to the overall relationship (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Noddings, 1984). The "carer" non-selectively attends to the needs of the "cared-for", while the recipient, "the cared-for", responds to the care provided by the carer (Noddings, 1984). Not all caring relationships are equal relationships; for instance, the student-teacher relationship is inherently unequal, though it is argued that the inequality is located within the role of teacher and student, not within the actual care giving itself (Leavitt, 1994; Noblit, 1993). When this caring stance becomes practice in the classroom, caring typically involves "the establishment of meaningful relationships, the ability to sustain connections, and the commitment to respond to others with sensitivity and flexibility" (Goldstein & Lake, 2000, p. 862).

Caring includes, though is not limited to, being prepared to challenge a student because you want them to learn and do better (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). Rather than ridicule, caring is about praising the efforts of the student, and having the sensitivity and flexibility to tailor assignments to the specific learning needs of the individual. Caring is about being able to hear the emotional needs of the child and being available to them as they work through their problems and concerns. By extension, caring is connected not only to the development of a duty of care which provides supervision and guardianship; it also encompasses the broader social context of the student-teacher relationship in and out of the classroom (O'Connor, 2008). It is within these notions of care that this paper is located.

There are several (somewhat dated) studies that have examined the importance of caring in teaching. Surveys of over 36,000 students found that caring and connectedness were major factors in promoting student wellbeing, which in turn was intrinsically linked to improved student outcomes (Resnick, Harris & Blum, 1993). Similarly, Lewis, Schaps and Watson (1996) found that student wellbeing was a significant factor in determining student achievement. Classrooms that have a warm, understanding and caring atmosphere better prepare students to learn, and provide a safe environment in which students can risk new ideas and mistakes, critical for intellectual growth (Dalton & Watson, 1997; Swick & Brown, 1999). Thus caring in teaching is important as it enhances and facilitates student learning.

Most studies regarding caring teachers have sought the views of students (Bosworth, 1995; Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2003; Garrett et al., 2009; Murphy, Delli & Edwards, 2004; Teven, 2001; Wentzel, 1997), where students have repeatedly indicated that they want teachers to care about them (Garrett et al., 2009; Teven, 2001; Wentzel, 1997). Specifically, primary and secondary students described caring teachers as those who are "helpful" or "loving" (Bosworth, 1995). More recently, teacher caring has been linked to patience, empathy, respect and relational behaviours such as helping, responsiveness, listening and interacting (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2003; Murphy, Delli & Edwards, 2004; Teven, 2001; Wentzel, 1997). Such data supports the view of Rogers and Webb (1991); "good teachers care, and good teaching is inextricably linked to specific acts of caring" (p. 174).

Other studies focus on in-service teachers (Hargreaves, 2000; Murphy et al., 2004; Rogers & Webb, 1991) with a specific emphasis on caring enactments (Hargreaves, 2000; Rogers & Webb, 1991). For example, one primary school teacher reported ..."I think a good teacher is one who cares and that caring is obvious in how that person deals with their students" (Rogers & Webb, 1991, p. 174). Specific acts of caring include being sensitive to the needs and interests of the student, the provision of interesting and engaging educational materials, patience and understanding, communication, and emotionally connecting with students (Hargreaves, 2000; Murphy et al., 2004; Rogers & Webb, 1991). As a consequence, it has been argued that caring in teaching is much more than affect or regard for the student and that instead, or additionally, caring is related to the quality of teaching (Rogers & Webb, 1991).

Some teachers struggle with setting boundaries around caring (Andrzejewski & Davis, 2008; Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009; Cushman, 2005; Hargreaves, 2000; Vogt, 2002). For example, those teachers who define caring around physical and emotional closeness may struggle with setting boundaries, and may be construed as over caring or caring "too much" (Andrzejewski & Davis, 2008; Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009; Cushman, 2005). Consequently, teachers often emphasise that there is a delicate balance between caring for students while at the same time not becoming too involved (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009). Vogt (2002) argues that these boundary issues are due to not having an agreed definition on what it means to be a "caring teacher".

There are some that describe caring as mothering (James, 2010; Vogt, 2002). On the basis of interviews with primary teachers, Vogt (2002) established a continuum of care, in which caring as mothering was situated at one end and caring as commitment to teaching at the other. Vogt (2002) suggests that caring should not be defined as an exclusively motherly

or parental activity, or contingent on a teachers' gender. Vogt (2002) argues that basing caring enactments exclusively on mothering or parental activity infers that male and non-parent teachers are lacking in relevant skills and professional experience.

Finally, whilst it has been found that pre-service teachers' teaching practices are strongly influenced by their preconceived beliefs about teaching (Dunkin, Precians & Nettle, 1994), little is known about the body of knowledge pre-service teachers use to inform their caring behaviours (Goldstein & Lake, 2000). In one of the few studies in this area, Goldstein and Lake (2000) highlighted the difficulty that some primary pre-service teachers have in finding appropriate examples of caring in their placement, "I have looked very hard for the caring relationship between teacher and student"(p. 865). Such reports indicate that pre-service teachers may not know caring when they see it, or do not receive sufficient guidance on the topic of caring in teaching.

Other pre-service teacher studies in this area are less focused on care; those that do highlight issues of care, tend to commence with a broad research intention and focuses more generally on pre-service teachers views on what makes a "good" or "bad" teacher (Murphy et al., 2004), and/or their beliefs about teaching (see for example, Weinstein, 1990). In other words, concepts on caring were not the initial focus in these studies, though pre-service teachers themselves identified caring as an important aspect of being a "good" teacher or a part of their beliefs about being a teacher. Thus there is a dearth of information that provides an in-depth analysis of pre-service teachers' experiences of care and their thoughts of how they might negotiate and enact their caring role as prospective teachers.

In sum, research on teacher caring has been largely explorative with the aim of understanding what a caring teacher is and does, from the point of view of students and in-service teachers, and to a lesser extent from pre-service teachers. Little research in this area had been conducted, and much of the available research is somewhat dated; whether there have been changes in relation to caring since that time has yet to be ascertained, especially from an Australian perspective. Thus, questions still remain regarding how primary pre-service teachers view caring in teaching, including their views on caring and what they consider to be their caring role as a teacher. It is important to ascertain how pre-service teachers perceive their caring role, so as to inform pre-service teacher programs and professional development opportunities for beginning teachers.

Within a qualitative paradigm, the aim of the present study was to identify primary pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences of caring in teaching. Specifically, the study sought to explore what primary pre-service teachers might consider appropriate and inappropriate enactments of teacher caring, and the barriers, if any, they might face in assuming a caring role.

Method

Given the exploratory nature of the research question, data were collected and interpreted according to a qualitative approach, in which themes were sought from participants rather than pre-determined hypotheses (Chase, 2008). Through the use of empathic interviewing, this study involves the interviewer joining with the interviewee in a collaborative process to explore and create a narrative around caring and teaching. Such a process allows for the participant to sift and clarify their own ideas and, thus, bring forth his or her voice (Fontana & Frey, 2008).

Procedure

Once ethics approval was obtained, the study was advertised via various pre-service teacher online noticeboards around a large Australian university, on urban and rural campuses. Additionally, information was disseminated at the end of lectures and tutorials with further information provided if required.

Participants

A purposive sampling of pre-service teachers was drawn from students completing either their third or fourth year undergraduate degree in primary education. Thirteen pre-service teachers agreed to participate, three male and ten female. For the purposes of reporting, participants were assigned identification numbers, for example M1 = male participant 1, F1 = female participant 1. Demographic details are outlined in Table 1, including placement location, parenting status and the number of practicum placements. Note that none of the male primary pre-service teachers reported practicum experiences in the youngest grade, namely the preparatory level. All three male participants indicated that they wished to work in the youngest grade, however, were not offered the opportunity to do so.

Age by Gender

Age	Male	Female
18-25	2	4
26-35	0	3
36-45	1	2
>46	0	1
Total	3	10

Gender by Parental Status

Gender	Parent	Non-parent
Male	1	2
Female	5	5
Total	6	7

Practicum Experience

School location	Frequency
Urban	6
Rural	10
Both	3

Table 1: Participant demographics.

Data Collection

Individual, semi-structured interviews between 60 and 90 minutes were conducted with participants. Semi-structured interviews aim to focus on core issues, relevant to the research, while at the same time leaving the participant room to freely weave in and around those issues of importance (Freebody, 2003). With consent, each interview was audiotaped and subsequently transcribed.

Interview Schedule

Overall, participants were encouraged to share their experiences as teachers in training in terms of what they had experienced or seen of caring (or non-caring) teachers. The literature review informed the development of the interview questions, which subsequently evolved to encapsulate new areas as expounded by participants. Sample questions included: "How would you define a caring teacher?" "What do caring teachers do?" "Is it important that teachers care for kids?" "Why or why not?" and "What does this caring look like?".

Data Analysis

Individual interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This iterative process involves identifying, analysing and progressively categorising a pattern of themes within and across the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Analyses drew on 195 pages of transcribed interview recordings. Initial descriptive categories were located within each participant's transcript. On completion of this initial coding, participants were provided with a copy of their interview transcript and a summary of coded themes pertinent to their interview. Participants were given the opportunity to validate their interview transcript and the researcher-identified themes. Allowing participants to "own" their data and providing them with opportunities for clarification, deletion and/or addition is known as member checking, a process that is commonly used to reduce error and provide interpretative rigour (Burnard et al., 2008). After participant feedback was incorporated, themes were identified across the individual data sets. Whilst previous literature had indicated that gender, parental status, and practicum experience may influence pre-service teacher views on caring, this study did not find any indication of differences according to these demographics and consequently are not reported on here.

Results

Five inter-related themes were identified, as presented and detailed below:

- Conceptualisations of caring
- The student-teacher relationship
- Boundaries within the caring relationship
- Becoming a caring teacher
- A continuum of care.

Themes are emphasised using direct quotes from participant transcripts as indicated by a coding identifier, for example, (M1) being male participant number one.

Conceptualisations of caring

Overwhelmingly participants struggled to provide a solid definition of caring:

I don't know what it is... a friend was just saying to me "Well of course you know what it is" I mean it's, but you just do it naturally, but I don't know what it is (M1).

At the same time, some participants, both male and female, used parenthood as a model for understanding caring that included but was not limited to, mothering. Placed in a preparatory class, one participant described herself as "*I feel like the mother hen and they're all your little chickies*" (F1). Similarly, another suggested that "*teachers quite quickly become almost like a pseudo parent*" (F11). However, despite acknowledging that "*being a parent is a really good framework to understand what caring is about, or what it means*", this participant who

was also a parent stated that his teacher role was, "*not about being all soft and cotton woolly, sometimes you use the soft cotton wool approach and sometimes you use what it says in the rule book*" (M1).

The link between caring and effective teaching and learning was repeatedly made by participants. For instance, one participant, who recalled her own experience at primary school, described a teacher who made her "*feel like I was number one*" which had a significant impact on her learning, "*he made me want to learn, he made me want to push myself and try harder and really succeed*" (F15). While participants find it difficult to define or conceptualise caring they were relatively more conversant about how caring might be enacted in their role as prospective teachers.

The Student-Teacher Relationship

For participants in this study, caring was primarily enacted via the student-teacher relationship. Caring was considered an "*emotional bond with the student*" and a prerequisite to good teaching: "*if teachers didn't care, then students wouldn't have that relationship to be able to go up to a teacher and ask them just a simple question*" (M2). At the same time however, many stressed that relationship was different to a friendship relationship, as one participant stated, "*you can't be their best friend, you're their teacher just showing an interest*" (F5).

Specifically, caring was relational and enacted by "*helping... [and] taking an interest in*" students and "*understanding where the child comes from, what's going on in their day to day lives*" (F4) as well as "*whether they've got their shoes on the right feet to making sure they've got enough food in their lunchbox*" (F15). Similarly, another indicated, "*they will come to depend on you for emotional support as you build a relationship so that they can come to you and say - I've had a really bad day*" (M3). This relational form of caring was for some a reciprocal and mutual process, that was a shared responsibly rather than centred solely on the actions of the individual teacher. In the words of one participant:

> *... it [caring] will be reciprocal, you'll care about how well the student's doing but I think, unless the student cares about your opinions, or cares about you, then they're not going to take it on board* (M3).

Another way in which care was enacted within the student-teacher relationship, for some, but not all participants, was touch, though there were qualifiers around this. For example, hugging, putting an arm around a student's shoulder, and the giving of high fives were acceptable ways in which some participants showed they care, especially when needing to reassure or comfort students. For example, "*physical contact is important for everyone, even as adults when we are talking with people we tend to have some touching*" (F12). Touch was not something these participants would initiate however:

> *With the younger children they at times gravitate towards you and I have had children embrace me ... I would never push a child away from an embrace but I would not instigate the embrace* (F4).

One participant indicated that teachers can modify touch by giving students "*high fives*" which "*still shows students affection but not an overt show of affection*" (F4).

Across participants, opinions about physical contact ranged from "*we can't touch the kids at all*" (F9) to "*I have kids in my placement class coming up and giving me hugs all the time, and, you know, I suppose a hug is okay*" (F8). The dangers of touch were identified by many, especially around potential allegations of misconduct: "*you have to be careful about everything*" (F7). The acceptability of physical contact for these pre-service teachers depended on whether the teacher was male or female, the age and the temperament of the student.

> *...it's more acceptable for a female teacher to be hugging or comforting students, whereas … if it's a male teacher it can be interpreted differently, people would rush into a conclusion ...unfortunately people think of it as taking it too far or being a paedophile* (F9)

One participant indicated that there was an ethical aspect to teachers expressing physical caring with students, with gender dictating the caring role that a teacher could assume:

> *I hug children at work in out-of-school-hours care if they're upset, especially the younger ones but not as a teacher – I haven't done that as a teacher, I'm not sure from a male perspective that's ethically purposeful, it is a barrier, the barrier is that genders have roles and the role we're always destined to do is based on a gender* (M2).

This same participant maintained that "*it doesn't mean we care less*" (M2), which was supported by another male participant, "*men nurture as well"* (M3).

Boundaries Within the Caring Relationship

Many participants used "*the line*" metaphor when describing their caring role, and often described boundaries as an obstacle that needed to be negotiated in some way. For example, "*overstepping the boundary*" (F4, F5, F7), "*crossing the boundary"* (F15), "*setting up limits"* (F11), "*drawing the boundary*" (F7, F9), "*overstepping the line*" (F8) and "*drawing the line*" (M1, F9). These boundaries related to their role as teachers and the student-teacher relationship:

> *I want kids to know me… [but] there's still a line, and you've got to be careful not to cross that, because once you become more of a friend than a teacher then the boundaries are a little blurred* (F15).

In describing boundaries, participants indicated that they were not to assume roles outside of their teaching responsibilities: "*maybe if you try and take on a role other than teacher, then you might be stepping into places that might be considered as caring too much*" (F4). Similarly, while participants acknowledged that teacher and parent caring had similarities, many acknowledged that they should not encroach on the parent's role: "*I think you ... if you overstep boundaries you may care in the wrong way, in that you might care inappropriately and try to become a parent rather than maintain your position as teacher*" (F4). Others reported, "*at the end of the day they're [students] the parents' responsibility*" (F8), "*the kids in your class aren't your children, they've got their own families and their own lives to go on to*" (F5) and teachers "*have to learn to switch off, I don't want to go home and think about 22 students all through the night*" (F1).

Many of the participants indicated that a level of mutual respect was needed to successfully manage the student-teacher relationship, which helped maintain appropriate boundaries as explained by one participant, "*they are not going to listen to you as a teacher because they think of you as a friend, there's got to be that certain level of student-teacher respect*" (F12).

The need to establish boundaries around caring was indicated by some to protect their own physical and emotional wellbeing.

> *...having been a parent yourself, you understand that it's not as easy as it might look, [caring too much] can happen and, I think, being able to manage how you feel is important, the longer teachers are teachers, they probably do limit their caring because it does take an emotional toll* (F11).

Some participants described the need to switch off, to separate their school life from their home life, "*there is some sort of boundary when I am in my teacher role at school and I'm just myself in my own time*" (F12). This same participant cautioned that "*if you're not caring for yourself and having time for yourself, then you can't have the energy to care for others and you get run down and stressed and physically stuffed*" (F12). While some participants

believed that self-care strategies would develop over time, "*it's really important to have your own time, I suppose that will come with experience"* (F5), others indicated that "*I don't think I've consciously thought about it"* (F12), and "*looking after your wellbeing as a teacher, I don't know what that means*" (F13). Interestingly, one participant reported that boundary setting with students was "*a self-protective behaviour that you just gradually develop*" (F11), though another argued that boundaries are "*probably good for you but perhaps not so good for the students*" (F11).

While a minority of participants indicated that society, school and the curriculum established boundaries, most described having to establish their own boundaries. For instance, one participant argued that "*there's no uni lecturer there in the classroom with you all the time saying 'that wasn't caring' and 'that is caring'; I suppose that's something you have to judge and do yourself along the way*" (F1). The arbitrariness was further expanded by another participant:

> *You're left to decide it on your own, there's not really any line where you say this is okay and that's not okay, but there are extremes where you say well that's definitely not okay, and that's definitely fine, and then there's everything in between* (M3).

Becoming a Caring Teacher

In the first instance, some participants referred to caring as instinctive, "*when you go into teaching, it's just the way you are*" (F8). Similarly, another participant argued that "*I think it's probably a natural instinct, if you didn't have that sort of caring instinct why would you want to be a teacher?*" (F5). That teaching was synonymous with caring was also indicated: "*you must be a caring teacher, if you're caring for people you're sort of creating a purpose for yourself and giving your position meaning*" (M3).

Previous personal experience with children, their own experiences as students, placement experience and independent research all influenced participants' views on caring. Some indicated that placement provided them with "*examples of teachers really caring for students*", while others cautioned, "*at placement you're not sure if you're getting the right [information]"* (F1). Similarly, in reference to mentor teachers, "*different people have completely different views because they have just come to their own sort of understanding of what is required"* (F12).

Nonetheless, many reported a lack of preparedness for their caring responsibilities, for example, "*Oh my gosh, no-one had prepared me for that caring role*" (F1). This same participant described not only being unprepared but overwhelmed or "*shocked*" by the caring responsibilities she needed to assume with young students, especially preparatory students. Others reported feeling "*confronted*" (F9) and "*quite nervous*" (F13).

The lack of training was emphasized by many for example, "*we don't learn how to care at university*" (F9). Instead, university tends "*to focus on a lot of things that aren't really that important, [not] what we're doing actually in the classroom*" (F11). Another indicated

> *...they tell you you've got to cater for different learning styles, they tell you you've got these management strategies, but I don't think in my degree I've actually had someone tell me it was a motherly role for caring in the prep [preparatory] classroom* (F1).

One thought that her university training would have better prepared her for her teaching role, but at the same time, acknowledged how difficult this would be:

> *...subconsciously, I did think that there was this big book telling you exactly what to do each day, but then when you're in the classroom with the kids that book is jumbled up, you may as well make a paper aeroplane out of it because... nothing can tell you what each individual child is going to be like* (F15).

While participants acknowledged that it was difficult to teach notions of care to pre-service teachers, clearer guidelines were nonetheless required. For instance, "*there does need to be something mentioned somewhere during university, maybe even doing mock situations"* (F4).

A Continuum of Care

Another way of representing the data is via a continuum of care, from non-caring through to over-caring. Participants were clearly able to identify instances of both ends of the continuum, and the resulting adverse consequences. For instance, over caring was not considered in the best interests of children nor pre-service teachers:

> *...if you are taking it too far then... especially for the younger students, and I think you're stopping them from building that independence that they need to get through school* (F12).
>
> *...sometimes... I put my students first... sometimes you feel like you don't have that time for yourself, and sometimes I think you can get really, really stressed about things and you kind of need to step away from it* (F9).

Over caring might led to "*teachers can become really burnt out and not care anymore, just do the same things over and over again, not introducing anything new"* (F11). Conversely, not caring sufficiently was also detrimental to students.

> *I had a student in our class that came in from another school ...even though he was in grade 5 he probably had a reading and writing level of grade 1 or 2 ...and nobody had ever helped him ...I did point out some of his strengths to his teacher* [but] *he* [the teacher] *wasn't interested ...it was frustrating ...because I didn't like watching this teacher doing the things he did* (F13).

Whilst end points of the caring continuum were clearly drawn, how participants showed they cared, and to whom, varied depending on various student and teacher factors as well as context (see figure 1).

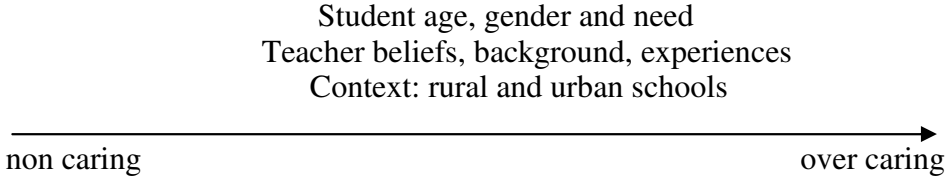

Figure 1: a continuum of care

In the first instance, participants reported being more nurturing and comforting with younger students, even though they still believed that they cared for older students. Caring enactments also shifted depending on the individual child and need, for example, "*different individuals need different levels of care or different types of care*" (M3). Moreover, all participants acknowledged that different teachers cared for students in different ways due to a teacher's personality, beliefs, and experiences: "*caring does change and different teachers definitely show different levels and abilities of caring too*" (F1).

Setting mattered, and those who had worked in rural settings reported "*closer relationships with their students"* and "*stronger caring feelings*" (F11) in comparison to their experiences of urban schools. Another agreed reporting that caring "*depends on whether you're in a city school, or a rural school*" as "*it's a lot more personalised*" in rural schools, where students and teachers potentially interact out of school hours and can be "*more involved*" (F1). These participants often attended weekend sports events of their students, and their role was considered *"not only that of a teacher, but also as a community member" (*M3).

In summary, participants regarded caring as an integral part of teaching, and implicit in being a good teacher. A continuum of teacher care was drawn on the basis of the data presented here, with non-caring and over-caring at the two extremes. Where pre-service teachers placed themselves on this continuum varied, according to a range of student, teacher and location variables. Additionally, the boundaries identified earlier, also vary in terms of the caring continuum, as different types of behaviours were acceptable in some situations but not in others (for example, hugging younger children but not others).

Discussion

Overall, participants' reports of caring are complex and multifaceted revealing a number of common themes. Many regarded caring as an instinctive or "natural" aspect of teaching, a finding which collaborates previous research (Burgess & Carter, 1992; Goldstein & Lake, 2000). As well, caring was regarded as intrinsic to being a teacher, and implicit in the teacher role. Participants here also associated teaching and parenting, consonant with a widely held and long-standing notion associating teacher caring with maternal instinct and motherly love (Burgess & Carter, 1992; Goldstein & Lake, 2000; James, 2010; Vogt, 2002). Participants however did not focus solely on mothering as both male and female participants made the link between the parenting and the teaching role.

Caring was enacted in several ways, one of which involved "touch". In keeping with previous research (Vogt, 2002), hugging or putting an arm around the shoulders of a student was generally viewed by participants here as an acceptable form of teacher caring. However, whether and how pre-service teachers "touched" students depended on the gender of the teacher and the age and sex of the student. Interestingly, a number of participants in this study suggested they would not initiate physical contact with their students, but would reciprocate physical contact. Such a finding has been found in previous research among male pre-service teachers (Cushman, 2005; Hansen & Mulholland, 2005), but this study found both male and female participants alike were not keen to initiate physical contact but were open to responding to children's initiations of touch. While emphasising that reciprocating touch may be important, these results suggest that both male and female participants fear potential allegations of misconduct and sexual abuse which has tempered their views on what is acceptable behaviour and what is not.

Participants described caring as an important emotional bond with their students, and a prerequisite to good student-teacher relationships, a finding also found with in-service teachers (Hargreaves, 2000; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Showing an interest in students, appreciating their backgrounds and interests was not only a significant aspect of caring for students but was part of being a good teacher overall, in terms of meeting student pedagogical as well as emotional needs. Interestingly, some recognised that a caring relationship was reciprocal, whereby teachers not only cared for students, but students also cared for teachers.

The challenges of negotiating the caring role of the teacher, and in particular navigating the student-teacher relationship meant that many participants felt the need to limit their caring professionally and personally. While all acknowledged that there were limits to caring, and that there was a "line" that clearly marked acceptable and unacceptable caring behaviour, this metaphysical line was somewhat arbitrary, and in the words of one participant, "*there's everything in between*". Such results resonate with other studies where in-service teachers described "*the line*" metaphor when differentiating between useful involvement and over/non-involvement with students (Aultman et al., 2009). Whilst some reported using guidelines set by others, such as government policy and societal and cultural norms, when those avenues failed to provide adequate direction, many described having to establish a boundary themselves. Consequently, "the line" or boundary, was a highly individualised

notion that varied across participants as well as situations and students. It could therefore be argued that in-service teachers (Aultman et al., 2009), and the pre-service teachers in this study lack the expertise, confidence or decision-making processes to establish appropriate boundaries of care within their teaching practices.

While participants expected that their training would fully prepare them for their caring role as a teacher, many reported receiving little or no training in this area or in issues to do with boundaries. Rogers and Webb (1991) summarise these sentiments: "The code [as in an ethics code] tells teachers what not to do but offers no guide for taking action ...we currently teach technical skills to the exclusion of that caring attitude" (p. 175/6). Whilst some participants utilised their mentor teachers as a resource in negotiating the challenges pertaining to their caring role, many questioned whether teacher placement was the appropriate place or only place for learning about caring. Participants in this study reported drawing from their own personal experiences as a template for caring rather than something that is aligned to their teaching profession. Whilst caring is contextual, we would argue that some exposure to caring scenarios might be of value to teachers in training to provide some guidelines and boundaries around for how they care for students, a suggestion made by many study participants. Such a finding supports the concerns raised by Goldstein and Lake (2000, p. 863) who proposed that it "leaves too much to chance".

Overall, the differences in participant views reflected within this study, suggest that caring in teaching can be placed along a continuum, in that caring varies depending on the context in which it is placed. For instance, caring varied depending on whether the school was in a rural or urban community, on the individual child and the teacher involved. The broader social-political context of touching and whether or not it is acceptable can also be incorporated into this continuum. Vogt (2002) locates caring on a different form of continuum, from mothering at one end through to caring as commitment to teaching on the other. A different continuum might be drawn from the data in this study, by highlighting acts of over-caring and non-caring at either termini of the continuum. Participants identified duty of care as the first level of caring, though acknowledged that it was not enough to engage with students just at this level. Many choose to care beyond the level of duty of care implying that the next level of caring should incorporate the social and emotional context of the student-teacher relationship. Such a continuum establishes levels of caring, appropriate or otherwise, and begins to anticipate different types of boundary issues, which has important professional development implications, particularly for pre-service teachers.

Implications

In this study, many pre-service teachers struggled to conceptualise their potential caring role. Because of the lack of preparedness, many reported feeling uncertain and vulnerable about boundaries and how much to care and for whom. Yet, given the complexities and ambiguities around these issues and the subsequent range of views identified here and in the literature, it is difficult for policy or training institutions to set firm rules or guidelines around what is acceptable caring and what is not. Similarly, data collected here indicate that some pre-service teachers find it difficult to negotiate issues of touching that is initiated by students. Thus, teacher training institutions need to provide a curriculum in which notions of care as well as touch are openly and frankly discussed, and case studies provided so that these ambiguities are reflected upon, with peers and others more experienced than themselves. Rather than just a black and white scenario of "you don't touch students", pre-service teachers need to understand the range of caring that might be asked of them by different students and at different year levels. Additionally, from the very beginning of professional learning, it is important that pre-service teachers are provided with appropriate role models of

caring practice in schools and given opportunities for reflection regarding what they see and experience (and what they do not see and experience).

The continuum of care identified here might assist in pre-service teachers' transition to professional practice as beginning teachers. Learning about levels of teacher caring, and where such caring may be situated along a care continuum, may help pre-service teachers to better anticipate potential boundary issues during practicum, and inform how schools and policies support beginning teachers. Preparing pre-service teachers to deal with feelings of uncertainty, while also helping them to develop their role as a caring teacher, is required in order to promote a greater sense of stability for beginning teachers and for pre-service teachers whilst out on practicum.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study set out to identify primary pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences of caring in teaching; specifically, what primary pre-service teachers might consider appropriate and inappropriate teacher caring, and the barriers, if any, they may face in their teaching role. It is limited by the research context, most notably the small sample size and the overrepresentation of rural, female participants, and does not set out to provide generalisations to other groups but instead was designed to yield depth over breath and representativeness. Given the reliance in the present study on self-reporting, future research might involve observing pre-service teachers in the classroom. Additionally, the study was conducted in one teacher training institution with pre-service teachers working in similar cultural contexts. As teacher training programs differ in terms of content and duration (Alvarez, 2007), future studies would profit from surveying and/or interviewing pre-service teachers from other institutions to establish whether their views are similar to those found in the present study. Whilst outside the scope of this study, issues raised by participants relating to students caring about teachers and teachers' opinions also warrant further investigation.

Overall, pre-service teachers' notions of care are at times nebulous and difficult to pin down to neat conceptualisations. Their understanding and experiences of care vary, though common issues, specifically around the student-teacher relationship and boundary concerns were apparent and highlight clear training implications. Rather than provide a recipe of set answers, the continuum of care identified here provides a potential framework from which pre-service teachers might reflect on their own, and others', caring behaviour. Caring in teaching is important for maximising student learning, and ensuring that students and teachers alike feel happy and safe.

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