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SCHOOL LEADERS' CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF TEACHER CARE FOR AFRICAN
AMERICAN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT**SCHOOL LEADERS' CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF TEACHER CARE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS**

Violet K. Whiteman
Old Dominion University, 2018
Director: Dr. Steve Myran

The purpose of this case study was to describe middle school leaders' conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students. The qualitative case study focused on school leaders' conceptualizations/identification of critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954) of care for African American middle school students. Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care, including modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation, was used to inform the study. Data were collected through interviews, discussions of identified incidents of care, and observation documentation from the middle school leaders participating in the study.

Themes identified from the study included: build relationships, identify and respond to students' needs, create an emotionally safe classroom environment, and extend contact with students. Results indicated that middle school leaders' conceptualizations of care were reflective of Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care. One subtheme, communication with students, revealed the use of purposeful side conversations as an effective way to engage in dialogue with students regarding behavioral issues and other concerns. This is reflective of research on care for African American students, since these students want teachers who do not embarrass them or punish them unfairly (Casteel, 2000). Adding purposeful side conversations to Noddings' (1984) dialogue component may be a way to reframe the narrative of dialogue to accommodate the care needs of African American middle school students.

Key words: Care, African American Middle School Students, Middle School Leaders

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“...But with God, all things are possible...”
Matthew 19:26 KJV

I am truly blessed and thankful that God granted me this opportunity. I pray that my findings will positively impact the work of school leaders and teachers as they inspire students to achieve excellence and success in school and in life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Care matters and educators who care make a difference in the lives of students since students will adjust their behavior for teachers they perceive care for them (Shann, 1999). Students will work harder academically for caring teachers (Cothran & Ennis, 2000) and engage in academic tasks (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Research shows that students of color know the difference between teachers who care and do not care, and students' sense of self and their academic achievement levels improve when teachers care (Lopez, 2003; Ochoa, 2007; Thompson, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). Students will react negatively if they feel misunderstood or disrespected by teachers and positively if they feel teachers hold them in high regard and are interested in their welfare (Hallinan, 2008, p. 273). Although a student will ultimately learn what he chooses to learn (Noddings, 2013), he needs the "cooperative guidance of a fully caring adult" to "attain competence in his own world of experience" (Noddings, 2013, p. 178).

Care matters to African American students because it helps them identify with academics (Osborne, 1999). Many believe that minority students have poor academic performance because they are lazy, do not value education, and have parents who do not care (Hale, 2001; Thompson, 2004). Building positive relationships between teachers and students that focus on achievement goals and creating a sense of belonging in the classroom is an option for addressing academic disidentification (Steele, 1997). When educators place the responsibility of student apathy on students and their families, they "fail to recognize the school factors that can lead to disengagement, frustration, and low achievement" (Thompson, 2008). Contrary to stereotypes, studies show that most African American students value their education, hope to attend college, and have parents who care about their education (Horn, Chen, & Chapman, 2003).

Care is especially crucial at the middle school level. Research suggests academic success is impacted by challenges occurring in middle school classrooms (Ames & Miller, 1994; Dickinson, 2002; Doda & Thompson, 2002; Liptiz, 1984; Merenbloom, 1991). A dispassionate approach is created when students transition to middle school. Students move from caring, family-like relationships, that include hugging in elementary school to bell schedules, multiple teachers, high-stakes testing, where hugs are avoided in middle school (Toshalis, 2016). Students experience a decline in self-esteem and academic self-efficacy (Baran, 2010; Peterson, Hamilton, & Russell, 2009), and relational connections are removed from learning environments just when they become developmentally necessary (Toshalis, 2016, p. 18). When students do not perceive teachers as caring, students do not care about or pay attention to classroom rules or management strategies (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2003), causing them to not be as successful as they could be in school.

School leaders influence school culture and aspects of school organization (Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2011) and can, therefore, create conditions for teachers to be caring. First, school leaders must work to cultivate caring school communities (Fuqua and Newman, 2002; Lawrence and Maitlis, 2012). This requires school leaders to develop teachers' capacity for caring for students and developing school organizational conditions to support expressions of caring (Cassidy and Bates, 2005; Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016; Murphy and Torre, 2014; Solomon, Schaps, Watson, & Battistich 1992). Next, school leaders must help teachers put caring into practice by aligning expectations with the teacher evaluation system expectations. School leaders can promote the application of caring teacher practices through expectations, encouragement, feedback, and guidance. Finally, school leaders must create organizational conditions that support caring. This can be done through providing opportunities, in and outside

of school, for teachers and students to engage in caring interactions (Smylie, Murphy, & Louis, 2016). “From years of studying school leadership and reform, working with practicing educators, and participating in education policy development, we have come to conclude that caring lies at the heart of effective schooling and good school leadership” (Smylie, Murphy, & Louis, 2016, p. 1).

Teachers enter into a caring relation with students and cannot be relieved of their responsibilities to care for students. A teacher is first, the one-caring and, second, a content specialist (Noddings, 2013). Teachers have frequent interactions with students and ethical ideals are, therefore, involved. A teacher cannot nurture the student intellectually and disregard an ethic of care. As a result of the impact teacher care has on students, the primary aim of educational institutions and efforts should be maintaining and enhancing care (Noddings, 2013).

School leaders can ensure an ethic of care exists in schools by having an understanding of Noddings' (1988) plan for implementation: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. This plan served as the conceptual framework for this study. Although the work of Noddings (1988), a white feminine, is groundbreaking in the area of care, school leaders' conceptualizations of care from this study provided insight as to whether components of the plan needed to be reframed to accommodate the needs of African American middle school students.

This study explored school leaders' conceptualizations of teacher care for African American middle school students in schools with a predominately African American population. The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one includes an introduction of the topic, statement of the problem and research questions, the significance of the study, theoretical and conceptual frameworks informing the study, and a definition of terms. Chapter two includes a review of the literature related to the topic. Chapter three outlines the study design and

methodology. Chapter four provides a presentation of research findings, and chapter five includes a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe school leaders' conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students, to determine what middle school leaders identify as critical incidents of care when observing teachers of African American students, and to determine how middle school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of care reflect Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

Research Questions

In order to understand how school leaders conceptualize teacher care for African American middle school students, what school leaders identify as critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors, and how school leaders' conceptualizations compare to Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care, this study was guided by three research questions:

- What are middle school leaders' conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?
- What do middle school leaders identify as critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?
- How do school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students reflect Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care.

Significance of the Study

School leaders are in a position where they are able to observe teacher demonstrations of care for African American students. Leaders must work with and train staff in order to improve student outcomes (Robinson & Timperley, 2007). Obtaining leaders' conceptualizations of their teachers' care for African American students could be a means of identifying and addressing teacher practices that may impede or enhance the success of African American students. This study would be beneficial in determining professional development opportunities in the area of teacher care for African American middle school students. The study would also add to the literature by providing middle school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students.

Theoretical Framework

Ethic of Care

The groundbreaking work describing the ethic of care can be attributed to Nel Noddings (1984). The ethic of care in teaching involves the reciprocal relationship between the "one-caring" teacher and the "cared for" student (Noddings, 1992). In this relationship, teachers feel obligated and responsible for empowering their students. Teachers view student needs from the perspective of "I must do something" rather than "something must be done" (Owens & Ennis, 2005).

According to Noddings (1992), in order to establish the ethic of care relationship between the one-caring teacher and the cared-for student, engrossment, commitment, and a motivational shift must be present. Engrossment occurs when the teacher accepts and acknowledges the students' feelings and experiences. Commitment is reflected in the teacher's persistence in taking responsibility to care for students. A motivational shift/displacement results when the

teacher shifts from a focus on self to a focus on the students. It occurs when the teacher views the world through the students' eyes (Noddings, 1984).

Caring between two people involves three dispositions of care: receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2002). Receptivity requires both parties to be attentive to the other's position, in order to build trust and understanding. Relatedness occurs when relationships are valued and cared about. Both parties contribute to the relationship so it can grow. It also involves the need to feel connected to others. Responsiveness refers to listening to and responding to the needs of others.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) asserts that in terms of power and privilege, minority groups are subordinate to the majority group (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Delpit (1988) acknowledges that there is a culture of power in each classroom and those with the power are least aware of it, while those without the power are most aware of it. Success in schools is determined by the acquisition of the culture of those who are in power. Standards of "Whiteness" are assumed by the United States, which suppress marginalized racial groups (Schaefer, 2006).

Teachers must understand the negative impact that race and racism can have on African American students (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Spring (2006) examined the paradigm of sameness or the view of European American culture as the dominant culture of schools. In the classroom, teachers must not become preoccupied with African American students' differences and categorizing these differences as impediments to learning (Grantham & Ford, 2003). This type of deficit-thinking causes teachers to lower expectations for African American students (Ford, 2004).

Critical race theorists believe it is necessary for African Americans to have a voice and tell their stories (Mungo, 2013). For this reason, studies exploring the perceptions of care of African American students helped inform this study. According to Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995), the voice of African Americans is necessary because reality is socially constructed. The stories of African Americans allow them to preserve their histories and ideas, and the exchange of their stories allow others to see the world in a new way. "This approach privileges the voices of those from oppressed and marginalized groups and gives them an outlet for telling their stories" (Mungo, 2013, p. 114).

Conceptual Framework

Caring teachers seek to convey caring feelings to their students (Noddings, 1992). This can be accomplished through Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Although there are many definitions, models, and approaches to care, few provide a framework for actually putting care ethics into practice. As a pioneer in the field of care ethics, Noddings' (1984) groundbreaking work in this area has led others to conduct research to support and expand her theory. For this reason, Noddings' (1988) four components for implementing an ethic of care was used as a conceptual framework for this study. The components include modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

Modeling

Noddings' (1984) first component for implementing an ethic of care is modeling, whereby teachers show students how to care. "We have to show in our own behavior what it means to care. Thus we do not merely tell them to care and give them texts to read on the subject; we demonstrate our caring in our relations with them" (Noddings, 1995, p. 190). Modeling happens everyday as teachers show students how to be caring (Noddings, 1994). This

is evident through teachers' body language, facial expressions, conversations (Camak, 2007), and interactions. Care can be modeled through listening and responding to students, giving students tokens of kindness (i.e. birthday cards), and showing kindness (smiling and being friendly) (Noddings, 2005). Teacher behaviors provide a model of care for students to follow and can take place beyond the classroom.

Dialogue

The second component of Noddings' (1992) plan is dialogue, which involves talking, listening, sharing, and responding, as well as making connections through language and shared experiences. Students and teachers engage in an open-ended conversation that may or may not have a definite answer or ending. The dialogue is natural discourse that allows the teacher to learn more about his/her students. The dialogue serves as a means to help teachers plan for their students' progress and achievement (Noddings, 1992). Engagement in dialogue creates a sense of belonging and motivates students to work (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993). Communication in the form of dialogue creates a special bond between teachers and students (Noddings, 2005).

Practice

The third component of Noddings' (1992) plan is practice, whereby students share efforts at providing care and teachers provide opportunities for students to practice care. Through cooperative activities, teachers and students can engage in caring activities in class. Practice is an ongoing, intentional, and reflective process. Teachers can practice caring through patience (Noddings, 1992) as well as honesty and openness (Noddings, 2002). Students can practice caring through regular service activities and through opportunities to care for humans and animals, such as class pets (Noddings, 1984).

Confirmation

Noddings' (1992) fourth component is confirmation, or affirming and encouraging the best in others. Confirmation depends on dialogue and practice. When a teacher confirms a student, he/she reveals "to him an attainable image of himself that is lovelier than that manifested in his present act" (Noddings, 1984, p. 193). Throughout confirmation, teachers assume the best and focus on the best about their students (Noddings, 1992). Confirmation requires trust, and the teacher must know students well enough to realize what they are trying to become. Teachers accomplish confirmation through getting to know their students well enough to realize who they want to become and visualizing a student's potential to become better. Confirmation occurs over time through trusting relationships (Noddings, 1996).

A goal of the study is to compare Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care to school leaders' conceptualizations of care for African American middle school students. This comparison could provide insight as to whether components of the plan could be reframed to accommodate the needs of African American middle school students.

Definition of Terms**Academic achievement**

Experiencing success with grades, standardized tests, and/or other achievement measures.

African American/Black

African Americans are "people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2).

Care

Care is basic in human life, and everyone wants to be cared for (Noddings, 2002). It involves a coherent pattern of interpersonal interactions (Iaani, 1996; Noddings, 1992). "Caring

is knowing, feeling, and acting in the best interest of others” (Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994).

Care, as an ethic in teaching, involves showing affective and nurturing behavior toward students (Howard, 2001), and it is a process consisting of something teachers do rather than something they feel (Bartell, 2011).

Conceptualizations/Perceptions

Ideas or pictures of something formed in your mind (Merriam-Webster, 2010); beliefs, attitudes, or opinions of a topic.

Critical Incident

“An incident is critical if it makes a ‘significant’ contribution, either positively or negatively, to the general aim of the activity, and it should be capable of being critiqued or analyzed” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 338).

Critical Incident Technique

A flexible set of procedures for gathering and analyzing specific incidents related to the concept under study (Flanagan, 1954). It relies on memory and recall of participants (Urquhart, 1999).

Incident

According to Flanagan (1954), an incident is “any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act” (p. 327).

Middle School Students

Students being educated in a middle school setting (grades 6-8).

Middle School Leaders

Certified principals or assistant principals overseeing middle school students (grades 6-8).

Teacher Performance Evaluation System

Performance standards and indicators by which teachers are evaluated (VDOE, 2012)

White American

White Americans are those “having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa” (Smith, 2014).

Organization of the Study

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one includes an introduction of the topic, statement of the problem and research questions, the significance of the study, theoretical and conceptual frameworks informing the study, and a definition of terms. Chapter two includes a review of the literature related to the topic. Chapter three outlines the study design and methodology. Chapter four provides a presentation of research findings, and chapter five includes a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review was for the researcher to examine and compare literature related to teacher care of African American middle school students. Care was defined and the importance of care discussed. Also, common strategies for showing care for African American students were examined.

Definition of Care

Care is a complex term and can be defined in many ways. Care is basic in human life, and everyone wants to be cared for (Noddings, 2002). It involves a coherent pattern of interpersonal interactions (Iaani, 1996; Noddings, 1992). “Caring is knowing, feeling, and acting in the best interest of others” (Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994). Caring for someone means helping the person grow and actualize himself/herself (Mayeroff, 1971). Care, as an ethic in teaching, involves showing affective and nurturing behavior toward students (Howard, 2001), and it is a process consisting of something teachers do rather than something they feel (Bartell, 2011). It can be situational and vary depending on the people involved (Kang, 2006). According to Noddings (1984), there are three elements in a caring relationship: the one caring, the one cared for, and the relationship between the two. Although someone can care deeply for another person without them even knowing it, Noddings (1984) believes the caring relationship is not complete unless the cared-for feels the caring.

For the purposes of this study, Noddings' (1992) definition of care was used. Noddings (1992) believes care is basic in human life, and she describes care as the reciprocal relationship between the “one caring” and the “cared for.” In a school setting, the teacher is the “one-caring” and the student is the “cared for.” The one-caring teacher commits and connects to the cared-for

student and shifts from a focus on the teacher self to a focus on the student other. In order for the caring relationship to be established, the cared-for student must receive and respond to the efforts of the one-caring teacher (Noddings, 1992).

Conceptualizations of Care

Concepts of Care

Tarlow (1996) developed a concept of care consisting of eight characteristics that describe the caring process: providing time, “being there,” talking (dialogue), developing sensitivity, acting in the best interest of the other, caring as feeling, caring as doing, and demonstrating reciprocity. The first three characteristics, providing time, “being there,” and talking (dialogue) are prerequisites for care to begin, and they support Noddings’ (1984) theoretical framework of care. Tarlow’s (1996) “be there” concept reinforces Noddings’ (1984) concept of commitment required of the one caring. Both frameworks utilize ‘dialogue’ as an activity through which caring occurs (Tarlow, 1996; Noddings, 1984). Finally, like Noddings (1984), Tarlow (1996) found that caring occurs over time within reciprocal relationships.

Another researcher providing support for Noddings’ (1984) theoretical framework is Mercado (1993) who suggests that caring relationships influence academic accomplishments of students. Mercado’s (1993) framework includes four themes: being together, being real or perceived as authentic, being open, and being fair. In support of Noddings’ (1984) model, Mercado (1993) recognizes dialogue as a means for establishing caring relations.

Theories of Care

Traditional frameworks of the ethics of care, such as Noddings’ (1992) have drawn from predominantly White perspectives of care. Black feminists perspectives of care more specifically address the needs of African American students. There are similarities and

differences between White feminists' perspectives of care and Black feminists' perspectives of care. White and Black feminist approaches are both based on teacher-student relationships.

White feminine Noddings (1984) and Ruddick (1989) relate caring to 'mothering' that should be practiced by both genders. Noddings (1992) and Mayerhoff (1971) both believe caring teacher-student relationships require teachers to understand students from the students' perspectives.

Teachers affirm and encourage the best in their students, and they must know their students well enough to realize what they are trying to become (Noddings, 2002). Comparatively, Black feminist Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) identifies "womanist caring," as teachers embracing the maternal by treating students like their own children. The role of mother is an honored role in the African American community (Bass, 2009), and it relates back to the image of Mammy, from slavery, being depicted as a caring, family-oriented, self-sacrificing individual (West, 1995).

A difference in the two approaches is the view on the significance of race in caring relationships. White feminist care theories are more "colorblind" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Thompson, 1998, 2003) and "fail to acknowledge and address the Whiteness of their political and cultural assumptions" (Thompson, 1998, p. 524). These theories fail to acknowledge that race and racism significantly influence whether students are successful in school (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). Black feminists, on the other hand, view care as being focused on race and class issues (Collins, 1993, 1995, 2000; Hooks, 1994, 2001; Thompson, 1998, 2003, 2004). This comes as a result of many Blacks facing racism, oppression, and poverty (Kang, 2006). Thompson (1998), a Black feminist, rejects the colorblind approach and embraces "colortalk" which recognizes racial identity and race as a significant dimension of ones experience.

Importance of Care

Care matters because of the impact it has on students. In a study by Cassidy and Bates (2005), where a school was committed to enacting an ethic of care, it was found that teacher care impacts students' attitude toward school and learning, emotional issues, perceptions of others, self-care, and students' futures. Students in the study expressed that when teachers showed care for them, they felt safe to ask questions and take chances. They also felt they could succeed and were not judged based on their past history. As a result, their attitude toward school and learning changed. Next, students viewed the school as helping them deal with their emotions. The caring, calm, and nonreactive manner of the staff led to students being less volatile and angry. Students reported that they felt better about themselves as they were able to discuss their problems. It was also found that students' perceptions of adults changed, and students began to see teachers and other people as more caring and respectful. Also, students began to care more for themselves as a result of the care they received from adults in the school. When caring is at the core of education, it gives students the capacity to becoming caring, which makes education more than just an academic pursuit (Noddings, 1988). Finally, students reported being more optimistic about their futures and considering the consequences of their actions before making decisions (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Care and Middle School Students

During the middle school years, many students experience a decline in self-esteem and academic self-efficacy (Baran, 2010; Peterson, Hamilton, & Russell, 2009). However, students in caring learning environments achieve at higher levels on standardized tests than students in educational settings perceived as less caring (Lee, Smith, Perry, & Smylie, 1999; Osher, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2004; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Unlike elementary school, academically, middle

school students are faced with an increase in the number of teachers they have, less perceived teacher support, and increased expectations (Carlisle, 2011; Jacobson, Williford, & Pianta, 2011; Waters, Cross, & Shaw, 2010). Demonstrations of teacher care help increase students' self-esteem, allowing students to develop a sense of competency and worth (Demetrious & Wilson, 2009; Newberry, 2010). A lack of teacher care in the classroom can lead to low motivation, poor behavior, and limited academic and social success for adolescents (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Merenbloom, 1991; Woolfolk, Demerath, & Pape, 2002).

Care and African American Students

Cultural implications of care

There are cultural implications of caring (Noddings, 1992). White feminists' approach to care is 'method-centered,' and focuses on how to care and become a caring person. This colorblind (Thompson, 1998) method pays attention to the attitudes of the one-caring. On the other hand, Black feminists' approach to care is 'difference-centered,' and focuses on marginalized or oppressed people and how to care for a unique person. This color vivid method suggests that racial differences should be recognized in caring relationships (Kang, 2006). While Kang (2006) does value the work of Black feminists, instead of focusing on the marginalized and oppressed, he suggests that the one-caring should look at the individual identity of the minority cared-for in order to achieve more effective caring relationships.

Identification with academics

African American students experienced a decreasing level of identification with academics between 1972 and 1992, when apparent racial differences became significant and substantial (Osborne, 1999). Steele (1992, 1997) identifies the culprit of the disidentification of students of color as negative stereotypes. His stereotype threat theory suggests negative

stereotypes cause African American students to become anxious about their performance and, therefore, not perform at optimal levels. An incorrect answer in class can confirm a negative stereotype as well as be personally damaging to an African American male student. As a self-protective measure, these students will reduce their identification with academics (Epps, 1970; Katz & Greenbaum, 1963). Students must feel comfortable disclosing areas of weakness, and some teachers, unfortunately, harbor inaccurate beliefs about the abilities of African American students. These beliefs can especially be detrimental to the academic success of African American male students (Milner, 2007). African American students recognize caring teachers as those who want them to achieve academically and socially (Howard, 2001).

Historical Context of Care for African American Students

Black ethic of care dates back to African ancestral kinship patterns that emphasize cooperation and respect for others. Communities were strengthened by the severe conditions Black people endured in the United States (Knight-Diop, 2010). An emphasis on interconnectedness of communities was adapted from the African ethos as a means to help enslaved communities cope with oppression (Sernak, 2004). Walker's (1996a, 1996b) conceptualization of care within a segregated school system placed an emphasis on institutional and interpersonal structures developed for the purpose of fostering academic and life success of Black children. Institutional structures included written expressions of beliefs, actions, and attitudes, and interpersonal structures included experiences and interactions shared among stakeholders. Caring was not viewed as female-gendered actions but as the collective efforts of all, both male and female educators who concerned themselves with the collective academic, social, and psychological survival of the race (Walker, 1996a, 1996b). Historically, Black teachers taught not only with the hope that it would lead to economic advancement, but also to

increase racial awareness and pride (Kelly, 2010). According to Anderson (1988) and Litwack (1998), African Americans equated education with freedom.

Teachers Demonstrations of Care for African American Students

Academics

Cultural relevance. Two main purposes of culturally relevant pedagogy are for teachers to connect to students' cultures to help students achieve success at school and to enable students to think critically about social justice issues (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Culturally relevant pedagogy enables teachers to help students envision a better world for themselves while having an awareness of social justice issues (Esposito & Swain, 2009). It bridges home and school cultures (Howard, 2002), and allows teachers to incorporate students' experiences and values into the curriculum (Gay, 2002). Cultural relevance is also beneficial for students experiencing academic disidentification. Ladson-Billings' (1995, 1998) research suggests culturally relevant teaching helps students identify with academic success. In a study of teachers who experienced success with African American students, Ladson-Billings (1995) found that an ethic of caring was one common trait shared by these teachers.

High expectations for achievement. African American students express a need to have teachers who have high expectations for student achievement (Friend & Caruthers, 2012). Howard (2001) found that students perceive teachers care when they express high expectations and are strict about students doing their work. Howard (2002) examined African American students' descriptions of effective teachers and found that care and concern can be demonstrated through demanding and expecting the best from students, as well as through praising student efforts. High expectations are conveyed through personal moments, and teachers devoting extra time to work with students before or after school. In Dallavis' (2014) examination of teacher,

student, and parent perspectives on academic achievement, a teacher stated that she shows care for her students by communicating high expectations. She also explained that she does not let her students get away with poor or sloppy work. Downey and Pribesh (2004) suggest there are racial mismatches in attribution of effort. In a study conducted by Farkas, Lleras, & Maczuga (2002), it was found that black teachers hold same-race students to a higher expectation regarding work habits and standards of conduct.

Academic support. According to Gay (2000), African American students perceive providing academic support as a caring behavior because “many students of color encounter too many uncaring teachers at all levels of education from preschool to college” (p. 62). In addition, Wentzel (1997) found that students perceived teachers cared when they taught in an interesting manner and provided students with needed assistance. Likewise, Ruggiero (2005) found students valued high expectations, making learning fun, and assistance when needed.

Classroom Environment

Sense of community. Caring teachers are able to create family or community-like classroom environments for African American students. The learning style of African American students is more collaborative and communal than the more independent learning style of the dominant culture (Rychly & Graves, 2012). In order to create a sense of community in the classroom, there must be shared emotions, values, and beliefs from the community members (Rungrojngarmcharoen, 2013). Being a part of this type of community means that students will be heard and their perspectives will be valued. Within these communities, teachers can integrate academic and social aspects of student learning and remove barriers that hinder student success (Peer & Huston, 2009). This is especially important for African American students since the

African philosophical approach to care is community-centered and the western approach to care is individual-centered (Ojiambo, 2015).

Classroom management. African American students expect their teachers, who have power in the classroom, to act with authority. African American students perceive authoritative teachers as having the ability to control the class (Delpit, 1988). If the students perceive a teacher to be weak or ineffective, they see no need to follow his/her directives. Authoritative teachers can control the class through teacher-student relationships (Delpit, 1988), and learning can take place when there is a social and interpersonal relationship between the learners and teachers (Dennick, 2012).

Respectful exchange of ideas. Caring teachers set the tone for a respectful exchange of ideas within the classroom. Teachers should allow students to engage in self-exploration in order for them to find their own voices and make meaning of their own learning (Howard-Hamilton, 2000). As students construct knowledge and raise and answer their own questions, teachers must be comfortable with disagreements that lead to dissonance. Students may become frustrated or angry when exploring issues of racial consciousness. This is fostered through cultural responsiveness and can be accomplished when teachers design instructional practices to have a multicultural perspective (Howard-Hamilton, 2000). In order for teachers to foster a respectful exchange of ideas in the classroom, Swenson and Strough (2008) found that conflict resolution skills may be effective when students experience disagreements. Students should hear their stories and perspectives included in the curriculum (Howard-Hamilton, 2000). As teachers encourage students to take ownership of the learning process, teachers must be caring and respectful toward their students (Dennick, 2012).

Communication. Teacher understanding and acceptance of African American students' communication styles may be viewed as a form of caring. Differences in communication styles can affect teacher-student relationships. African American students prefer a "call response" social interaction style whereby students may speak out loud while the teacher is speaking in response to the teachers' comments. These comments by African American students are not meant to be rude disruptions or demonstrations of disrespect but serve as the students' way of "gaining the floor" to participate in conversations (Gay, 2000). Poor communication leads to limited student engagement (Barnes, 2005), and failure to listen to other students can stifle student learning (Sims, 2002). Emotional responses, such as doubt, frustration, and confusion, can lead to mistrust and limited risk-taking (Sims, 2004). This means that students must feel they are supported and their views are accepted in class discussions (Walshaw & Anthony, 2008).

Fairness

African American students perceive teachers who behave fairly toward all students as caring (Morris & Morris, 2002). Casteel (2000) studied seventh-grade students and found that African-American students did not believe race was a factor in the way their White teachers treated them. They actually believed their teachers were fair and could relate to them. This seemed to be as a result of their teachers not embarrassing them or punishing them unfairly. A limitation to Casteel's (2000) study was the low sample size and the examination of only one school. This weakened the generalizability of the findings.

Frymier and Houser (2000) examined student perceptions of justice and predicted an increase in students' affective learning when students perceived their teachers to have justice-related abilities. Students wanted their teachers to be able to convey information clearly and

make others feel good about themselves. Several researchers support care for students as seeking justice for them (Cooper, 2009; Thompson, 2004; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Thompson, 1998). Students also want teachers who help them stay out of trouble (Ruggiero, 2005).

African American teachers versus White teachers

African American teachers often show care through their insistence that students reach potential and through their non-acceptance of nonsense from students (Milner, 2012). If students perceive the teacher to be caring, students are able to look beyond their teacher being “mean” to see the purpose behind the teacher’s actions (Howard, 2001). Consequently, these teachers must be mindful of their responses to students and remain firm yet supportive (Howard, 2001). White teachers, on the other hand, are often reluctant to reprimand African American students because of the students’ accusations of racial bias (Henfield & Washington, 2012). In addition, White teachers may not be knowledgeable of the communication styles of African American students or feel comfortable using them. This cultural discontinuity can impact White teachers’ attitudes and expectations for their students (Graybill, 1997).

There is a decline in the representation of African American teachers, therefore, Brockenbrough (2014) believes there is an urgency to prepare a predominantly White, female, middle class teaching force to work with African American students. “Well-intentioned Caucasian teachers come to minority classrooms ill-equipped to prepare minority children for tests standardized on Euro-American norms” (Burt, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2013). Hyland (2005) studied four White teachers who considered themselves good teachers of African American students. Through one teacher’s efforts to be a caring and helpful teacher, she unknowingly displayed hidden racism. The teacher acknowledged herself as a helper and considered herself a

good teacher of African American students. Initially, this self-description seems positive, but with further examination, the role of helper infers that the teacher viewed her students and families as needy and incapable. Her concept of helper perpetuated a racist mindset. This teacher also admitted that she rarely tried to exit her students from special education, even if their goals were met, because she believed they would always need special education services. This type of viewpoint makes this teacher a poor advocate for African American students (Hyland, 2005).

Care and School Leaders

There is limited research on principals' perceptions and understandings of care for African American students. In Cassidy and Bates' (2005) examination of administrators' conceptions of care for underserved, "at-risk" adolescents, it was found that administrators viewed care as being embedded in the school culture, based on relationships, and focused on the "whole child." The administrators in the study focused on whether the environment was caring and respectful. They sought a nurturing community that was sensitive to their students' uniqueness. Administrators also discussed the importance of building relationships so that the school would be like a family and not just a place for staff to work. Showing care for staff would hopefully be translated into staff showing care for students. In looking at the "whole child" perspective, administrators discussed the importance of caring for all aspects of their students' lives, not just their academic needs (Cassidy and Bates, 2005).

Care versus Teacher Academic Press

Demonstrations of teacher care for African American students are related to teacher academic press. Students perceive teachers care when they express high expectations and are strict about students doing their work (Howard, 2001). Students also perceive teachers care

when they provide students with needed assistance (Wentzel, 1997). Similarly, academic press establishes a normative environment where teachers hold high expectations for students, believe students can be successful academically, and help struggling students meet academic expectations (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000). Teachers direct their instruction, decisions, and actions in a manner that best supports student learning (Coleman, 1990). In a study of social support, academic press, and student achievement, it was found that, regardless of students backgrounds, students do best in school when social support and academic press are both strong (Lee, Smith, Perry, Smylie, 1999). Although academic press has been viewed as the only measure of school health, other than socio-economic status that is strongly linked to student achievement (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990), teacher care is also linked to achievement. In the age of accountability, school leaders are encouraged to move from traditional leadership styles that focus on authoritative governing to collaborative styles focusing on supervision of instruction (DiPaola & Hoy, 2007). Therefore, academic press has become a school-wide facet of the cultural system of a school (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002).

Summary

Care can be situational and vary depending on the people involved (Kang, 2006). “Differences on caring are derived from having distinctive cultures, different traditions and ways of thinking” (Kang, 2006, p. 37). Since culture relates to race, African Americans middle school students can experience care differently from other races. Once leaders are able to understand the most effective ways to show care to African American middle school students, they will be able to ensure that teachers are trained and strategies for showing care to these students are properly implemented in classrooms. The framework used for this study is Noddings’ (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

Noddings' (1988) framework, research on care for African American students and middle school students, as well as school leaders' conceptualizations/identified critical incidents of care will hopefully provide a means for improving the school experiences for African American middle school students.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe school leaders' conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students, to determine what middle school leaders identify as critical incidents of care when observing teachers of African American students, and to determine how middle school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of care align with Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Since school leaders are in a position to observe teacher demonstrations of care for African American middle school students, obtaining and analyzing these conceptualizations could be a means of identifying and addressing teacher practices that may impede or enhance the success of African American middle school students. This study would be beneficial in determining professional development opportunities in the area of teacher care for African American middle school students. The study will also add to the literature by providing middle school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students.

In order to understand how school leaders conceptualize teacher care for African American middle school students, what school leaders identify as critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors, and how school leaders' conceptualizations compare to Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care, this study was guided by three research questions:

- What are middle school leaders' conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?
- What do middle school leaders identify as critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?

- How do school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students reflect Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care.

Research Design

A case study design was selected for this qualitative research. Case studies can be used to learn more about situations where limited knowledge is available (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). This approach was used since a case study is “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ of a case or multiple cases over time through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). In this study, multiple cases were used in order to “make comparisons, build theory, or propose generalizations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 141). Data were collected from seven middle school leaders through multiple sources including interviews, discussions of critical incidents of care, and school leaders' observation documentation.

Researcher Bias

Researchers must consider their own professional experiences when developing a research problem (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). “The researcher must seek out and report both personal bias and interpretations that differ from those with which they began the study” (Drisko, 1997, p. 86). As a middle school principal in the district where the research was conducted, I acknowledge the potential for bias. As a former middle school teacher and assistant principal, I admit to having some bias regarding the qualities and characteristics caring teachers of African American middle school students likely possess. I also acknowledge holding a preconceived bias that, although most middle school teachers would likely perceive themselves as individuals who care for their students, not all of them are perceived by the administrators evaluating them

as effective in their efforts to show care to their students. I identified school leaders' conceptualizations of teacher care through the use of interviews, identified critical incidents of care, and observation documentation, then determined whether conceptualizations were consistent with Noddings' (1988) plan for the implementation of the ethics of care.

Acknowledgment of biases enabled me to conduct the study free of personal opinions and ideas about caring teacher qualities and characteristics. I am currently employed with the school district in which the study took place, and I have worked exclusively for the division, serving as a middle school teacher, assistant principal at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and a middle school building principal. As a result of my leadership positions within the district, I have a professional relationship with the study participants. I acknowledge that the school leader participants in this study also held prejudgments regarding the qualities and characteristics caring teachers of African American middle school students likely possess. In order to minimize researcher bias, I solicited multiple and varying perspectives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) of care from school leaders. Throughout the research process, interview transcripts were read and reviewed multiple times by the researcher in an attempt to suspend "any preconceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence what the researcher 'hears' the participants saying" (Leedy and Ormrod, 2013, p. 146). The use of a research team to review transcripts also helped strengthened the trustworthiness of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Participants

Purposeful sampling methods were used to select seven school leaders from middle schools with a predominately African American student population. I established rapport and gained the trust of the participants since I work in the same district as the participants. Only certified principals or assistant principals were eligible to participate in this study. A total of

seven participants were recruited, representing all predominately African American middle schools within the district.

Basic demographic information was obtained from the school leaders prior to the interviews. For confidentiality purposes, all participants were assigned pseudonyms (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Participant	Gender	Years in Education	Assistant Principal	Principal
1. Micah	Male	13	3 years	3 years
2. Chloe	Female	21	2 years	10 years
3. Grace	Female	16	6 years	N/A
4. Joel	Male	32	1 year	10 years
5. Raven	Female	26	7 years	N/A
6. John	Male	19	3 years	N/A
7. Faith	Female	30	11 years	N/A

Measures

The main data source for the study was seven 30-45 minute interviews focused on school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care. Interview questions were informed by the research questions. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the school leaders' currently assigned schools. To ensure content validity, a blueprint was developed to construct the interview questions. A first draft of interview questions was shared with an expert for feedback and suggestions, and modifications were made as needed. A pilot study was conducted

to enhance the validity of the interview questions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Data Collection

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher received permission from the Institutional Review Board to conduct research. Following approval, the researcher requested permission from the school district for conducting research within the division, and submitted the study concept, which included the study invitation letter, a letter of study purpose, the interview protocol, and the interview questions. Once permission was granted to conduct the study, the researcher extended an invitation via electronic mail, face-to-face, and/or phone calls to the selected participants. The selected school leader participants were provided a letter of invitation and an informed consent form, including interview protocols (confidentiality, request to decline participation, and study purpose). Once respondents agreed to participate, follow-up phone calls were made to extend gratitude and establish an interview date, time, and location.

Data collection took place over the course of four weeks and included interviews, discussions of identified critical incidents of care, and a review of observation documentation. School leader and school demographic data were collected prior to each interview. Each school leader participated in a semi-structured interview and a discussion of care for two teachers the school leaders had observed and considered to be caring. Participants provided two observations reports (Standard 5 section) they completed on the selected teachers. Participants also discussed additional incidents of care demonstrated by the teachers observed. An audit trail was maintained in order to organize research activities, participant information, consent forms, observation reports, interview protocols, field notes, memos, transcripts, and coding efforts (Creswell, 2007).

Saturation (Bowen, 2008) was determined once the researcher reviewed interview transcripts, observation documentation, and coding efforts and noticed repetition among participants. At that point, it appeared that no new information would present itself (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Kendall, 1999), and the researcher determined that the study was complete.

Interviews. The researcher conducted an interview for each of the seven middle school leaders. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended to gather conceptualizations and explanations. The interviews were structured to last no more than 30-45 minutes. Probing questions helped expand the participants' responses (Hays & Singh, 2012). The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants regarding date, time, and location. The protocols for the interview (Appendix B) included the purpose of the interview and a restatement of confidentiality and anonymity.

Interview questions were designed to determine how school leaders define care, what school leaders believe it means to be a caring teacher in a middle school classroom with a predominately African American population, and what teacher actions/interactions school leaders perceive as caring as related to African American middle school students. To establish validity, interview questions were reviewed by the researcher's Dissertation Chairperson and Committee. The interview questions were adjusted based on the feedback and guidance of the reviewers.

Once interview questions were asked, participants were then asked to discuss specific incidents of care documented in their observations. Quick Time Player was used to record interviews and discussions about selected critical incidents of care. The researcher used the voice-typing feature of Google Docs to transcribe interviews and discussions. Unforeseen technical difficulties with this process led the researcher to repeat each word of the interview so

that the voice-typing feature would work appropriately. Ironically, this provided an added benefit of a first read-through of the interview data.

Critical Incidents. Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Technique (CIT) format was used in this study to discuss specific incidents of care that school leaders noted in their observations, since it focused on the real-life experiences of individuals and could be modified to the needs of the situation (Hughes, Williamson, & Lloyd, 2007). "An incident is critical if it makes a 'significant' contribution, either positively or negatively, to the general aim of the activity, and it should be capable of being critiqued or analyzed" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 338). Participants were asked to recall specific incidents of care they documented in Standard 5 when observing the teachers, as well as other incidents they had observed for each teacher selected. Critical incident discussions used for this study required participants to review identified critical incidents of care, use one or two words/phrases to describe the incidents, discuss teacher/student interactions, and provide reflections. Each school leader determined which incidents observed were considered "critical incidents."

Observation Documentation. Standard 5, The Learning Environment, of the Virginia Teacher Performance Evaluation System states, "The teacher uses resources, routines, and procedures to provide a respectful, positive, safe, student-centered environment that is conducive to learning" (VDOE, 2012). One of the indicators for Standard 5 states that the teacher "establishes a climate of trust and teamwork by being fair, *caring*, respectful, and enthusiastic" (VDOE, 2012). Consequently, when conducting observations, school leaders look for evidence showing teachers are caring. With a focus on caring from Standard 5, school leaders were asked to select an observation they completed, during the current school year, for two teachers they considered to be caring. Participants were told that the focus would be on Standard 5 of the

observation. Participants were asked to review and discuss critical incidents of care documented for Standard 5.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included the following steps (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995): memoing, transcription of interviews, constant comparison, categorization of data (categorical aggregation), interpretation of single instances (direct interpretations), identification of patterns (pattern identification), and synthesis and generalizations (naturalistic generalization) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Data Analysis Process

Step/Process	Explanation
Memoing	Data analysis began during the data collection process with memoing and summarizing. Field notes were jotted down during the interviews and memos were used to summarize preliminary findings (McLeod, 2001).
Interview transcriptions	Interview data were transcribed and organized using a data management tool created with Google Sheets, which helped the researcher immerse herself in the data. The transcribed interviews were read thoroughly in order to understand and capture the essence of the participants' responses.
Constant comparison	Prior to categorizing the data, possible codes/key phrases were noted from the conceptual framework and literature and set aside (Hays & Singh, 2012). These codes were referred to as the researcher engaged in constant comparison (Schwandt, 2001) of data sets throughout the study.
Categorical aggregation	Next, data were categorized using categorical aggregation (Stake, 1995). Manual sentence-by-sentence coding and paragraph-by-paragraph coding were both done to identify categories and help cluster data in a meaningful manner (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). Subcodes were created for codes that were used frequently (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Direct interpretation	Direct interpretation (Stake, 1995) was then used to directly interpret the meaning of single instances, critical incidents, and specific documentation related to the data.
Pattern identification	Next, pattern identification (Stake, 1995) was used to identify underlying themes and patterns that characterized the case (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995).
Naturalistic generalization	Finally, naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1995) was used as the researcher looked for convergence (triangulation) of the data to construct an overall visual portrayal of the case, draw conclusions, and note implications regarding the case (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was defined according several criteria and strategies, including credibility, dependability, and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was demonstrated through the use of memos and an audit trail. Based on the sample and thick description, categories and findings from the study may be transferable to other cases. Dependability was established through the use of a research team, and by triangulation of multiple data sources (interviews, identified critical incidents of care, and observation documentation) to strengthen evidence of identified themes. The role of the research team was to review interview transcripts and assist with coding efforts. Confirmability, genuine reflections of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was evidenced by the use of interviews, identified critical incidents of care, and observation documentation.

To further establish trustworthiness, the researcher also used reflexive journaling, field notes and memos to “describe and analyze findings as they develop throughout a study” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 205). Memos were also created to support the coding process. Member checking helped ensure an accurate portrayal of participants’ intended meanings (Guba &

Lincoln, 1989). Peer debriefing (Patton, 2002) allowed for data analysis to be reviewed by questioning and challenging findings. The researcher also used an auditor to review the audit trail to ensure fidelity of the research. Ethical validation was demonstrated by treating all aspects of the research process as a moral and ethical undertaking (Angen, 2000).

Limitations

There were several limitations with the study. One limitation and threat to trustworthiness was the sample size/number of cases used in the study. While the seven participant interviews were adequate in reaching saturation for the study, it may not be enough to reach saturation across a larger, more varied sample of school leaders. Another limitation included the transferability of results. Although results would be applicable to middle schools with a predominately African American population, findings may or may not be applicable to African American middle school students attending schools with a predominately White population. A third limitation is that the researcher had a working relationship with the participants, which may have influenced their responses. The researcher made efforts to limit concerns through member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of data sources. A final limitation is that the researcher did not interview the teachers who the school leaders selected and discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe middle school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students. This chapter presents findings guided by the following research questions:

- What are middle school leaders' conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?
- What do middle school leaders identify as critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?
- How do school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students reflect Noddings' (1988) plan of implementation for the ethic of care?

Additionally, I present a description of the major themes from the analysis and an explanation of how the themes relate to Noddings' (1988) plan of implementation for the ethic of care and research conducted on care for African American students.

Caring Teacher Behaviors for African American Middle School Students

Research question #1: What are middle school leaders' conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?

Themes

School leaders were asked how they believe teachers can effectively show care for African American middle school students. Three major themes, with respective codes/categories, were identified: build relationships (knowledge of students), identify and

respond to students' needs (actions that benefit students), and create an emotionally safe classroom environment (communication with students).

Build relationships. Data indicated all seven school leaders believe caring teachers can effectively show care for African American students by building relationships with them. School leaders believe teachers can build relationships with African American middle school students by gaining an overall knowledge of students.

Knowledge of students. School leaders discussed the importance of teachers knowing and understanding the culture, experiences, and challenges of African American middle school students. This can be done through dialogue.

Culture. Micah discussed the importance of taking the time to understand elements of students' culture. He stated:

Micah: A lot of times it's tied up in trying to understand their culture. I think the ones who get it right take the moment to understand their culture and what they are experiencing...the popular artists or the popular athlete at the time. A lot of times, I wouldn't say for every single African American student, but for a majority of the African American students that I've come in contact with, their culture is a big part of who they are. And so (caring is) when you take time to try to figure out a little bit of their language, a little bit of about what is making them excited at the time, and when you take time to understand what's going on in their world.

Joel agreed, but added the importance of getting to know the students individually and as a group in order to connect the learning to who the students are. He mentioned:

Joel: I think we have to understand the culture of the African American student, what they are into regarding the music they like to listen to, and I guess, the latest fashion. Can you relate to their world? I think that is very important. It is showing care to the African American students, and when you gain those pieces of background information regarding what they like, what they listen to, who they are as a person, as a group of people, then you can connect the learning to who they are. When those connections are made, they feel more comfortable with you. They see that, oh, so you do understand the latest dance? Or, you may not be able to do the latest dance, but, you do understand, you know, that's what that means.

Experiences. Some school leaders discussed students' experiences and life outside of

school:

Chloe: You have to understand what their life looks like outside of school. And the only way you can do that is care enough to talk to them, ask them “why” when things fall short to see if they will share with you what they need to be successful. Give them other opportunities so you can say, “When you get home, do you have a quiet place to do homework?” And, if they say “no,” say, “Well, how about if I stayed with you for 30 minutes after school?” Or, “if you want to come in on a Saturday or if you want to take our lunch time, if you want to do something extra.” Care enough to figure out what that child is going through or what that child needs. See how you can help them be more successful.

Grace pointed out the importance of being able to relate to students:

Grace: Oftentimes, when students feel like you can relate to them, they tend to think you care about them. You know, when you talk about some of their favorite rap music, and you can relate to them in that manner, their favorite foods or things that are of importance to them, such as the latest information, not necessarily current events, but maybe the gossip in Hollywood or the current movies. A lot of the times that tends to be, what I say, is just a groundbreaking moment for students to be able to accept teachers.

School leaders also mentioned that understanding the challenges African American students face helps teachers build relationships with students.

Challenges. Some of students' challenges are related to what happens at home:

Chloe: I would say just making sure that they understand their background and understand their challenges... You know, children who struggle, they can show care by understanding what happens at home, what study habits look like...

Raven pointed out that African American students often come to school with so many emotions that it can be difficult to connect with them. She stated:

Raven: You have to realize that they come with so many emotions, and so if we don't see them as a whole person and go around that and see those things that are going on in their lives, and then we tend not to connect with them.

She also pointed out:

Raven: I think our students tend to come to school with a lot of more baggage than other students, and I think that our teachers have to go above and beyond of what the students really need. And so, their caring isn't so much as just coming in and teaching students. They almost have to get into their space.

Identify and respond to students' needs. Data indicated school leaders believe caring teachers can effectively show care for African American students by identifying and responding to their needs through actions that benefit students such as encouragement, monitoring and checking for understanding, and adjusting instructional practices.

Actions that benefit students. School leaders mentioned helpful actions that allow teachers to identify and respond to students' needs:

Chloe: ...Figure out what that child is going through or what that child needs to see how you can help them be more successful.

Micah noted that caring teachers take care of more than just the academic needs of students.

He stated:

Micah: Those people who, for the most part, are looking at what a child needs and are trying to make sure that their needs are taken care of, whatever that takes. And so some people buy food for kids, and some people buy clothes for kids.

Contacting parents would also be viewed as a beneficial action. Raven noted:

Raven: Sometimes we're reluctant to call parents. I don't know what the fear is of picking up the phone and calling the parents, but most parents will say, "Call me and I'll correct the situation." But I don't think we should have to be apprehensive about calling the parents and having administration call them. It shows that you're interested in their children.

Encouragement. Encouragement is a form of confirmation and is considered an action that benefits students:

Grace: ...Just hearing teachers comment on a regular basis to students, regardless of race, a comment that is positive, such as encouragement, saying, "Awww, that was a good way you put it" or things of that nature.

Raven: If they're going around and they're giving them (students) positive feedback and checking their work and making sure that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing, I think that's a plus for a teacher.

Chloe: Really taking the time to get to know kids and encourage them. And I find that we don't encourage a lot because some of us, I don't know if "don't care" is the right word, but we don't give them that encouragement.

School leader, Faith, pointed out that teachers should talk with and encourage students everyday:

Faith: If you're just willing to just talk to that student everyday and try to encourage them and help them along the way to improve their education.

Faith also discussed the use of storytelling as a way to encourage students:

Faith: By getting to know the student, building a rapport with the student, being able to tell the student stories that they can relate to, and stories that can show them that they can be as successful as other African Americans. Or, just showing them that there are people like you who have done wonderful things, and showing them that, you know, "I believe you can do those things as well."

Monitoring and checking for understanding. Monitoring and checking for understanding are ways teachers can show support in the classroom for African American middle school students.

Faith: ...Whether the teacher is paying attention to when that student is raising their hand, answering a question that the student may have; whether the teacher is moving around the room and checking to make sure African American students and all of their students are understanding what they're doing.

John discussed how caring teachers identify students' needs. He said:

John: I look for someone who is willing to engage and get to the root of things. If they're working on an activity, and the teacher goes around and they see that they're not doing well or that they're at a stumbling block, I look for a teacher who's willing to say, "How can I help you? What is it that you get? What is it that you don't get? How can we make sure that you make the connection so that you can get everything that you're supposed to get out of the activity?"

Adjusting instructional practices. Adjusting instructional practices was also identified by school leaders as an action that benefits students. School leaders discussed teachers getting into character and making real world connections. This aligns with research on culturally responsive teaching, whereby teachers instruct within a context that is familiar to students (Savage, Hindle, Meyer, Penetito, & Sleeter, 2011).

John: I also look for teachers who are willing to ask questions and take the feedback from the students to kind of drive what it is that they're doing in class.

Micah: Try to tailor the educational program, their instruction to meet the needs that child has. And so a caring teacher is someone who doesn't just come into the classroom and say you got to learn this, you got to do this, but someone who is really trying to make the whole child better...So, someone who is willing to teach the child first and then the content second.

Joel: So, I think understanding their world enables the teacher to connect with them on that personal level and from that personal level you are able to actually teach them the concepts that are required for them to be successful, according to State Standards.

Create an emotionally safe classroom environment. Data indicated that all seven of the school leaders believe caring teachers of African American middle school students work to create an emotionally safe classroom environment the classroom through communication with students, respectful interactions, joy/laughter, and a sense of community.

Communication with students. School leaders discussed how caring teachers communicate with African American middle school students in a variety of ways, including through purposeful side conversations, verbal/nonverbal expressions of care, respectful interactions, joy/humor, and by promoting a sense of community.

Purposeful side conversations. School leaders noted that some conversations, especially concerning discipline issues, should not be held in front of students' peers. School leaders mentioned pulling students to the side to have conversations with them:

Micah: ...Teachers who are willing to pull kids to the side to have conversations with them as opposed to just doing it out in front of everyone. And not necessarily trying to always write a referral but trying to help a child understand the best way to do things. And so those people, pulling kids to the side, trying to mentor them, have conversations with them [are caring].

Joel: So I look to see how teachers are interacting with students when they have to be disciplined. Do they take them to the side and have a quick conversation with them? Or, do they just wait until after the class is over and then have a follow-up conversation with them.

Grace: ...Being able to engage them in conversation. When there is something that could be a difficult conversation in the classroom, or difficult comment, that teachers respond in a way of, "We're all going to be respectful for everyone, whatever it is that you say."

Grace discussed the importance of communicating in a language that students understand:

Grace: I believe to be effective, it has to be consistent, in that it has to be in the language that the student can understand. When a student tells you, "You don't care about me" or "I don't care," it's how you respond. So when they're used to a person, maybe acting like they don't care in return, getting or having a wall up, what happens is that students end up being turned off by you.

Verbal/Nonverbal expressions of care. School leader Grace mentioned caring teachers can communicate with students verbally or nonverbally. She stated:

Grace: So when we're talking about being effective, you want to be able to talk in that student's language so that they understand it...a lot of times that is verbal or nonverbal.

Chloe pointed out that teachers should actually verbalize their feelings of care to students. She stated:

Chloe: And I also look for teachers actually saying that they care. "This is why I need you to do this guys, because I care about you and I want you to do your best, and I want you to be the smartest students in middle school."

Faith added that caring teachers verbalize that belief in students. She stated:

Faith: Or, just showing them that there are people like you who have done wonderful things, and showing them that, you know, "I believe you can do those things as well."

School leaders also noted nonverbal expressions of care. Raven mentioned the importance of physical closeness, specifically proximity. She stated:

Raven: I think our students have to have proximity. You have to get in their space. If I stay at the board or if I stay behind my desk, that kind of tells the kids there's a barrier...But if you're just up there at the board and they raise their hand, and you don't even come near them, it's almost like they're saying, "Okay, well I'm not good enough for you to come in my space." But with African American students, you have to be around and you have to, you have to almost touch them...even if you just pat them on the shoulder and say you know, "You're doing a great job."

Faith mentioned eye contact, paying attention, and moving around the classroom. She said:

Faith: Whether the teacher is making eye contact with the students, whether the teacher is paying attention to when that student is raising his/her hand, answering a question that that student may have, whether the teacher is moving around the room...

Verbal/Nonverbal expressions of care align with Noddings' (2013) research. Cared-for (student) "sees the concern, delight, or interest in the eyes of the one-caring and feels her warmth in both verbal and body language" (p. 19).

Respectful interactions. School leaders noted that another way caring teachers communicate with African American middle school students is through respectful interactions.

Chloe: I look for genuine interactions, where teachers have that connection with students. And, I look at the way students respond to the teacher as well.

Raven: You have to make sure they understand that, if you don't have any interaction with our children, they're not going to respond.

Joel: I also look at their interactions with students and the teacher within the classroom throughout the instructional time. "Who are you calling on? Are you calling on other ethnicities more often than African-American students." So, what is happening in that exchange of instructional time?

John discussed teacher behaviors that are not considered caring:

John: You know, not someone who ostracizes the kid because he or she does something in particular, and is unwilling to go back and kind of counsel them and kind of help them modify what it is they're doing...just someone who is willing to build a relationship.

In order to have respectful interactions, one school leader discussed the importance of trust. She stated:

Raven: And our students, they have to trust you. It's a trust factor, and if they don't trust you and they don't respect you, then they don't respond well to you.

Joy/Humor. School leaders viewed happiness and laughter as a means of showing care for African American middle school students. John discussed the importance of humor. He stated:

John: I look for teachers to be willing to laugh with them. Laughing is important with them, well, in my opinion. Laughing is important with the kids because I think that humor kind of bridges that disconnect because African-Americans want to be, African-American males want to be comfortable in class. I'm sure everybody does, but I know, as an African American male, you want to be comfortable in class and with the person you're working with.

Understanding the humor of African American middle school students helps teachers to not take things personally. Micah discussed the importance of teachers not getting upset about certain things:

Micah: I think along with understanding their world, knowing what things to get upset about and what things not, because a lot of African American kids joke a lot. Maybe because the culture lends itself to it, even when things aren't going well, we (African American students) still want to have fun.

Chloe: But, then I see the relationships that are so smooth, and just seamless, you know where they are laughing and talking, and they can call them by name and they share and they can kind of say something to them and the kids don't react, and things like that. So, then the kids know that, "She cares about me." Then, they respond in a certain way.

Chloe also discussed that she looks for students who appear happy and excited. She stated:

Chloe: I look to see if they're really happy to be in the classroom or if they feel productive. I look to see, you know, if they feel excited, but not even excited, but they're alert because, "I'm learning something, and I'm trusting this teacher."

Sense of community. School leaders believed and research supports that African American students value a family-like or community-like environment.

Micah: I guess along the lines of understanding what's going on with them personally. I think that probably goes for all students, but with the African American culture, it is built a lot off of the ideas of family, and so when you are able to engraft yourself in sharing those familial values with the kids [that's caring]. Some teachers I've seen who do well with them create a sense of family in the classroom.

John: I look for teachers who are establishing that climate in the classroom of comfortable that, "This is our setting and we're going to work here and this is what we're going to do together." You know, I look for teachers to invite that, that unity, that working together.

A summary of school leaders' identified themes of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students may be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Identified Themes of Caring Teacher Behaviors for African American Middle School Students

Identified Themes	Codes/Categories	Subcategories
Build relationships	-Knowledge of students	-Culture, experiences, challenges
Identify and respond to students' needs	-Actions that benefit students	-Encouragement, monitoring and checking for understanding, adjusting instructional practices
Create an emotionally safe classroom environment	-Communication with students	-Purposeful side conversations, verbal/nonverbal expressions, of care, respectful interactions, joy/humor, sense of community

School Leaders' Observed and Identified Critical Incidents of Care

Research Question #2: What do middle school leaders identify as critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?

Themes

School leaders were asked to identify critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students. Three major themes, with respective codes/subcategories, were identified: identify and respond to students' needs (actions that benefit students), create an emotionally safe classroom environment (communication with students), and extend contact with students. Two of the themes, identify and respond to students' needs and create an emotionally safe classroom environment, were also identified themes for school leaders' conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students.

Identify and respond to students' needs. Data indicated all school leaders noted teachers' efforts to identify and respond to students' needs as critical incidents of care. School

leaders shared that teachers could identify and respond to African American middle school students' needs with actions that benefit students, such as encouragement and monitoring and checking for understanding.

Actions that benefit students. School leaders identified incidents where students would benefit from the actions of the teachers.

Encouragement. John discussed a teacher who encouraged her students whenever she would see them. He stated:

John: So she lets them know that, "Hey, I'm here for you and we're going to work together." And I see her having conversations with her students in the cafeteria, in the hallway, and a lot of times, I see her doing it after assessments or right before assessments when she's reviewing for them, where she'll say, "Hey, this is what we're going to do. Y'all better get ready." And you know she's kind of preparing them, and she says, "You've been working on this, and this is what we're going to do, and you're going to do fine." So she is definitely encouraging. Whenever I see her, she's always encouraging.

John also noted how the second teacher he selected encouraged students:

John: Another piece is the feedback she would give them when they participated in class, and she would tell them you know, "Excellent!" or "Great job!" Again, pushing them to make good decisions and do the right thing.

Raven stated:

Raven: I wrote down, throughout the observation, she often praised her students for excelling on the lesson that day.

Faith discussed a teacher who would encourage her students to try. She stated:

Faith: What's standing out for this teacher is that she reminded the students that it was okay to try, even if they didn't get the answer correct.

For the second teacher, Faith stated:

Faith: In this particular observation, the only thing that I noted...that falls under caring was that the teacher complimented her students throughout the review. She consistently said to the students, "Good job."

One school leader noted how positive reinforcement made students feel:

Micah: So, I would say the critical incident related to care... There was a student working at the board and the student thought that he had done the work incorrectly and was kind of getting down on himself, and the teacher stated, "No, it's good. Have confidence." So, students feel comfortable sharing and discussing information out loud in their classroom... going to the board because the teacher gives positive reinforcement.

Monitoring and checking for understanding. Raven mentioned a teacher who circulated the classroom to monitor progress. She stated:

Raven: And so she would go around and make sure that they were doing what they were supposed to do. Some of them worked well independently, but there were some that needed some guidance. So she would go into their space, and she would just bend over and help them quietly.

One school leader pointed out that while monitoring students, one teacher noticed a change in the behavior of one student.

Chloe: ...she was just saying that she [the student] looked sad, and that if she wanted to come and talk to her later, let her know. But she said, "You look sad, and you seem like something is going on." So she said, "If you want to talk to me later, you can." So she had pulled her outside, and that's when I was walking in to come do the observation.

Monitoring students would also allow the teacher to determine if redirection would be needed.

School leader, Raven, identified a teacher who redirected off-task behaviors. She stated:

Raven: She moved around frequently and for anybody that wasn't on task, she kind of redirected them. And said you know, "Hey, we got to make sure we do this to make sure we keep our grades up."

Raven also noted that:

Raven: There were some students who were not on point that she redirected them and asked them to step out of the classroom. And she went out into the hallway and spoke to them alone instead of criticizing them in front of their peers.

Monitoring and checking for understanding would also help teachers determine students' level of understanding and specific actions needed to help students. Chloe discussed a teacher who planned to conference with her students to determine what they needed help with.

Chloe: "You guys do not get 'verbs,' the distinction, some of you don't get the distinction between verbs and nouns." She says, "I want you to think about what it is so I

can help you.” I don’t know how she said it, but she said it like, “I want to know, I want to conference with you once we do our next assignment or our next assessment. So once I conference with you, I can determine how to help you.”

Chloe explained how the conversation went:

Chloe: So she said, “I’m concerned.” It was very genuine. And she says, “Tomorrow, when we do our next assessment, I’ll be calling you over...” Something like that...” So I can help you. I want to be able to help you.” And it was just, it just goes along with who she is. She cares about that they don’t get it. She cares about that. And then she said also today, “Let me take some more time on this because a lot of you are confused, and I want to make sure that you get it.” So, that right there is what I said earlier about caring if kids don’t get it. And that’s what, you know that’s how I would be, like that’s why I’m confused sometimes. I’m like, well you know they don’t get it, well why don’t you...Do you not know that? So she just recognizes what they don’t get and then she cares enough to say, “Let me help you.” And, she says that. So imagine what that feels like to a student in that classroom. “Wow! I can *not* know something, and she is going to help me.”

Monitoring and checking for understanding would also help determine the types of conversations teachers need to have with students. John noted how this could be done by talking to and questioning the students. He stated:

John: She communicates with them, talks to them, ask them questions, inquires into how they're doing, how they are feeling, what are they going through, how can she help them?

Micah pointed out that sometimes teachers must adjust instructional practices to help students understand concepts. He stated:

Micah: The teacher is also willing to get into character in things or use different accents to show, to ensure that students feel comfortable when she is explaining things.

One school leader pointed out that the teacher’s knowledge of the students helped her identify actions to take in order to help the students. She stated:

Grace: So what I think, to me, is caring, is the fact that she was knowledgeable of all her students, their particulars. You know, this particular student kind of turns around a lot. I’m working on him on making sure he’s sitting in a certain spot...So, I think the fact that she has knowledge of her students or has observed her students enough to recognize what are some of their strong suits, how to work those things out.

A review of actual observation documentation revealed that school leaders' observation documentation reflected research on care for African American students and aligned with identified critical incidents discussed by school leaders. A majority of the school leaders' identified Critical Incidents of care focused on identifying and responding to students' needs through actions that benefit students. This was also the case for the actual observation documentation. Data revealed that school leaders documented evidence of teachers supporting students with helpful actions mainly by checking for students' understanding.

Create an emotionally safe classroom environment. Data indicated all school leaders identified aspects of the classroom environment as critical incidents of care. Data revealed that school leaders believed caring teachers of African American middle school students create an emotionally safe classroom environment through communication with students and structure.

Communication with students. School leaders identified incidents whereby teachers communicated with students through verbal/nonverbal expressions of care, respectful interactions, joy/humor, and by fostering a sense of community.

Verbal/Nonverbal expressions of care. One school leader identified an incident where the teacher verbalized her belief in her students:

Micah: The students were taking a test and it's in a content area where the students were not particularly strong. And so the teacher walks around class and gives them positive reinforcement, "Good job." or "Come on, you can do it." "I believe in you." And so I believe that was a very positive thing.

Another school leader mentioned proximity as a nonverbal expression of care:

Grace: When observing, it's more so about...some of the nonverbal pieces that students tend to see. For instance...proximity, or being close to them and not feeling that they are standoffish.

Respectful interactions. Some school leaders discussed respectful student-teacher interactions as a form of care:

Chloe: Well, it was just the overall interactions with her students, and you can tell that she has positive relationships with them...It was just the way she talked to them, the way they responded to her, the feel that I got when I walked into the classroom...She treats them with genuine love and respect...Just her voice, her tone, conversations with them.

Joel's reflection of this incident pointed out the feeling expressed through the interaction:

Joel: The students interact with the teacher by adhering to what the teacher was directing students to do, and I guess this is something you had to have been there to experience. It was a certain tone or a certain feeling that was expressed in that interaction. You could pick up quickly that the teacher and that student, and the students, had a great working relationship, and that they respected each other in that working relationship. In regards to the teacher to the student, it was the same. And I think, that tone comes from what that teacher has actually established. I think it is just the makeup of the teacher. It's just the characteristic of the teacher. And, therefore, it was carried through his interaction with his students, both on a whole scale or individually.

Joel's second identified critical incident of care also focused on respectful interactions in a first year teacher's classroom. Although the teacher has been working to implement strategies suggested by administration, she still struggled with classroom management. Although her frustration was evident, she still continued to be respectful to her challenging students. In his discussion of this incident, Joel pointed out the manner in which the teacher redirected students who were off task. He stated:

Joel: One thing that stood out for me during this observation was when she was with her small group. There were some students outside of her group within the classroom who were off-task. But, she redirected them one or two times and then they adhered to those redirections. But, she did so in a positive way, but yet and still, this is a teacher who is developing those best practices and some of the behaviors in the classroom were not positive. But the way she is beginning, or she did in this observation, the way that she handled those was a positive redirection.

Grace also cited a critical incident pointing to the manner in which the teacher redirected students. Grace stated:

Grace: When it was their time, or she called on them to respond, the students were not only respectful of the teacher, but they were respectful of each other. So, it wasn't a lot of other chattering going on. And if there was, the teacher was great at, you know, classroom management. She was good at redirecting students if they were off task.

Joy/Humor. School leaders noted the importance of students enjoying class and having fun:

Chloe: ...In this classroom they just all seemed to just have fun. They were choral reading and they were just having fun with it, and you know, no one felt embarrassed. And, she was praising them, and everyone just had smiles on their faces.

Micah: The students for the most part will continue to try without complaining, they'll give more effort, some of them will have smiles on their faces.

Raven: The students really enjoyed class.

Raven: And so they come in and they're always smiling, kids smile. You know the kids are a reflection of whatever body language you come into the classroom with or whatever temperament, the kids mirror it.

Sense of community. While discussing the critical incident of care from one observation, Chloe felt the interactions between the students and the teacher created a community feel in the classroom. She described the incident in the following manner:

Chloe: It was just a community feel. It was just when I walked in, it was an environment conducive to learning. "We were free to make mistakes, free to contribute, we felt free to be a part of the learning environment. The teacher cares about me." I didn't hear any sarcasm or any, "You should know this." It was all about, you know, "We should learn together."

John discussed how the seating arrangement fostered collaboration:

John: She has them in quads. They're sitting in fours and so one of the specific things I asked her was, "Why sit them in quads?" And her response was, "We're in a world where everyone is working together. These kids need to learn how to work collaboratively with one another. If that's one of the things that we're expecting, people are expecting of us as teachers, why don't we do this to kids because that's a skill that is a life skill that they're going to have to transition with."

Structure. In discussing expectations, one school leader noted how the teacher would share her beliefs when she redirected students. This helped enforce the classroom structures:

John: Okay. In this particular observation, I noted that she established clear expectations for her classroom, and whenever she had to redirect students, she would let them know her beliefs. She would start by saying, "In here..." or "In this class we..." And to me, that shows care because she wants them engaging in and doing what it is she expects of

them because she shared it with them, "In this class, this is what we do. This is how we do things." And to me, that's caring because she could have just as easily just let them kind of go and do whatever and not engage them at all.

This leader also noted:

John: The teacher spends a significant amount of time making an attempt to be proactive to ensure that the students make the best decisions and are keeping in line with the class expectations and with her expectations and the building expectations, and principal's expectations.

Structure can create an environment where the teacher does not have to remind students of the rules. Grace noted:

Grace: It is very balanced. And that's what's unique about it because when she needed the time to talk, she didn't have to remind them about the rules. She could if she needed to, so that means she didn't have a problem redirecting students. However, it was very balanced, so when she talked, they were quiet.

In a critical incident noted by school leader Faith, the teacher's structure lead students to have a reverent fear of the teacher. Faith stated:

Faith: This particular teacher is very structured. The students have a reverent type fear of the teacher. But once they get to know her, then they know that she does care about what happens to them, once they get to really know her.

Consistency could also help create structure. Chloe pointed out:

Chloe: Every time I'm in there, it's consistent. I can say that. It's just that with this teacher, it's consistent. I like being in there. Very seldom, if ever, do I get referrals from that class, so that's evidence that when I'm not in there, the relationships are there.

Structure is needed for students to remain calm and focused. Raven stated:

Raven: I would say that it was a quiet and calm environment. The kids were very focused, very in tune to what she was doing.

In another identified critical incident, John discussed how the teacher explained the routines and tasks to students. He said:

John: ...She took the time to explain to me what she explained to them and the routines and the tasks that they were going to be responsible for while sitting in these quads. And to me again, that shows care because she's willing to go through and explain to these

kids, "This is what I expect of you while you are working together, and this is how we do things when working as quads or as groups."

A review of actual observation documentation revealed that school leaders' observation documentation reflected research on care for African American students and aligned with identified critical incidents discussed by school leaders. In actual observation documentation, school leaders identified critical incidents of care focused on creating an emotionally safe classroom environment as evidence of care. School leaders documented and discussed evidence of teachers having respectful interactions with students as well as evidence of structure in the classroom, including clear expectations, routines, and procedures. Although collaboration was identified by two school leaders in their interviews, four school leaders documented evidence of collaboration in their actual observations of the teachers.

Identified Critical Incidents Outside the Classroom

In addition to the identified critical incidents of care from their observations, school leaders were asked to identify and reflect on any critical incidents of care related to the teachers' extended contact with students.

Extend contact with students. Data indicated school leaders identified critical incidents regarding teachers extending contact with students outside the classroom/academics.

Extend contact outside classroom/academics. Raven discussed a teacher who extends contact with her students by having an after school open door policy and through tutoring:

Raven: She has an open door policy after school. And so the kids can come in after school and get any help that they need, and she stays with them. She's also one that stayed back and helped paint as well. But, she does a lot of tutoring, a lot of tutoring with the students and she has a good relationship with them. They don't have a problem talking to her and telling her anything, and that's boys and girls.

Joel discussed a teacher who extends contact with students by complimenting and rewarding them throughout the school. He stated:

Joel: In the hallways, I've seen this teacher interact with other classes or other students as they travel through the hallway. For instance, giving out behavior incentives. That is one of the things that we use for our climate and culture here with PBIS. So, I see, observe this teacher complimenting students and giving out behavior incentives to acknowledge that they were doing the right things.

John noted a teacher who extends contact with students through engaging dialogue:

John: Well, the teacher is always engaging with her students, inside and outside of the classroom. In settings, after school or during school, she's with them...So those are the types of things that I see that this teacher does that shows that she cares about her kids, and not only what they're doing in school, but what's going on outside of school that could be adversely affecting school.

Grace stated:

Grace: What I can say is that outside the classroom is that she, because she's passionate about the students' learning, and she makes sure she avails herself after school, a lot.

Micah discussed a teacher who extends contact with students through extracurricular activities.

He stated:

Micah: I've seen some people take kids to games and do extracurricular activities with them, outside of their, you know, their duties, just to show a child that hey, someone's here in your corner. We're not going to just let you go, but we are going to make sure that, you know, what you need is there for you.

Table 4 organizes identified themes, codes/categories, and subcategories for the identified themes of critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students.

Table 4

Identified Themes of Critical Incidents of Caring Teacher Behaviors for African American Middle School Students (In and Outside of the Classroom)

Identified Themes	Codes/Categories	Subcategories
Identify and respond to students' needs	-Actions that benefit students	-Encouragement, monitoring and checking for understanding
Create an emotionally safe classroom environment	-Communicate with students -Structure	-Verbal/Nonverbal expressions of care, respectful interactions, joy/humor, sense of community,
Extend contact with students	-Outside classroom/ academics	-High expectations

Conceptualizations/Critical Incidents of Teacher Care for African American Middle School Students as compared to Noddings (1988)

Research Question #3: How do school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students reflect Noddings' (1988) plan for the implementation of the ethics of care?

Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care includes modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. The school leader participants in this study were not asked questions directly related to the four components. Instead, the researcher looked to see how responses to interview questions corresponded to the components. This study of school leaders conceptualizations/critical incidents of care resulted in four identified themes related to care for African American middle school students: build relationships, identify and respond to students' needs, create an emotionally safe classroom environment, and extend contact with students.

These themes and accompanying codes/categories and subcategories can be compared to Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care.

Modeling

Noddings' (2013) modeling component points to the teacher portraying himself/herself as the one-caring. Although school leaders did not use the term modeling, they did discuss teacher behaviors that modeled care for students. Data analysis revealed that most of the school leaders believe teachers model care when they identify and respond to students' needs. School leaders also discussed aspects of creating an emotionally safe classroom environment, including structure and fostering a sense of community.

Identifying and responding to students' needs is a way for teachers to model care. School leaders discussed encouragement and monitoring and checking for understanding which are actions that could be modeled by teachers. This is reflective of Noddings' (2013) belief that caring teachers "...intervene perceptively and creatively, attributing the best possible motive, and offering our help and our example in caring" (p. 193). School leaders cited proximity as a nonverbal expression of teacher care. This is reflective of Noddings (2013) as well since she has noted the importance of the teacher's physical presence because students know when they are being received or ignored.

Structure, one aspect of an emotionally safe classroom environment, provides teachers a way to model rules and expectations. School leaders discussed the importance of teachers having rules and clear expectations. This reflects Noddings' (2013) plan for implementing an ethic of care. Noddings (2013) believes that a caring teacher is "not content to enforce rules – and may even refuse occasionally to do so – but she continually refers the rules to their ground in caring" (p. 178). Coincidentally, none of the school leaders mentioned enforcing rules or giving

consequences. School leaders did mention having purposeful side conversations with students to help get them back on track behaviorally. How students learn to approach problems as a result of their relationship with the teacher is more important to caring teachers than punishing the student (Noddings, 2013).

School leaders discussed fostering a sense of community. This also provides teachers an opportunity to model care and is reflective of Noddings' (2013) research since she discusses the importance of classrooms being collaborative and cooperatively organized for tasks. Research on the ideal classroom environment for African American students speaks to creating a family or community-like environment (Howard, 2001). In order for a family or community-like environment to be established, it must be collaborative (Rychly & Graves, 2012) and there must be shared emotions, values, and beliefs (Rungrojngarmcharoen, 2013). A family or community-like environment does allow for students' perspectives to be heard and valued (Peer & Huston, 2009).

School leaders discussed classrooms having a certain level of comfort whereby students felt free to share ideas. This could be fostered in an emotionally safe classroom environment. Additionally, in identifying critical incidents of care, school leaders referenced respectful interactions. Research on care for African American students reflects this and suggests that African American students view school as a place to help them deal with their emotions, and a caring staff and calm environment leads students to be less volatile and angry (Cassidy and Bates, 2005).

In an effort to model care for African American students, teachers' actions must be perceived as caring by these students. A problem with the modeling component is that Noddings (1994) provides a Western European perspective on modeling and African American teachers

and White teachers have been known to demonstrate care toward African American students in different ways. African American teachers often show care through their insistence that students reach potential and through their non-acceptance of nonsense from students (Milner, 2012).

While Noddings (2013) views “meanness” as anticaring, research on care for African American students suggests that if students perceive the teacher to be caring, students are able to look beyond their teacher being “mean” to see the purpose behind the teacher’s actions (Howard, 2001). Consequently, these teachers must be mindful of their responses to students and remain firm yet supportive (Howard, 2001). White teachers, on the other hand, are often reluctant to reprimand African American students because of the students’ accusations of racial bias (Henfield & Washington, 2012).

Dialogue

Data analysis revealed that the use of dialogue was evident across all of the identified themes. Although school leaders did not use the term dialogue, they did discuss behaviors and interactions that require dialogue, such as talking with students to gain knowledge of them, purposeful side conversations, respectful interactions, and having extended contact with students.

Most school leaders commented on getting to know students through the use of dialogue. School leaders viewed dialogue as being important in holding conversations with students about their culture, experiences, and challenges. This is reflective of Noddings (2013), “...When I spend time in dialogue with my students, I am rewarded not only with appreciation but also with all sorts of information and insights” (p. 52). Although building relationships can be done through dialogue, given the constraints of time in school, this relatedness is often dismissed (Noddings, 2013). As a solution, Noddings’ (2013) suggests if teachers are present to the students as the students address the teacher, then the teachers do not have to spend time

establishing “deep, lasting, time-consuming” relationships with each student (p. 180). One important factor only mentioned by two school leaders that is crucial to Noddings’ (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care, is the development of a reciprocal relation between the student and the teacher. Although school leaders were descriptive in their explanations for building relationships with students, Noddings (1992) suggests that a caring relationship is only established once the student receives and responds to the efforts of the teacher (Noddings, 1992).

All of the school leaders discussed the use of dialogue in caring teachers’ efforts to identify and respond to needs of African American middle school students. School leaders discussed teachers questioning students about what they should be doing, and redirecting students as needed in order to hold them accountable for assigned work. This is reflective of Noddings (2013) since she believes that in order to be viewed as caring, the one-caring must make a commitment to act. One school leader even noted contacting parents as an action that would benefit students. This use of dialogue aligns with Noddings (2013) who even suggests that teachers “First engage in true dialogue with parents before with students (need trust and cooperation)” (p. 184).

Although dialogue is important, the manner in which teachers engage in dialogue with African American middle school students is important as well. A gap in Noddings’ (2013) research would be the attention needed for understanding how to communicate with African American middle school students. Dialogue poses a problem for African American students when teachers’ perceptions of caring differ from that of the students. Van Galen (1993) examined how care was defined across cultural groups in a high school. Interviews with students, parents, and staff revealed a caring school atmosphere. Classroom observations, however, exposed a different reality. Teachers were more likely to engage in extended dialogue

with White male students than females and African American males. Teachers were also more likely to use humor to communicate with White males about the students' lives outside of school. Humor used with African American students was minimal and focused on performance in school-related athletic events.

Practice

Noddings' (2013) practice component refers to providing students with opportunities to care for people, animals, and plants (p. 187). School leaders did not mention practice specifically, and data did not reveal their views on practice. However, school leaders did discuss how students mirror teacher actions within an emotionally safe classroom environment. This can also be done through extended contact with teachers.

School leaders pointed out that caring teachers of African American students spend time demonstrating care to students outside the classroom. This is done through after school tutoring, service projects, extracurricular activities, and conversations outside of the classroom. These opportunities provide a means for students to participate in supervised practice in caring. Although this is reflective on Noddings (2013), the challenge of extending contact with students is that it often requires a commitment of extra time from the teacher, beyond school hours. "These extended contact opportunities allow teachers to act as 'counselors and advisors in their subject fields and not just as imparters of knowledge'" (Noddings, 2013, p. 187). A suggestion made by Noddings (2013) for extended contact with students is for teachers to remain with students for several years to establish a level of trust and understanding. This is not a practice in the division of the school leaders participating in this study.

Confirmation

The fourth component of Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing care ethics that was commonly expressed by the school leaders was confirmation. "When we attribute the best possible motive consonant with reality to the cared-for, we confirm him" (Noddings, 2013, p. 193). Data analysis revealed that most of the school leaders discussed how teachers confirm students in their efforts to identify and respond to students' needs and to create an emotionally safe classroom environment. Although school leaders did not use the term confirmation, they did discuss behaviors and interactions that confirm students, such as actions that benefit them and nonverbal expressions of care.

Actions that benefit students, such as encouragement, monitoring and checking for understanding, and adjusting instructional practices help confirm students. School leaders noted that students respond to teachers' efforts to confirm them through behaviors such as receiving the action, smiling, and/or completing their work. This is reflective of Noddings (2013), whereby "The response of students remains at the heart of confirmation for teachers" (Noddings, 2013, p. 196).

The data revealed that only one school leader made a direct reference to caring teachers having high expectations for African American middle school students. This is surprising since research on care for African American students suggests that students feel teachers care when they express high expectations and are strict about students doing their work (Howard, 2001). Although most school leaders did not mention high expectations, some commented that caring teachers make sure students are doing what they should to be doing. Also, Howard (2002) noted that high expectations are conveyed through personal moments, and teachers devoting extra time to work with students before or after school. With this being the case, school leaders indirectly

referred to high expectations when they spoke of teachers having extended contact with students. Noddings (2013) discusses high expectations, but states, "Simply to have high expectations for our students in general is not confirmation" (p. 196)

School leaders noted ways teachers confirm students in an emotionally safe classroom environment. Nonverbal expressions of care, such as eye contact and proximity, confirm students. This is reflective of Noddings' (2013) research that suggests students are confirmed when they see concern or interest in the eyes of their teachers, and they feel care through the teacher's words and body language. School leaders discussed laughter as a way of showing care. This is also reflective of Noddings' (2013) research. According to Noddings (2013), "When we care, the humor, the harmless desires, the tendency toward playfulness of the cared-for enter us" (p. 53). A gap in Noddings' (2013) research, however, is related to verbal expressions of care. School leaders discussed the importance of teachers actually telling African American middle school students they care about them and believe in them.

Summary of Study

Identified Themes

Analysis of school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students revealed four major themes: build relationships, identify and respond to students' needs, create an emotionally safe classroom environment, and extend contact with students.

Identified theme #1: Build relationships. Data revealed that school leaders believed caring teachers of African American middle school students work to build relationships with their students. An identified code/category was having knowledge of students. In order to build relationships, school leaders noted that teachers must gain knowledge of students' culture,

experiences, and challenges. Building relationships was not identified as a major theme for school leaders' identified critical incidents of care.

Identified theme #2: Identify and respond to students' needs. Data revealed that school leaders believed caring teachers of African American middle school students must identify and respond to students' needs. This theme was identified as a major theme for school leader conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students as well as for identified critical incidents of care. The same code/category was identified for both as well: actions that benefit students. School leaders noted several subcategories: encouragement, monitor and check for understanding, and adjust instructional practices to meet the needs of students. The one subcategory that emerged in school leaders' conceptualizations but not for their identified critical incidents of care was adjusting instructional practices.

Identified theme #3: Create an emotionally safe classroom environment. Data revealed that school leaders believed caring teachers of African American middle school students must create an emotionally safe classroom environment. This theme was identified as a major theme for school leader conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students as well as for identified critical incidents of care. Two major codes/categories were identified for creating an emotionally safe classroom environment: communication with students and structure. School leaders noted specific subcategories related to communication with students: purposeful side conversations, verbal/nonverbal expressions of care, respectful interactions, joy/humor, and foster a sense of community. No additional categories were identified for the subtheme of structure.

Identified theme #4: Extend contact with students. Data revealed that school leaders believed caring teachers of African American middle school students should have extended contact with students outside the classroom/academics. This was identified as an additional theme after the researcher prompted school leaders to share other ways the caring teachers they selected to discuss demonstrated care for African American middle school students. School leaders mentioned ways teachers extend contact with students outside the classroom/academics. A subcategory identified for this theme was high expectations, since Howard (2002) revealed that high expectations are conveyed through personal moments, and teachers devoting extra time to work with students before or after school.

Connection to Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an Ethic of Care

Results indicated that middle school leaders' conceptualizations of care were reflective of Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Modeling was reflected in two of the identified themes: identify and respond to students' needs and create an emotionally safe classroom environment. Dialogue was reflected across all identified themes: build relationships, identify and respond to students' needs, create an emotionally safe classroom environment, and extend contact with students. Practice was reflected in two of the identified themes: create an emotionally safe classroom environment and extend contact with students. Finally, confirmation was reflected in three of the identified themes: identify and respond to students' needs, create an emotionally safe classroom environment, and extend contact with students.

Table 5 organizes identified themes, codes/categories, and subcategories for the identified themes of school leaders' overall conceptualizations and critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students: build relationships, identify and

respond to students' needs, create an emotionally safe classroom environment, and extend contact with students.

Summary of School Leaders' Conceptualizations/Critical Incidents of Teacher Care for African American Middle School Students

Table 5

Summary of School Leaders' Conceptualizations/Critical Incidents of Care for African American Middle School Students as compared to Nodding's (1988) plan for implementing an Ethic of Care

Noddings (1988)	Identified Themes	Codes/Categories	Subcategories
Dialogue	Build relationships	-Knowledge of students	-Culture, experiences, challenges
Modeling, Dialogue, Confirmation	Identify and respond to students' needs	-Actions that benefit students	-Encouragement, monitoring and checking for understanding, adjusting instructional practices
Modeling, Dialogue, Practice, and Confirmation	Create an emotionally safe classroom environment	-Communication with students -Structure	-Purposeful side-conversations, verbal/non-verbal expressions of care, respectful interactions, joy/humor, sense of community
Dialogue, Practice, Confirmation	Extend contact with students	-Outside classroom/ academics	-High expectations

A visual portrayal of these themes and their respective codes/categories and subcategories can be found in Figure 1.

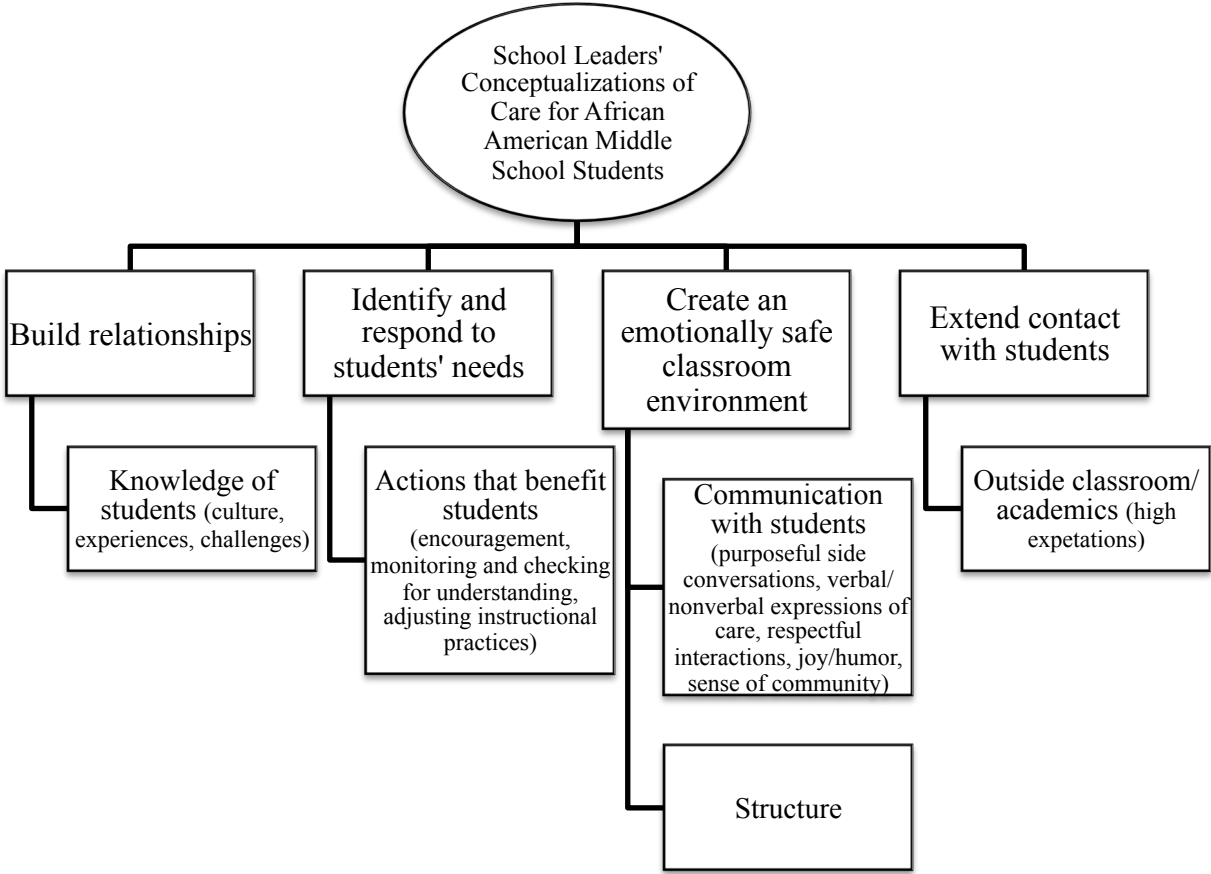


Figure 1.

Summary of School Leaders' Conceptualizations/Critical Incidents of Teacher Care for African American Middle School Students

Summary

The goal of this study was to explore school leaders' conceptualizations/identified critical incidents of care and determine how they reflect Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. The intent of this study was to gain insight from seven school leaders working in middle schools with predominately African American populations. Data collection consisted of individual interviews, identification of critical incidents of care, and observation documentation. Data analysis revealed four major themes: build relationships, identify and respond to students' needs, create an emotionally safe classroom environment, and extend contact with students.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Study Overview

This study examined school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students. In order to understand how school leaders conceptualize teacher care for African American middle school students, what school leaders identify as critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors, and how school leaders' conceptualizations compare to Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care, this study was guided by three research questions:

- What are middle school leaders' conceptualizations of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?
- What do middle school leaders identify as critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students?
- How do school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of teacher care for African American middle school students reflect Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care.

Literature on care asserted the most effective model for implementing care in schools would be Noddings' (1988) plan of action for implementing an ethic of care. This model includes four components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

A case study design was selected for this qualitative research, and data were collected from interviews with school leaders about caring teacher behaviors, discussions of critical incidents of teacher care, and a review of documented observation reports. Data analysis included the following steps (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995): memoing, interview transcriptions,

constant comparison, categorization of data (categorical aggregation), interpretation of single instances (direct interpretations), identification of patterns (pattern identification), and synthesis and generalizations (naturalistic generalization).

Identified themes and respective codes/categories from the study included: build relationships (knowledge of students), identify and respond to students' needs (actions that benefit students), create an emotionally safe classroom environment (communication with students; structure), and extend contact with students (outside classroom/academics). Results indicated that middle school leaders' conceptualizations of care were reflective of Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care. One identified code/category, communication with students, included the following subcategories: purposeful side conversations, verbal/nonverbal expressions of care, respectful interactions, joy/humor, and a sense of community. Of these subcategories, purposeful side conversations, emerged as an effective way to engage in dialogue with students regarding behavioral issues and other concerns. This is reflective of research on care for African American students since these students want teachers who do not embarrass them or punish them unfairly (Casteel, 2000). Adding purposeful side conversations to Noddings' (1984) dialogue component may be a way to reframe the narrative of dialogue to accommodate the needs of African American students in an effort to effectively show care for African American middle school students.

Obtaining leaders' conceptualizations of their teachers' care for African American students could be a means of identifying and addressing teacher practices that may impede or enhance the academic success of African American middle school students. Implications assert the importance of school leaders providing professional development on teacher care for African

American middle school students. Chapter 5 focuses on a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Restatement of the Problem

Care matters and educators who care make a difference in the lives of students since students will adjust their behavior for teachers they perceive care for them (Shann, 1999). Students will work harder academically for caring teachers (Cothran & Ennis, 2000) and engage in academic tasks (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Research shows that students of color know the difference between teachers who care and do not care, and students' sense of self and their academic achievement levels improve when teachers care (Lopez, 2003; Ochoa, 2007; Thompson, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). Students will react negatively if they feel misunderstood or disrespected by teachers and positively if they feel teachers hold them in high regard and are interested in their welfare (Hallinan, 2008, p. 273). Although a student will ultimately learn what he chooses to learn (Noddings, 2013), he needs the "cooperative guidance of a fully caring adult" to "attain competence in his own world of experience" (Noddings, 2013, p. 178).

Care matters to African American students because it helps them identify with academics (Osborne, 1999). Many believe that minority students have poor academic performance because they are lazy, do not value education, and have parents who do not care (Hale, 2001; Thompson, 2004). Building positive relationships between teachers and students that focus on achievement goals and creating a sense of belonging in the classroom is an option for addressing academic disidentification (Steele, 1997). When educators place the responsibility of student apathy on students and their families, they "fail to recognize the school factors that can lead to disengagement, frustration, and low achievement" (Thompson, 2008). Contrary to stereotypes,

studies show that most African American students value their education, hope to attend college, and have parents who care about their education (Horn, Chen, & Chapman, 2003).

Care is especially crucial at the middle school level. Research suggests academic success is impacted by challenges occurring in middle school classrooms (Ames & Miller, 1994; Dickinson, 2002; Doda & Thompson, 2002; Liptiz, 1984; Merenbloom, 1991). A dispassionate approach is created when students transition to middle school. Students move from caring, family-like relationships, that include hugging in elementary school to bell schedules, multiple teachers, high-stakes testing, where hugs are avoided in middle school (Toshalis, 2016). Students experience a decline in self-esteem and academic self-efficacy (Baran, 2010; Peterson, Hamilton, & Russell, 2009), and relational connections are removed from learning environments just when they become developmentally necessary (Toshalis, 2016, p. 18). When students do not perceive teachers as caring, students do not care about or pay attention to classroom rules or management strategies (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2003), causing them to not be as successful as they could be in school.

School leaders influence school culture and aspects of school organization (Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2011) and can, therefore, create conditions for teachers to be caring. First, school leaders must work to cultivate caring school communities (Fuqua and Newman, 2002; Lawrence and Maitlis, 2012). This requires school leaders to develop teachers' capacity for caring for students and developing school organizational conditions to support expressions of caring (Cassidy and Bates, 2005; Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016; Murphy and Torre, 2014; Solomon, Schaps, Watson, & Battistich 1992). Next, school leaders must help teachers put caring into practice by aligning expectations with the teacher evaluation system expectations. School leaders can promote the application of caring teacher practices through expectations,

encouragement, feedback, and guidance. Finally, school leaders must create organizational conditions that support caring. This can be done through providing opportunities, in and outside of school, for teachers and students to engage in caring interactions (Smylie, Murphy, & Louis, 2016). “From years of studying school leadership and reform, working with practicing educators, and participating in education policy development, we have come to conclude that caring lies at the heart of effective schooling and good school leadership” (Smylie, Murphy, & Louis, 2016, p. 1).

Teachers enter into a caring relation with students and cannot be relieved of their responsibilities to care for students. A teacher is first, the one-caring and, second, a content specialist (Noddings, 2013). Teachers have frequent interactions with students and ethical ideals are, therefore, involved. A teacher cannot nurture the student intellectually and disregard an ethic of care. As a result of the impact teacher care has on students, the primary aim of educational institutions and efforts should be maintaining and enhancing care (Noddings, 2013).

School leaders can ensure an ethic of care exists in schools by having an understanding of Noddings' (1988) plan for implementation: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. This plan served as the conceptual framework for this study. Although the work of Noddings (1988), a white feminine, is groundbreaking in the area of care, school leaders' conceptualizations of care from this study provided insight as to whether components of the plan needed to be reframed to accommodate the needs of African American middle school students.

Methodology

Research design. A case study design was selected for this qualitative research. Case studies can be used to learn more about situations where limited knowledge is available (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). This approach was used since a case study is “an exploration of a ‘bounded

system' of a case or multiple cases over time through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). In this study, multiple cases were used in order to "make comparisons, build theory, or propose generalizations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 141). Data were collected from seven middle school leaders through multiple sources including interviews, discussions of critical incidents of care, and school leaders' observation documentation.

Data collection. Data collection took place over the course of four weeks and included interviews, discussions of identified critical incidents of care, and a review of observation documentation. School leader and school demographic data were collected prior to each interview. With each school leader, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and discussions of care for two teachers the school leaders had observed and considered to be caring. Participants provided the researcher with two observations reports (Standard 5 section) they completed on the selected teachers. Participants also discussed additional incidents of care demonstrated by the teachers observed. An audit trail was maintained in order to organize research activities, participant information, consent forms, observation reports, interview protocols, field notes, memos, transcripts, and coding efforts (Creswell, 2007).

Data analysis. Data analysis included the following steps (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995): memoing, transcription of interviews, constant comparison, categorization of data (categorical aggregation), interpretation of single instances (direct interpretations), identification of patterns (pattern identification), and synthesis and generalizations (naturalistic generalization).

Discussion of Findings

Discussion of Themes

School leaders' interviews, discussion of critical incidents of care, and a review of documented observations resulted in the following identified themes and respective codes/categories: build relationships (knowledge of students), identify and respond to students' needs (actions that benefit students), create an emotionally safe classroom environment (communication with students; structure), and extend contact with students (outside classroom/academics). Some codes/categories included specific subcategories: knowledge of students (culture, experiences, challenges), actions that benefit students (encouragement, monitoring and checking for understanding, adjusting instructional practices), communication with students (purposeful side conversations, verbal/nonverbal expressions of care, respectful interactions, joy/humor, sense of community), and outside classroom/academics (high expectations).

Identified theme #1: Build relationships. Building relationships was identified as a major theme. Positive relationships help African American students identify with academics (Steele, 1997) and offers middle school students an opportunity to build family-like relationships. It was surprising that school leaders did not specifically or directly identify incidents involving the building of relationships when discussing critical incidents of care for their selected observations. This may be attributed to an assumption made of the part of the leaders. It could be that when observing teachers, school leaders assume teachers have already worked to build relationships with students, so they do not feel the need to document it.

School leaders also discussed gaining knowledge of students' culture, experiences, and challenges. In the age of high-stakes testing, when teachers are content-focused, this poses a

challenge. Time restraints do not always allow teachers an opportunity to spend time getting to know all of their students in this manner. As a result, teachers must find small increments of time to connect with and focus on individual students and find ways to extend contact with students.

Identified theme #2: Identify and respond to students' needs. This theme aligns with research on care for African American students. Research on students' perceptions of caring teachers reveals students' need to have academic support that provides students with needed assistance (Wentzel, 1997; Ruggiero, 2005). A key point that school leaders made in this study is that caring teachers of African American middle school students actually identify students needs, and then they respond with helpful actions. Identifying student needs requires an awareness, which is reflected in Noddings' (1984) engrossment. Engrossment creates a shift of energy toward the cared-for (Noddings, 1984). "The one-caring desires the well-being of the cared for and acts (or abstains from acting – makes an internal act of commitment) to promote that well-being" (Noddings, 2013, p. 24).

School leaders identified actions that benefit students: encouragement, monitor and check for understanding, and adjust instructional practices to meet the needs of students. Of the three actions, adjusting instructional practices may require additional planning. Instruction can be ineffective when the teacher uses traditional methods to instruct students from different backgrounds who approach learning differently (DeVita, 2001). Adjustments to traditional teaching practices must be made in order to reach students with varying learning styles (Rychly & Graves, 2012). When the teacher's teaching style and the students' learning styles are not aligned, instruction can be ineffective. Culturally responsive teachers instruct within a context that is familiar to students (Savage, Hindle, Meyer, Penetito, & Sleeter, 2011). Students bring

learning resources to school with them, in the form of prior education and individual experiences. Teachers must acknowledge, respect, and use these learning resources when planning instruction. It was surprising that cultural relevance was not mentioned by school leaders since it is beneficial for students experiencing academic disidentification (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This could possibly be attributed to teachers not understanding how to draw on students' home culture to help them succeed, high-stakes testing and a focus on content, or teachers not having the time or feeling comfortable enough to hold discussions on social justice issues.

Identified theme #3: Create an emotionally safe classroom environment.

School leaders mentioned factors that allow teachers to create an emotionally safe classroom environment. Diverse learners need an ethic of care within the classroom that is demonstrated in a nonthreatening and intellectually focused space (Walshaw & Anthony, 2008). According to Noddings (2013), "The child genuinely cared-for is free to respond as himself, to create, to follow his interests without unnecessary fear and anxiety" (p. 72). In order for this to occur, students must feel emotionally safe in the classroom environment.

School leaders felt that teachers of African American middle school students could create an emotionally safe classroom environment through communication with students and structure. The code/category, communication with students, revealed the use of purposeful side conversations as an effective way to engage in dialogue with students regarding behavioral issues and other concerns. This is reflective of research on care for African American students since these students want teachers who do not embarrass them or punish them unfairly (Casteel, 2000). Communication with students also revealed the need for a sense of community. This aligns with research on care for African American students since the learning style of African

American students is more collaborative and communal than the more independent learning style of the dominant culture (Rychly & Graves, 2012). The code/category of structure is reflective of African American students' need for classroom management, whereby teachers have the ability to control the class (Delpit, 1988). Students can feel emotionally safe when the learning environment is "predictable, structured, familiar" (Perry, 2000, p. 4). Reflective of care, a sense of emotional safety comes from consistent attention to students' needs, which leads to predictability (Perry, 2000).

Identified theme #4: Extend contact with students. Extending contact with students is a way to show care for them. School leaders discussed how the identified teachers spend time after school hours tutoring students, attending extracurricular activities, and working on service projects with students. This appeared to be the norm for the caring teachers discussed by the school leaders. However, is this the expectation for being considered a caring teacher? Or, can a teacher be viewed as a caring teacher if he/she does not have extended contact with students? Due to commitments to their own families or other outside situations, some teachers may not be able to commit to having extended contact with students outside of regular school hours. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to ensure that the time they do spend with students is used productively. As Noddings (2013) has stated, "I do not need to establish a deep, lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every student. What I must do is to be totally and non-selectively present to the student – to each student – as he addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total" (p. 180).

Connection to Noddings' (1988) plan for implementation of Ethic of Care

References to all four identified themes can be found in Noddings' (1988) research. However, the most notable difference between school leaders' conceptualizations/critical

incidents of care and Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care points to the code/category for the identified theme of creating an emotionally safe classroom environment: communication with students.

Data revealed that school leaders believe teachers communicate with African American middle school students through purposeful side conversations, verbal/nonverbal expressions of care, respectful interactions, joy/humor, and a sense of community. While Noddings (1988) references interactions, joy/humor, and collaboration in the classroom, she does not discuss purposeful side conversations, especially as a means of addressing disciplinary concerns or other issues. Adding purposeful side conversations to Noddings' (1984) dialogue component may be a way to reframe the narrative of dialogue to accommodate the care needs of African American students.

Reframing the Narrative

Noddings (1992) discusses dialogue as a component of her plan for implementing an ethic of care. Since students perceive care differently based on culture, the dialogue component comes with an assumption that African American students will perceive dialogue with the teacher as caring. This must be questioned since teachers of different races or cultures may communicate with students differently. Research on care for African American students suggests these students want teachers who do not embarrass them or punish them unfairly (Casteel, 2000). Although Noddings' (1992) traditional White feminine framework attempts to address cultural differences, research is limited on its ability to help the one-caring teacher address the needs of the cared-for African American students. In this study, school leaders noted that teachers would pull students to the side or meet with them after class to discuss discipline related matters. As a result, "purposeful side conversations" was identified as a subcategory.

Although Noddings (1992) references open-ended conversations, natural discourse, and listening with her dialogue component, she does not mention pulling students aside to have purposeful conversations about discipline matters. Reframing Noddings' framework to include a component called "purposeful side conversations" may be a means for filling this gap in Noddings' research. Purposeful side conversations would offer an effective way for teachers to communicate with African American middle school students, especially about disciplinary concerns, through Noddings' (1988) framework.

Purposeful side conversations. All school leaders mentioned the use of dialogue in caring teachers' efforts to communicate with students. School leaders discussed teachers having conversations with students by pulling students aside or speaking with them one-on-one to discuss discipline issues or other situations. These purposeful side conversations help teachers avoid criticizing students in front of their peers. Also, in Steele's (1992, 1997) stereotype threat theory, he mentions how African American students can become anxious about their performance, especially when an incorrect answer is given in class. As a self-protective measure, these students will reduce their identification with academics (Epps, 1970; Katz & Greenbaum, 1963). Holding purposeful side conversations with students, instead of addressing or criticizing students in front of the entire class, may provide a possible solution to their anxiety as well as a means for them to avoid reducing their identification with academics.

Purposeful side conversations would require the one-caring teacher to hold purposeful, individual conversations related to discipline concerns, or other situations needing attention, with the cared-for student. Philipp & Thanheiser (2010) found that care is developed when teachers spend time holding individual conversations with students. This improves their relationship with students, sparks positive changes within the students, and changes their own perceptions of the

students. Purposeful side conversations would allow the teacher and the cared-for student to voice his/her opinions and be heard by one another.

Adding purposeful side conversations to Noddings' (1984) dialogue component would provide a means for teachers of African American middle school students to properly address challenging situations and conflict. This step would also help teachers build caring teacher-student relationships with these students. Purposeful side conversations could be guided by purposeful questions related to the situation at hand. To address a discipline issue, the teacher might ask the student if he/she is okay, question the student as to what may be going on and what supports are needed to help the student.

Purposeful side conversations would also show the cared-for student that the one-caring teacher values his/her opinions. Bartholomew (2003) noted that teachers do not always make their students feel safe by valuing their contributions. A teacher "makes it easier to address student fears, mistakes, concerns, capabilities, challenges and limitations" (Hooks, 1994, as cited by Ojiambo, 2015, p. 16) if they allow the voices of students to be heard. Schools often provide limited opportunities for students' knowledge, thoughts, desires, and opinions to be heard in school (Friend & Caruthers, 2012). Purposeful side conversations would help fill this gap.

Critical race theorists believe it is necessary for African Americans to have a voice and tell their stories (Mungo, 2013). According to Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995), the voice of African Americans is necessary because reality is socially constructed. Adding purposeful side conversations would show African American students their teachers are willing to listen to them. In addition, these conversations could be a means for discussion of social justice issues. This discourse would help set the stage for building a trusting teacher-student relationship and foster an emotionally safe classroom environment. The one-caring teacher could also hold purposeful

side conversations as needed to assess receptivity and responsiveness to the teacher's demonstrations of care.

Figure 2 is a visual portrayal of how school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of care reflect Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care. Purposeful side conversations may fill a gap in the plan.

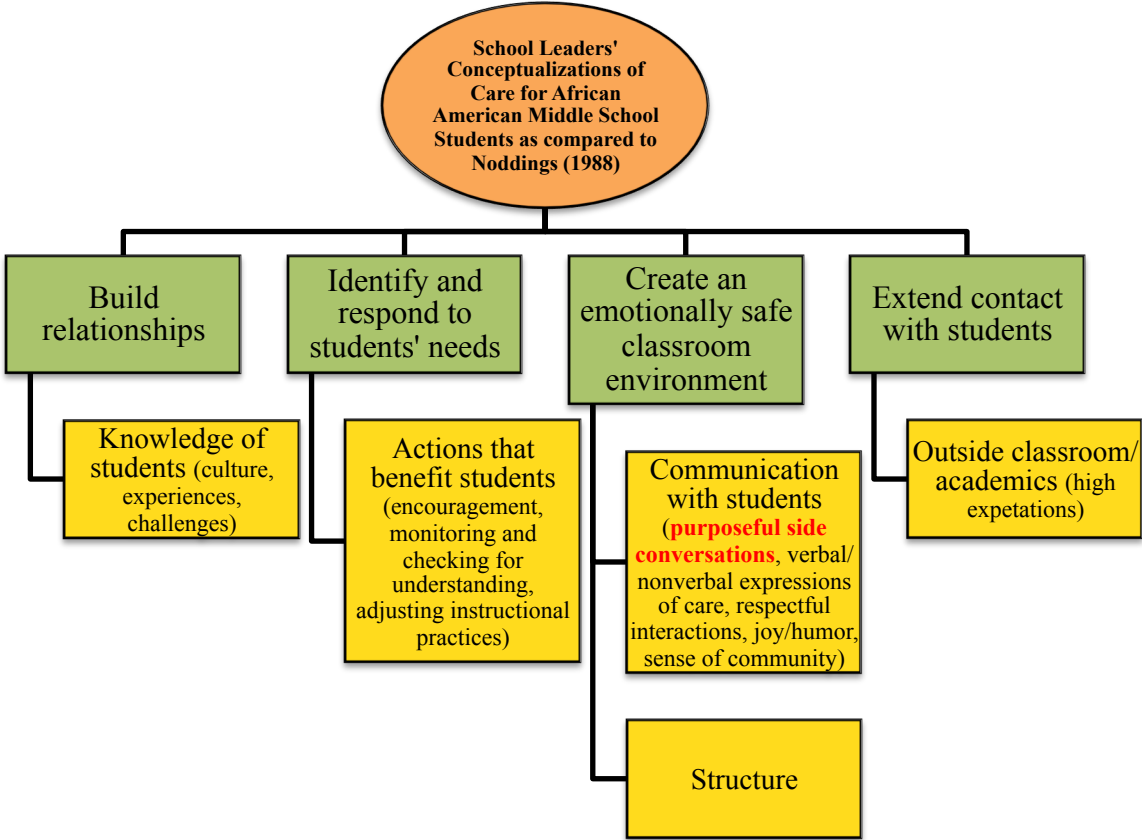


Figure 2.

Reframing Noddings' (1988) narrative to include purposeful side conversations

Key:

	School leaders' identified themes that reflect Noddings (1988)
	School leaders' identified codes/categories and subcategories that reflect Noddings (1988)
	Reframing Noddings' (1988) narrative to include purposeful side conversations

Implications for Practice

Findings for this study have implications for district leaders, school leaders, and teachers.

District Leaders

Implications for district leaders regarding care for African American middle school students involve professional development for school leaders and training and preparation programs for teachers. Professional development would be needed for school leaders. School district leaders have the responsibility of ensuring school leaders understand the impact of teacher care for African American middle school students and how care can be demonstrated. Professional development opportunities for school leaders could include an overview of Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing care, as well as information from the findings of this study, including the four identified themes, subthemes, and categories. School leaders would need training on what to look for and document when observing teachers.

Since public schools are staffed primarily by White teachers (Allen, 1999), district leaders must ensure that teacher training and preparation programs effectively prepare teachers to successfully teach African American middle school students. Ladson-Billings (2000) suggests restructuring field experiences to help teachers understand communities and cultures, and recruiting and retaining African American scholars to help disrupt preconceived notions about the abilities of African American students.

School Leaders

There are implications for school leaders regarding fostering a school culture of care, create a caring school environment conducive to the success of African American middle school students, training staff to show care for African American middle school students, and documenting demonstrations of care on teacher evaluations.

School leaders must create a caring school culture. A major influence on classrooms is the culture of the school. School culture must emphasize and model fair and respectful interactions between teachers and leaders. If this is done, teachers are more likely to treat students with respect (Lizzio, Dempster, & Neumann, 2011).

School leaders have the responsibility of ensuring a caring school with caring teachers for all students. Students experience a decline in self-esteem and academic self-efficacy during the middle school years (Baran, 2010; Peterson, Hamilton, & Russell, 2009), so school leaders are challenged to create a caring school environment conducive to the success of African American middle school students. School leaders must be knowledgeable of the African American culture and learning needs of African American middle school students. School leaders must be able to create a school culture that embraces Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethics of care, as well as the findings of this study that are believed to benefit African American middle school students.

School leaders must provide teachers and staff with necessary resources and training on care for African American middle school students. The school leader will serve as a trainer of trainers, or a staff developer. Teacher-leaders will emerge to eventually take on this role and professional development could occur in team meetings led by teacher-leaders. The school leader would serve as the informal trainer of the teacher-leaders (Wilhelm, 2013).

When observing teachers, school leaders must be mindful of how to identify and document incidents of care. School leaders should continue to use Standard 5 of the VA Evaluation System to monitor and document teacher care practices. Post conferences following observations of teachers would provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on and improve care practices.

Teachers

There are implications for teachers regarding training, dangerous care, purposeful side conversations, and self-care. First, it will be important for teachers to attend trainings to gain an understanding of how to effectively show care for African American middle school students. Even if teachers view themselves as caring, their students could still benefit from the new knowledge the teachers acquire. Teachers must also be forthcoming with themselves regarding their thoughts and perceptions of African American middle school students and be open to learning a more effective way to show care for these students.

Next, teachers must be able to identify when care becomes dangerous. If a teacher's care is not received or the teacher doubts his/her caring, the caring can turn into "cares and burdens," and the teacher will then need "pity, compassion, and sympathy" (Noddings, 2013, p. 37). Also, when demonstrating care for students, teachers must be mindful not to engage in superficial caring (Dallavis, 2014). This is considered a dangerous form of care because teachers engage in personal relationship-based discussions about "life and stuff" over curricular and academic items. This type of caring is centered on developing friendships with students and can be a self-oriented caring since the teacher can use it as an opportunity to reveal too much about his/her own personal life. Mendus (1993) even argues that Noddings' (1984) ethic of care is dangerous because "the bond among citizens is not like the love between a mother and child, for citizens are not intimately, but politically involved with each other" (Mendus, 1993, p. 21). He does not believe that caring individuals should have to shoulder the burden of welfare provision. Since results of the study reflect Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing care, following the plan and findings revealed by the study should equip teachers with the tools to show care to African American students effectively.

Third, purposeful side conversations facilitated by teachers about discipline issues would allow an opportunity for African American middle school students to discuss perceived and actual injustices. These conversations could help foster an emotionally safe classroom environment that could serve as a safe rhetorical space for students. This would allow students to be a member of a community of carers where they could address social justice issues. For this reason, it is important for teachers to recognize the value of student voice, especially with purposeful side conversations, so that students will be more open in sharing their views and responding to care shown by teachers.

Finally, teachers must engage in self-care. Noddings' (2013) notes that "the one-caring must be maintained, for she is the immediate source of caring" (p. 105). This means that teachers must take care of themselves before they will be able to effectively care for students. Noddings' (2013) suggests rest, congenial companionship, and joy in personal work. A lack of self-care could possibly result in teacher burnout.

Limitations

There were several limitations with this study. One limitation and threat to trustworthiness was the sample size/number of cases used in the study. While the seven participant interviews were adequate in reaching saturation for the study, they may not be enough to reach saturation across a larger, more varied sample of school leaders. Another limitation included the transferability of results. The study focused on middle schools in one school district, which lessened generalizability of results. Although results would be applicable to middle schools with a predominately African American population, findings may or may not be applicable to African American middle school students attending schools with a predominately White population. A third limitation was researcher bias that may have affected

the analysis of the interview responses. Also, the researcher has a working relationship with the participants, which may have influenced their responses. The researcher made efforts to limit concerns through member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of data sources. Another limitation is that the researcher did not interview the teachers who the school leaders selected and discussed. A final limitation was purposeful selection methods that did not take into account gender or years of experience of the school leaders selected to participate in the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are many opportunities for future research. First, future research should replicate this study with a larger sample size in order to compare male versus female school leader conceptualizations of care for African American middle school students. Data from this study did not reveal any significant evidence of the difference between the male versus female school leaders' conceptualizations of teacher care for African American middle school students. Conceptualizations were "rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness," (Noddings, 2013, p. 2) based on ethics from a feminine view. It is surprising that school leaders did not specifically discuss care as "guided by the masculine spirit – justification, fairness, justice," (Noddings, 2013, p. 1) since research suggests that fairness is perceived as care by African American students (Morris & Morris, 2002).

Next, future research could involve interviewing school district leaders to determine their knowledge of the importance of teacher care and the impact on African American middle school students. School district leaders could be questioned about their action plans and professional development options for school leaders and teachers. A study of this nature may heighten the awareness of the need for training related to care.

Finally, this study should be replicated in a broader context, in other school divisions, with African American as well as non-African American school leaders. Future research studies should also follow up with interviews by teachers, questioning them specifically about Noddings' (1988) four components of her plan for implementing an ethic of care. Teachers could be questioned about results found from this study, including how teachers build relationships, identify and respond to students' needs, create an emotionally safe classroom environment, and extend contact with students.

Conclusion

Care matters to African American middle school students, therefore, care must matter to school leaders. School leaders must create conditions for teachers to be effective carers of African American middle school students. This means that leaders must foster a caring school culture, provide teachers with direction for demonstrating care for African American middle school students, and provide staff with necessary resources and training.

Noddings (2013) believes schools are in a crisis of caring, and “no matter what teachers do, their efforts are not perceived as caring” (p. 181). Teachers have the responsibility of ensuring a caring classroom environment for students. Without understanding students, the act of caring for them cannot exist (Kang, 2006). Once teachers are able to understand the identity of students, teachers will be able to implement methods of caring to meet the needs of the students.

The purpose of this study was to explore school leaders conceptualizations/identified critical incidents of care for African American middle school students and determine how these conceptualizations/identified critical incidents of care reflect Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Interviews were

conducted with seven school leaders, including principals and assistant principals. A qualitative, case study research design was used, and data were analyzed to identify patterns and themes.

Results show that school leaders understand care and were able to discuss caring teacher behaviors and critical incidents they viewed as effective for showing care to African American middle school students. While school leaders offered great insights and findings were reflective of Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care, there is still a need for more research and exploration on care for African American middle school students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter to Participants

Dear _____,

My name is Violet K. Whiteman, and I am currently working to complete my PhD in Educational Leadership from Old Dominion University, in Norfolk, VA. I would like to conduct research with middle school leaders (principals and assistant principals) to examine school leaders' conceptualizations of teacher care for African American middle school students and what middle school leaders identify as critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students.

Participating school leaders will be asked to participate in a 30-minute interview session and document and review incidents of care for two teachers they have observed. School leaders may also be asked to answer emails related to the study. School leaders do not need to prepare for the interview, and instructional time will not be affected. Each interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed. No names or identifying characteristics, aside from the ones mentioned by the interviewee, will be used to link the recordings to the participant.

The interview will be recorded and information provided will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect school leader identities. All data will be kept in a secure location, not on school premises. I, the researcher, will be the only person with access to the collected data.

Prior to the study, I will meet with you to explain the study in more detail, to answer any questions you may have, and to obtain your informed consent. My hope is that the findings of this study will help develop a theoretical model focused on school leader conceptualizations of teacher care for African American middle school students. Also, this study will be beneficial in determining professional development opportunities for school leaders in the area of teacher care for African American middle school students.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or have any questions, please contact me at via email at vwhit013@odu.edu. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Violet K. Whiteman
Doctoral Candidate
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Procedures:

An Informed Consent Form was provided to selected middle school leaders requesting participation in the study.

Interviewee:

Gender of school leader:

Total number of years working in education:

Total number of years working as a Principal/Assistant Principal:

Total number of students enrolled in the school:

Total number of African American students enrolled in the school:

Opening Script:

“Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to interview you today. The purpose of this interview is to gain insights from you regarding how you define care within an educational setting and your conceptualizations of teacher care for African American middle school students. I thank you for your willingness to respond to interview questions related to care. Before I begin, I would like to remind you that although the interview will be recorded, your responses will remain confidential.”

- I. Background and Opening Questions
 - a. How many years have you been in Education?
 - b. How many years have you worked as a school leader (assistant principal, principal)?
 - c. What is the demographic breakdown of students in your school?
- II. Interview Questions about Conceptualizations of Care
 - a. How do you define care?
 - b. What makes a teacher a caring teacher?
 - c. How can teachers effectively show care for African American middle school students?
 - d. When observing teachers, what actions/interactions do you perceive as caring as related to African American middle school students?
- III. Interview Questions about Critical Incidents of Care (discussed for both of the teachers/observations selected by school leaders)
 - a. What would you identify as a Critical Incident of care in the observation of the teacher you selected?
 - b. How would you describe the incident in one or two words/phrases?
 - c. Discuss the student-teacher interactions with African American students.
 - d. What incidents of care have you observed with this teacher outside of the classroom/academics?

Closing Script

“Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. The recordings will be transcribed verbatim. Again, thank you for your feedback and willingness to participate in the interview.”

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form**PROJECT TITLE: School Leaders' Conceptualizations of Teacher Care for African American Middle School Students****INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information that may impact your decision to participate in this research and to document your consent if you choose to participate.

Title: **School Leaders' Conceptualizations of Teacher Care for African American Middle School Students**

Location: The research will be conducted at the school leaders' school or a location convenient for the school leader.

RESEARCHER

Name: Violet Keene Whiteman

Title: Doctoral Student

Academic Degree: PhD in Educational Leadership

College: Old Dominion University

Department: Education Department

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

Several studies have been conducted around the subject of "care." The purpose of this research study is to describe school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students and to determine how middle school leader descriptions of care align with Noddings' (1988) plan for implementing an ethic of care.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving exploratory, grounded theory research to describe middle school leaders' conceptualizations/critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students. The qualitative design focuses on the identification of critical incidents of caring teacher behaviors for African American middle school students. Data will be collected through interviews, identified critical incidents of care, and documented observation data. School leaders participating in the study will participate in an interview session and they will review and discuss incidents of care for teachers they have observed. School leaders' discussions will be based on Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Technique (CIT) for specific incidents of care. If you say YES, then your participation will be needed over the course of one week. Data collection will take place at your school. Approximately seven subjects will be participating in this study.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

RISKS: There are no identifiable risks associated with this research study.

BENEFITS: The main benefit for participating in this study is that this study would be beneficial in determining professional development opportunities in the area of teacher care for African American middle school students.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

The researcher wants your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary. The researcher recognizes that your participation may pose some inconvenience, however, the researcher is unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION

If the researcher finds new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, the researcher will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as interview transcripts, observations, and critical incident reports confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from the information and use numbers/pseudo-names, destroy recordings, and store information in a locked filing cabinet prior to its processing. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher will not identify you.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is okay for you to say NO to participating in this research study. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University or the researcher.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you understand this form, the research study, and its purpose. The researcher should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher will contact you to schedule a date and time for your interview.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are agreeing that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you understand this form, the research study, and its purpose. The researcher should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher will contact you to schedule a date and time for your interview.

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, please call Dr. Jill Stefaniak, the current IRB Chair, at 757-683-6696, or jstefani@odu.edu.

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in this study. The researcher will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	Date
Witness' Printed Name & Signature (if Applicable)	Date

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	Date
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VITA

Violet Keene Whiteman

Education:

- 2018 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA 23529
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership
- 2007 Old Dominion University
Norfolk, VA 23529
Master of Science in Education
Educational Leadership
- 1988 Old Dominion University
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Bachelor of Science
Elementary/Middle Education

Professional Experience:

- 2014-Present Principal
Jefferson Davis Middle School
1435 Todds Lane
Hampton, VA 23666
- 2012-2014 Assistant Principal
Kecoughtan High School
522 Woodland Road
Hampton, VA 23669
- 2010-2012 Assistant Principal
Andrews PK-8 School
3120 Victoria Blvd.
Hampton, VA 23661
- 2007-2010 Benjamin Syms Middle School
170 Fox Hill Road
Hampton, VA 23669
- 1989-2007 Math Teacher
Eaton Fundamental Middle School
2108 Cunningham Drive
Hampton, VA 23666

Professional Endorsements/Certifications:

Virginia Department of Education:
Post-Graduate Professional License:
Administration and Supervision PreK-12
Middle Education 4-8
Early Education NK-4