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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

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The Graduate School

CARING ABOUT MORE THAN GRADES AND TEST SCORES: THE WORK OF REPUTATIONALLY CARING TEACHERS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Gregory Max Chalfin

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Teacher Education
Educational Studies

May 2020

This dissertation by: Gregory Max Chalfin
Entitled: *Caring About More Than Grades and Test Scores: The Work of Reputationally Caring Teachers*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor in Education in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in the Department of Educational Studies.

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ABSTRACT

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Using Nel Noddings' definition of care as a theoretical framework (2005) alongside Elliot Eisner's ecology of schooling (1988), this study examined how "reputationally caring" teachers approached assessment in their classrooms and their reasons for doing so. These topics were explored through interviewing and observing participants, in addition to analyzing documents related to their methods of assessment, utilizing the research methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship. This qualitative study include four "reputationally caring" teachers. The term "reputational care" is of the author's creation and refers to those teachers who are known by various school constituents: parents, students, colleagues, and administrators as teachers who demonstrate care by going above and beyond in their classroom, prioritizing student-teacher relationships.

Individual context mattered greatly, and the study examined how the participants navigated obstacles to care within their respective environments. In addition, I considered the implications approaching assessment through a lens of care has for the field of education and for the professional development of teachers. Reputational care did not automatically carryover between communities, and detailed description of the participants' environments and journeys to reputational care underscored the significance

such an approach has for educational settings, including the introduction of Educative Care, a new contribution to the field of care and education that views teachers as empathic mentors. The participants of this study viewed their role as such, prioritizing relational care and viewing their relationships with their students and the holistic support of them as of paramount importance. This has implications for the field of education in considering the development and onboarding of teachers into new communities and for developing practices around faculty wellness, caring for those who provide care in educational communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the process of writing this dissertation and going through this academic journey, I am reminded of one of my other passions, long-distance running. Training for a marathon and completing a doctoral program require many of the same qualities: perseverance, discipline, creativity, and an indefatigable spirit. Neither can be done alone, and through this process, I have been supported by many, most significantly my Research Advisor, Dr. Christine McConnell. I would have never embarked on this journey without Christy's belief in me, and I am forever indebted for her mentorship, support, and care. This thesis is about the work of reputationally caring teachers. Christy, you are one.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Derek Gottlieb, Dr. Suzette Youngs, and Dr. Connie Stewart. Their guidance and support have greatly aided this process, and I am grateful to have had such a supportive and caring committee. I'd like to thank my classmates in the University of Northern Colorado Cohort 3 program. I have missed our classes together during the latter stages of this journey and look forward to crossing paths with each of you down the road. I also would like to thank my own teachers, colleagues, and friends for helping me in supporting this work. I could not be the writer, educator, and person I am today without the immense support they have provided me.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Mark and Karyl, for teaching me to stand up for what I believe in, to always wonder what is over that next hill, and to make sure to first care for others along the way.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to Jen Berger for her understanding, care, and love. Only a relationship as strong as ours could endure the insanity of both pursuing doctorates at the same time. I can't wait to continue our adventure together.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Prologue

I have never met a teacher like her. We arrive to class, and she dusts off the old record player. She asks us to get out our copies of *Macbeth.* We listen; we discuss; we debate; we argue. She affirms; she rebuts; she cajoles; she demonstrates care for each and every one of us.

Adolescent hormones leave us, at times, self-absorbed, too interested in the classmate sitting next to us, the game that night, the world around us to immerse ourselves presently in Banquo, Duncan, and Lady Macbeth, but we learn something that year in sophomore English. A teacher who really cares does more than bring dusty content alive through uniform methods. She meets each student where they are.

The year is 2002. I am a high school sophomore, and my friends are frustrated. They don't care about Lady Macbeth either, and they just want to know what they got on their English paper. There is no grade written. Instead, my friend rewinds and fast forwards, rewinds and fast forwards, rewinds and fast forwards to find the score of his paper. Ms. Knox has required us to bring in a cassette tape to class. She will record her thoughts about our paper. After we listen to them, and summarize what she has said, she'll let us know the grade. My friend didn't hear the part about listening. Ms. Knox cares about him. He doesn't yet care.

Fast forward a decade, and I am a middle school English teacher. I have forgotten Ms. Knox's ways and methods. Cassette tapes went out of vogue alongside worries of Y2K. I love my students; love playing with literature, bringing it alive for them. We do mock trials with Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and read *Romeo and Juliet* aloud in class. Our own vignettes, in the style of Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street,* line the walls. Yet, I feel dispirited. Many weekends and evenings, I copiously copy edit, write long, thoughtful, descriptive narratives on my students' papers. Many class periods, I hand back the paper. Jon receives it, and he flips the pages quickly. He finds the 88 scribbled on the back page. He shrugs, returns to his conversation with his friend, and stuffs the paper in his backpack. Jon and I will never talk about what I wrote. I fear my future carpal tunnel syndrome diagnosis will be a Sisyphean effort.

I knew I needed another way. A 2013 conference in New Jersey put me on the path. At the Klingenstein Summer Institute for Early Career Teachers, I meet Jed. Jed gets it. He offers feedback to his students through YouTube video narratives; he cares more about experience than metrics. He teaches me his methods and ways. My practice begins to be transformed. Jed, in a way, has the impact Ms. Knox did. He spurs me to think differently, to consider the way my students learn in ways I have never have before.

Since that time, I have been wrestling with a sincere belief that the way we assess and are assessed has a profound impact on our beliefs and the way we interact with one another. As an educational community, it is my belief that we must care about more than grades and test scores. We must move beyond *U.S. News and World Report* college rankings and the report cards of our schools. Rankings of schools, be it administered by a state's Department of Education or a company like niche.com, should not rule the day.

Returning to the roots of that sophomore English class with Alice Knox, we seek to prioritize relational care. This study seeks to examine the impact such a caring approach to assessment can have on the students attending our schools.

Introduction to the Study

How does a teacher evaluate their students' progress? Since formal education commenced, this has been a fundamental question, one that invokes discussions of teachers as diverse as Aristotle, one-room schoolmarms, and modern-day guides planning their lessons to meet Common Core Standards. Teaching has evolved through the eras, and headlines today show an increasing influence of data, measurement, and analytics on education and other fields (Mason, 2018; Mathew, 2016). Nate Silver's once esoteric blog fivethirtyeight.com, a website that uses statistics to tell stories about a wide variety of topics, including sports, economics, culture, technology, and education, is now one of the 500 most popular websites in the United States (Fivethirtyeight.com traffic statistics, 2018). The analytics movement has swept popular culture, integrating itself into the worlds of sports, business, and politics in significant ways (Mathew, 2016). The MIT Sloan Sports Analytics Conference in Boston draws hundreds of attendees each year and included former President Barack Obama as one of the speakers in 2018 (Chemi & Golden, 2018). The rise of big data has been one that has accelerated in recent years; however, as Samuel E. Igo outlined in *The Averaged American* (2007), the American public's fascination with polling and data goes back more than half a century. According to Igo (2007), social science's rise to prominence came from three major studies between 1930 and 1960, the Middletown Studies of Muncie, Indiana; the Gallup polling that correctly predicted the 1936 election in favor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the

Alfred Kinsey studies of sexual behavior conducted between 1948 and 1953. Americans wanted to know if they were "normal," and once polling and data tracking began, it was a "genie out of the bottle" (p. 189).

The data movement has influenced the world of education with the field divided on whether the movement helps or harms classrooms (Herold, 2018). In political discussions of education, accountability and measurement has continually emerged as a key issue. Senator Al Franken famously asked Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos during her confirmation hearing about her views on the "relative advantage of assessments and using them to measure proficiency and growth" (Wong, 2017). DeVos struggled to answer, highlighting her lack of understanding of, as Franken described, "a subject that has been debated in the education community for years" (Ortiz & Hernandez, 2017).

More recently, DeVos claimed that "this country has a student achievement crisis" (Strauss, 2019) during a speech discussing recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. She claimed that two out of three American students cannot read at grade level, a false interpretation of the NAEP data (Strauss, 2019).

DeVos's struggles to answer questions or accurately interpret data aside, the notion of measuring performance is one that has been discussed among education policy experts at the highest levels of government for years. Standardized testing is deeply rooted in American public education. On the heels of the "No Child Left Behind Act" (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002), the "'Every Student Succeeds Act' now requires states to test students in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school" (Klein, 2017). One study

revealed that students took, on average, 112 standardized tests between Pre-K and 12th grade (Resmovits, 2015). Testing, a form of measurement, has, and appears to continue to be, a rite of passage for American public school students. One might say the testing and accountability movement's growth and influence has changed the very tenor of American public education (Ravitch, 2010).

Dana Goldstein (2014) outlines these outside forces in *Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession.* As she writes, the recent changes that have happened in public education have left many teachers disillusioned by a model that has left too many teachers feeling like their job performance is based on externally determined metrics:

> To many American teachers, the last decade of value-added school reform has felt like something imposed…by politicians with little expertise…corporate philanthropists who long to remake education in the mold of the business world, and by economists who see teaching as less an art than a science (p. 231).

Despite her seeming lack of clarity on the question of assessments used to measure a student's growth or proficiency, DeVos was confirmed, and she was asked about her views on the role testing has within the nation's public schools. Responding that it should be up to individual states and districts to determine how much testing is appropriate, DeVos explained that "it's important for parents to have that information, so that they can be assured their students are in the right place…Testing is an important part of the equation" (Klein, 2017).

Such an education system produces data and scores of test results, but for some critics, it does not produce much else. Diane Ravitch, once a proponent of No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002), became one of its fiercest critics, writing in *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (Ravitch, 2010), "I concluded

that curriculum and instruction were far more important than choice and accountability…Testing, I realized with dismay, had become a central preoccupation in the schools and was not just a measure but an end in itself" (p. 13). In thinking about these critiques, the question then becomes about how the culture of testing might take a different form or be considered another way. If curriculum and instruction are more important, as Ravitch asserts, how might we design a school system that allows assessment to bolster those key elements, instead of controlling them?

There are many ways to assess someone besides standardized assessments commonly used in schools today, and teachers do them all the time. Some teachers build in choice for their students in the manner in which they are assessed. Others incorporate the arts to move away from traditional multiple-choice bubble sheets. While there is always a tension between external oversight and localized instruction (McMillan, 2003), many teachers design assessments that have the priority of meeting their students' needs before external ones. Some may have the talent to design assessments that meet their students' needs and help prepare for external standardized assessments, but as Eisner (1994) writes, teachers should "let the test and measurement specialists follow our needs rather than we follow theirs" (p. 150). Standardized assessments remove the ability to adapt an assessment to fit an individual student's goals, interests, strengths, and to challenge their weaknesses. In the testing movement, schools, teachers, and by deduction, students are being reduced to being viewed as a summary of their grades and test scores (Brick, 2012; Taylor, 2016). As W.H. Auden satirically writes in his poem *The Unknown Citizen* about the loss of individuality in a society that is increasingly standardized, "He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be / One against whom there was no official

complaint / …And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education" (Auden, 1940). In many ways, this resembles the modern education system. Students become unknown, unidentifiable objects flying through the education system until they either graduate or drop out. What can we really know about them when the system values their numbers so highly?

According to social psychologist Donald P. Campbell, "The more any quantitative indicator is used, the more subject it is to corruption" (Hess, 2018). Cheating scandals in Atlanta (Blinder, 2015) and elsewhere (Marbella, 2011) proved that what is now commonly referred to as Campbell's Law's applies when it comes to standardized tests. Might there be another way to humanize our understanding of how students are performing and experiencing schools? This dissertation will explore that very topic.

Study Rationale

This dissertation seeks to examine assessment through an emerging lens (Averill, 2012; Cloninger, 2008; Cooper & Miness, 2014; Cridland-Hughes, 2015; Hackenberg, 2010) of research on the topic of care theory's application to the classroom. While others have written on the topic of caring practices in the classroom and the impact they have on student-teacher relationships (Averill, 2012; Rolón-Dow, 2005), there is a gap in the field of study of how caring practices directed toward the field of assessment impact different aspects of a teacher's classroom, including those set out by Eisner (1988) in his ecology of schooling (intentions, structure, curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation).

As Sir Ken Robinson (2010) might say, such a caring lens requires educators to think of their classrooms with an understanding of them as part of a "changed paradigm." Robinson speaks of this in his TED Talk "Changing Education Paradigms":

> Schools are still pretty much organized on factory lines, ringing bells, separate facilities, specialized into separate subjects; we still educate children by batches…Why do we do that? Why is there this assumption that the most important thing they have in common is how old they are? (Robinson, 2010).

As education has become more systematized and corporatized, the relational caring of schools, the understanding and prioritization of individual student-teacher relationships, has been diminished. Instead, test scores and rating systems become entrenched as most valuable. As Ravitch (2010) writes:

> Our schools will not improve if we value only what tests measure. The tests we have now provide useful information about students' progress in reading and mathematics, but they cannot measure what matters most in education. Not everything can be quantified (p. 226).

Noddings has long offered an alternative to the movement of testing and standardization in education through her description of care theory. While Noddings has not written directly at length about care theory's application to how teachers approach assessment in their classrooms, she most directly challenges the testing movement in her book *When School Reform Goes Wrong* (2007): "The assignment of students to tracks on the basis of test scores and past school performance should have been questioned…The fundamental concept of liberal democracy is choice, or freedom to make significant choices" (p. 11). This view stems from Noddings' work, the application of care theory to the field of education (1984, 2003, 2005). Born out of the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) in feminist theory and applying the philosophical notions of Martin Heidegger's understanding of care as "the very Being of human life" (Noddings, 2005, p. 15), Noddings defines care as a reciprocal relationship between two human beings in which the carer demonstrates "engrossment and motivational displacement" (p. 16) and "is seized by the needs of another" (p. 16). The cared-for, then, must accept this care,

demonstrating "reception, recognition, and response" (p. 16) for the relationship to be one that is considered "caring" under Noddings' definition. These are the kinds of relationships that Noddings, and others, would argue need to be promoted within schools (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Johnson, 2009; Noddings, 2005).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine how reputationally caring teachers, identified through the lens of care theory, approach assessment, or tools of measurement, in their classrooms. Moreover, the purview of the study was to examine teachers' intentions toward assessment, and the impact such an approach had on the other elements of their classroom, as described by Elliot Eisner's ecology of schooling (Eisner, 1988).

Educational Criticism and Connoisseurship

To conduct this study, I employed the methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship. Elliot Eisner (1976) pioneered this methodology, and its application to my study is appropriate as it allows me to closely examine the work of teachers and their caring practices. The methodology requires two acts, connoisseurship, a private act with which we all engage, and criticism, a disclosure of "what we learned through our connoisseurship" (Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017, p. 2).

Connoisseurs exist across a multitude of fields. When one attends a baseball game with a person exceedingly knowledgeable about the game, they may explain why the infielders are playing at a certain depth during a key moment in the game. Connoisseurs of other fields can recognize subtle difference and complexities: "Wine connoisseurs are able to discriminate the qualities of a particular wine" (p. 9).

As an educational connoisseur, I too am looking for subtleties and did so for this study through practices described by Eisner (1976): “What is it that one does when one writes an educational criticism of a classroom or a set of curriculum materials, or a school? There are three things that one does. One describes, one interprets, and one evaluates or appraises what one sees” (p. 142).

In conducting this work, I engaged in what Uhrmacher et al. describes as “discernment, appreciation, and valuing” (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 12):

> Discernment is the ability to discriminate subtle and nuanced qualities. Appreciation involves knowing the conventions and traditions that characterize particular genres or types of qualitative experience. Valuing is represented by the knowledge of what constitutes goodness within a particular domain (p. 18).

The methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship allowed me to closely engage with the work of four reputationally caring teachers. The research with my participants was guided by the questions listed below.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

Q1 How do reputationally caring teachers approach classroom assessment and why do they have that approach?

Q2 How do reputationally caring teachers perceive and negotiate external influences on assessment?

Q3 When assessments are approached through a caring lens, how are the other elements of the ecology of schooling affected, including curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and intentions?

Q4 What are the implications of caring assessments for the professional development of teachers and for assessment practices in general?

The following section elaborates on the purpose and impetus for each of these questions. The research questions outlined below, and the data sources employed to answer them, can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Question	Data Sources
How do reputationally caring teachers approach classroom assessment and why do they have that approach?	Document analysis, interviews with teachers, observation of classes
How do reputationally caring teachers perceive and negotiate external influences on assessment?	Interviews with teachers (primary), document analysis and observation of classes
When assessments are approached through a caring lens, how are the other elements of the ecology of schooling affected, including curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and intentions?	Document analysis, interviews with teachers, observation of classes
What are the implications of caring assessments for the professional development of teachers and for assessment practices in general?	Document analysis, teacher journaling and reflection, interviews with teachers, observation of classes

Research Question One

Q1 How do reputationally caring teachers approach classroom assessment and why do they have that approach?

This question emphasizes the process by which reputationally caring teachers think about assessing their students. In thinking about individual assignments (tests, projects, papers, etc.), overall grading scales (letter grades, weighting, points), required standardized tests taken by students, and the process of determining the success or failure

of their students, what core values and practices guide the process of assessing students for these teachers who demonstrate care? In the final pages of *A Challenge to Care in Schools* (Noddings, 2005), Noddings writes about the approach to assessment through this lens. She writes about the importance of self-evaluation and a team-based approach that involves a far more democratic process than the traditional teacher-student evaluation relationship:

> When deficiencies are identified, teachers and students together will have to ask which of these are most vital to remove and for whom…This kind of evaluation is much harder than giving a multiple-choice test, but if giving multiple choice tests were central to the assessment of human growth and development, we parents would administer them regularly at home (Noddings, 2005, p. 180).

Given Noddings' comments, it is reasonable to infer that the collaborative process described in the quotation above is in line with Noddings' beliefs about assessment. Through interviews with my participants, an analysis of assessments given by teachers, the grading and feedback practices employed, the language used on assessments, and the classroom environment on assessment days, I learned about the approaches of my participants that lent insight into how and why reputationally caring teachers approach assessing their students in the ways that they do.

Research Question Two

> Q2 How do reputationally caring teachers perceive and negotiate external influences on assessment?

Regardless of how reputationally caring teachers assess their students, the specter of external influences looms as possibly interfering with the caring relationship the teacher is trying to cultivate. For each individual teacher, this may look different, depending on the context and their environment. As mentioned above, pressures from external organizations like the government or the College Board might influence the way

the teacher feels they can or must assess their students. For others, school constituents like administrators, parents, or even the students themselves might lend a different influence to the manner of assessment. To answer this question, I asked my participants what pressures, real or perceived, influence the process and practice of caring for their students. For some, the obstacles came directly from the environments themselves. For others, obstacles came from places one might not ordinarily expect, like the home environment of the teachers themselves.

Research Question Three

> Q3 When assessments are approached through a caring lens, how are the other elements of the ecology of schooling affected, including curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and intentions?

Learning to think of schools as an ecosystem was a transformative moment in my own professional experience. As is true of ecosystems in the natural world, changing one aspect of a school's culture or process influences and affects all aspects. To gather data about this question, I observed my teachers in action, examined artifacts of their assessments, and asked them in interviews about the relationship between the assessment of their students and other aspects of their work with students in and out of classrooms. In examining this question, I learned more about how reputationally caring teachers' approach to assessment influences the other aspects of their classroom, including curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and the intentions teachers have for their students (Eisner, 1988). While individual context and environment impacted the specific caring practices that teachers employed, the teachers of this study placed emphasis on the holistic care of children. They prioritized the intention of building relationship with their students by caring about the engagement of their students and their joy for learning

through formative assessment above coverage of content and summative assessment practices.

Research Question Four

> Q4 What are the implications of caring assessments for the professional development of teachers and for assessment practices in general?

Finally, this question examines future ideas around the topic of caring assessments. In an education field that currently places such emphasis on metrics, reforms often fall short of their intended goal due to a combination of factors, including those predicted by Campbell's Law. As Frederick Hess, Executive Editor at *Education Week,* writes, "How we use those measure matters immensely…They need to be designed with an eye to ensuring they don't break the law. Campbell's Law, that is" (Hess, 2018). This question looked with an eye toward thinking about how a different approach to assessment might impact the field of education and the professional development of its teachers. While there is significant possibility of further exploration for this question, the findings of this question demonstrated the possibilities of helping teachers learn more about progressive education philosophies that view the role of a teacher like that of a parent, willing to do anything to support and advocate for a child. Developing educators who view the student-teacher relationship as lifelong and extending beyond the classroom walls will breed educators who are charged with demonstrating care for the whole person, not just an individual's academic aptitude.

Key Terms

In this study, I reference key terms that require precise definitions and chose these to help define and limit the scope of the study.

Reputationally caring teachers. This term is of my own creation and refers to those teachers who are readily identified as "caring" by others, including students, parents, administrators and other teachers. This term is based on other research that uses "reputational method" to determine participants, such as Collinson, Killeavy, and Stephenson (1999), Khaki (2005), and Salim (2016). For this study, "reputationally caring" teachers are those teachers who go above and beyond the call of duty in their schools and who prioritize student-teacher relationships in their classrooms. Carol Ann Tomlinson (2015) succinctly and thoughtfully describes what it means to be a caring teacher in her work, The Caring Teacher's Manifesto: "Caring for the students we teach means adapting and planning to their needs rather than expecting them to adapt to us" (p. 90). In short, these are the teachers who exceed the baseline requirements of contact hours in practicing their craft and who deeply care about their students. These teachers "actively accept responsibility for each student's academic, social, psychological, and cultural well-being" (p. 90). To find these teachers, I asked principals of various schools and colleagues about those teachers in their communities who are viewed by students and families as seeing teaching as a calling, rather than as a job with specific hours.

These are the teachers who have a profound impact on their students' lives, in the same manner as a caregiver. As Noddings (2005) writes, "Students are not usually as close to teachers as offspring are to their parents, but the relationship is still, ideally, a close one, and for some students, teachers are more important than parents" (p. 106). These teachers are the ones who became participants of my study. In Chapter III, I will expand on the ways in which I recruited and selected participants.

Assessment. The term assessment, rather than testing or evaluation, was chosen intentionally for this study. I am seeking to examine how teachers assess their students, as opposed to how they only specifically test them and am interested in looking at a wide variety of ways that teachers assess what their students know and how they represent their learning. Traditional tests are one tool that teachers can employ; however, assessment encompasses a broader incorporation of various methods, including formative projects, self-assessment, and representing one's learning through multiple forms of representation (Eisner, 1997).

Assessment is also a more appropriate term for this study than evaluation. As Garcia (2011) outlines, these terms are often used synonymously, but there are important subtle distinctions in their application to education:

> Although there are some fine similarities, the definitions present diverse meaning and practices. In 1967, Scriven defined evaluation as a judgment of the value or merit of something. A program evaluation can be seen as an example of evaluation. In the other hand, assessment can be defined as the collection of data about student progress in order to infer about the student's knowledge, skills, and abilities…Teachers are responsible for the assessment process that occurs in the classroom (Garcia, 2011, p. 249).

This is an important distinction in use of terms, and throughout the study, I refer to care theory's application to assessment, as opposed to testing specifically or to evaluation.

Summary

In Chapter I, I have provided an overview of the study, introducing the rationale for conducting this study and the methodology, educational criticism and connoisseurship, that I used to do so. As education has become more data-driven, the purpose of this study was to examine how reputationally caring teachers, using the lens of

care theory, approached assessment in their classroom. The research questions are also introduced in this chapter and allowed me to dig further into why reputationally caring teachers took such an approach, how teachers perceived and negotiated external influences to assessment, the impacts such an approach had on other elements of a teacher's classroom, and the implications the approach has for the professional development of teachers and for assessment practices more broadly.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the definition of care as theorized by Noddings and the application of that care to the concept of assessment, as demonstrated in the educational literature. In addition, I will explore Noddings' ideas about care theory as they relate to Eisner's ecology (1988). I will also describe the body of research on the lack of social-emotional learning in schools in an age of accountability and the implications this has for our schools. This literature review will also provide a summary of research that has demonstrated the drawbacks of standardized assessment in schools and will lead to a discussion of what it means to care about students in an age of accountability. This section will finally explore and build on previous research on caring teaching and caring assessment practices and will provide the rationale for this study.

Introduction

When Diane Ravitch (2010) first learned about the reforms that would bring "testing, accountability, choice and markets" (p. 2) to America's public schools, she was enthusiastic and encouraged. However, over time, as the implementation of George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" act occurred, Ravitch's thoughts shifted. Why? "The short answer is that my views changed as I saw how these ideas were working out in reality" (p. 2). From Ravitch's book from 10 years ago to today, many of the reports of

that climate of standardization in public schools paint a picture of schools still in dire need of reform (Strauss, 2016). Schools are not being reported as places that care about student-teacher relationships or emphasize the health and wellbeing of their students. Instead, they are places that emphasize the comparison of students. I believe this is unhealthy for our education system and for the students who are in it.

As veteran English teacher Peter Green writes in a *Washington Post* blog article, "The signature feature of a ranking system is that it locates losers. But what decent teacher would stand in front of the class on the first day of school and say, 'Five of you will turn out to be losers'" (Strauss, 2016). Instead of an approach to assessment that pits students against one another in high-stakes competition, assessment can be approached through a myriad of other lenses, including that of care.

Definition of Care and Caring Assessment

A search of the term "caring assessment" in the databases Education, ERIC, and Proquest Dissertations and Theses yields more than 200 articles; however, nearly all of them are not about education. The term "Caring Assessment" is actually one that comes from nursing and is employed as a "survey to measure patients' perceptions of nurse-caring behaviors" (Wolverton, 2016, p. 14). One article (Filkins, 2013) in the field of education employs the phrase "caring assessment" to describe an exploration similar to that of this study. In the article, Filkins (2013) describes his own journey of using formative assessments in reading toward the goal of care and is similar to the work of this study. In quoting from Peter Johnston's *Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives* (2012), Filkins describes the interaction between one student, Samson, and his tutor and moves toward the work endeavored in this study:

> Samson's response of continued productive struggle is what makes assessment a caring act in Noddings's view. Good assessment, a truly formative assessment, seeks to elicit a response of increased confidence from learners by *in*forming instruction and *trans*forming student learning and competence" (Filkins, 2013, p. 50).

Despite this, there is very limited research and employment of this concept in the literature. Changing the search term to include "caring assessments" brings up only one additional news article of relevance to education, a brief "Letter to the Editor" article about what one student feels is the cold, harsh nature of Brock University's (Ontario, Canada) exam system:

> Exams aren't caring assessments or mentorship or teaching – they're rigid contracts of hegemony that assign you a grade based on your ability to memorize. Having a degree shouldn't mean you can memorize. It should mean you can think, which is something that there is little to no space for on exams (Nadon, 2015).

Given this dearth of literature on the topic, I needed to break down the term "caring assessment" into its component parts to be able to understand more about how assessment viewed through a lens of care has been studied and what it might mean. What does it mean to care? A variety of different scholars have contributed to the body of knowledge on care theory with Gilligan (1982) among the most prominent. From Gilligan's foundational work, Noddings (1984, 1997, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2013, 2015, 2016) developed a robust application of care theory to educational contexts.

Gilligan and Noddings are widely thought of as two of the most prominent early voices in care theory that brought it to the level of being a distinct moral theory (Care Ethics, 2018). However, Gilligan's work would arguably not have occurred if not for her critique of her mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg's, work on moral development. Kohlberg (1984) saw distinct stages of moral development and that it "moved toward more

universalized and principled thinking" (Care Ethics, 2018) as individuals grew up and got older. In his studies, girls would consistently score lower because Kohlberg prioritized an ethic of justice above that of care, an ethic that prioritized autonomy and fairness over individual relationships. While based on Kohlberg's studies, Gilligan's studies changed the understanding of this idea and placed an ethic of care above that of justice in discussions of morality. It led to a new exploration of study in the field of care ethics, which was integral to care theory's eventual application to education. Without this progression, the application of care theory to education and its prioritizing human relationships within schools may not have occurred.

In her groundbreaking book *In A Different Voice* (Gilligan, 1982), Gilligan, like Kohlberg, posits that men and women often think about moral dilemmas differently, though she is quick to assert that these traits are not solely male or female: "The different voice I describe here is characterized not by gender but theme" (p. 2). The book was grounded in three studies. One was about college students who dropped a course on moral and political choice. Eighty percent (16 of 20) of those students were women. The second was about the abortion decisions of women between the ages of 15 and 33, and the last was about a study about rights and responsibilities. Men and women from age 6 to 60 were interviewed about a variety of topics, including moral development (Goldberg, 2000). In these matters, men often discuss individualism and correct solutions, while women discuss and prioritize relationships and care (Gilligan, 1982). One example of this can be found in the second chapter, where Gilligan compares the two responses and ideas of "conceptions of morality" for two eleven-year old students, "To Jake, responsibility

means not doing what he wants because he is thinking of others; to Amy, it means *doing* what others are counting on her to do regardless of what she herself wants" (p. 38).

This thinking has implications for schools, and since publishing the book, Gilligan has done extensive work in schools with significant studies with girls at the Emma Willard School in New York and the Laurel School in Ohio (Goldberg, 2000). As Gilligan discusses, the moral development of boys and girls creates challenges for schools in supporting the development of students and has significant implications for schools and their function. She reaches a similar conclusion, as we will see, to her disciple Noddings: "Good schools succeed in a variety of ways but at the core are real relationships between adults and children" (Goldberg, 2000, p. 704).

Noddings (1984, p. 175-182) built on Gilligan and Kohlberg's ideas. Her ideas brought forth ideas around an ethic of care's impact on school. For the purposes of this study, Noddings' ideas are essential and serve as a relevant and important starting point for care theory's application to education. The foundation of care theory is in caring relationships: "…in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings – a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (Noddings, 2005, p. 15). It is important to note Noddings' definition of care involves two actors, both equally important in the transaction of care. However, while reciprocity is a key component of caring relationships, Noddings does not view caring relationships in the same manner as 'contract theorists' such as Plato and John Rawls" (Noddings, 1984, p. 4). Unlike Rawls' veil of ignorance, in which "everyone is in the same situation, and everyone is presumed to be equally rational" (Friend, n.d.), Noddings believes that "what the cared-for gives to the relation is not a promise to behave as the one caring does" (Noddings, 1984, p. 4).

Instead, while reciprocity is an expectation for defining caring relationships, it is not assumed to be the same action. Instead, the characteristics of the carer in a caring relationship include "engrossment and motivational displacement" (Noddings, 2005, p. 16). In short, these terms demonstrate that the carer can "really hear, see, or feel what the other tries to display" (p. 16). Noddings is trying to describe a carer as someone who is fully present, "seized by the needs of another" (p. 16). Qualities that define the "consciousness of one who is cared for" (p. 16) are "reception, recognition, and response" (p. 16). Thus, in a caring relationship, both carer and cared-for must be engaged with and receptive to the encounter. This is essential in thinking about the student-teacher relationship and how a caring relationship is defined. Not every student-teacher relationship is one that can be described as caring, and this study will seek to examine caring teachers who have the qualities described by Noddings.

Applied to education, care theory has important implications for the practice of teaching and learning. Power dynamics are instrumental to consider when thinking about caring relationships, and as discussed, Noddings' understanding of caring relationships relies on knowing that caring relations are born out of equal responsibility from both parties. The traditional student-teacher relationship, contrarily, is one that involves an imbalance of power. Care theory challenges that notion, asking us to reconceptualize what it means to be a caring teacher (Noddings, 1984), and to rethink the aims and intentions of our schools. As Noddings (2005) writes, "When we discuss teaching and teacher-learner relationships in depth, we will see that teachers not only have to create caring relations in which they are the carers, but that they also have a responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care" (p. 18). There is an equality between

student and teacher that requires both actors to be active in the relationship. Students are not passive receptacles to be filled with knowledge and controlled by rules and structures. Rather, they engage in relationships with adults in the school, making choices about their own education. As Noddings (2013) writes about one middle school principal who, in her view, was not promoting caring relationships within his school, "[He] told me proudly that his school had achieved silent halls…I was shocked to hear that he hoped next to achieve silent cafeterias" (p. 24). A school with caring relationships does not see students as people to control, but rather as equals with whom to engage in reciprocal, caring relationships.

Care Theory and Eisner's Ecology

With this lens of promoting caring relationships within schools in mind, we can examine the implications for care theory on various elements of schools. Eisner (1988) writes of schools as ecosystems, suggesting that when one of the five elements of intentions, structure, curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation are altered, all are changed. To achieve substantive change, Eisner suggests "our educational system must be viewed as a whole, as an ecosystem of mutual dependence" (p. 29). In examining how the application of care theory influences the teaching and learning process within schools, Eisner's construct is a useful one. Conceptually tying Eisner's ecology to Noddings' care theory, I will explore specific aspects that may emerge during my data collection. The following sections provide context for how the theory and conceptual framework potentially intersect. This will be important as a frame of reference during the data analysis phase of this study.

The first element of Eisner's ecology is that of intentions. Noddings speaks clearly and authoritatively about what she believes should be the intentions of our schools: "Be clear and unapologetic about our goal. The main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people" (Noddings, 2005, p. 174). In thinking about the practice of teaching and learning, a teacher's intentions have an immense impact on the learning that can occur. Moroye (2009) describes how intentions can manifest as curriculum, another of Eisner's elements of schooling, and employs the term "complementary curriculum" (p. 795) to do so. While Moroye's work focuses on the practices of ecologically-minded teachers, teachers who have beliefs that align with Noddings' care theory might similarly share them as part of their complementary curriculum. As Moroye (2009) writes, "…their beliefs are not separate from their practice, are not compartmentalized into a different section of their lives, are integral to who they are in the classroom" (p. 795). For example, a caring teacher's complementary curriculum might include an emphasis on caring relationships between characters while discussing a text or include projects that emphasize or explore the caring relationships with friends and family in a student's lives. The intentions of a caring teacher in sharing their complementary curriculum might be those qualities of caring relationships, defined by Noddings, of engrossment and motivational displacement. Teachers want students to fully care for others when engaging with them. Noddings' ideas make room for valuing the complementary curriculum within caring classrooms.

One of the intentions of caring teachers also has to be the happiness of their students: "Although we agree that there is more to happiness than subjective well-being [SWB], it doesn't hurt to pause now and then and ask children and ourselves: How much

fun are you having?" (Noddings, 2003, p. 38). Noddings' care theory asks us to reflect on how often education brings about joy for students, promoting further learning through what Dewey (1938) calls educative experiences. Schools should promote activities that allow students to understand "that caring in *every* domain implies competence…There is nothing mushy about caring. It is the strong, resilient backbone of human life" (Noddings, 2005, p. 175). For caring teachers, Noddings (2005) offers ideas of how the intentions of these teachers can be realized through the other four aspects of Eisner's ecology: structure, curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation.

The structure of schools has remained relatively similar over time. Since the Committee of Ten in 1892 made recommendations about the number of years of school and what subjects to be studied (Aulbach, 1994), the basic structure of schools has remained relatively similar. In creating structures that demonstrate care for students, Noddings suggests that the traditional notion of industrial schooling be replaced with an emphasis on relationships. Subject matter does not need to be divided into math, English, and history. Instead, Noddings (2005) suggests thinking about "expertise more broadly and instrumentally…A biology teacher should be able to teach whatever mathematics is involved in biology" (p. 174), suggesting the potential for more interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Moreover, she recommends students and teachers staying together through multiple grade levels and keeping students in the same building for as many years as possible. Noddings is prioritizing the relationship of the teacher with the student over the content coverage and subject-area expertise. She views educators as teachers of children rather than teachers of subjects. Allowing students to functionally think of the school as

their own, and as a home, can help facilitate an ethos of care within the school. Keeping students with teachers builds trust and develops relationships that take time to cultivate.

A third aspect of Eisner's ecology is curriculum, and in schools that exemplify care theory, there would be a lack of uniformity in it. Noddings (2003) suggests that coercing students to learn material that they are uninterested in is counterproductive to the aims of care and happiness: "If we are serious about promoting happiness, we will recognize that every act of coercion raises a question" (p. 88). Moreover, Noddings seeks to avoid uniformity in curriculum and expresses her distaste in the form of a critique of Mortimer Adler's "Paideia Proposal". Where Adler believes in standardization of curriculum toward the purpose of preparing students to participate in democracy, advocating that "all sidetracks, specialized courses, or elective choices must be eliminated" (Adler, 1982, p. 195), Noddings critiques such a perspective. She asserts that Adler's vision "sacrifices a first principle of democracy: In the pursuit of eventual freedom, it denies students any freedom whatsoever in the choice of their own studies" (Noddings, 1983, p. 203). Thus, in the practice of teaching and learning, Noddings believes in a curriculum that involves student choice and focuses on themes of care. She believes in giving "at least part of every day to themes of care" (Noddings, 2005, p. 174), and the curriculum might even be structured around such topics as caring for self; for the inner circle; for strangers and distant others; for animals, plants and the earth; for the human-made world, and for ideas, all chapter titles in her work, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* (Noddings, 2005). Noddings acknowledges that such a view "requires a change in the way we conceive curriculum and instruction" (p. 175); however, she asserts that such a change is not a new idea. As

she writes, Noddings' progressive vision was "well described by John Dewey years ago" (p. 175) in his article "My Pedagogic Creed" (1897).

Eisner's fourth element of the ecology, pedagogy, finds significant overlap between Dewey and Noddings. One possibility of care theory's applicability to pedagogy is found through Dewey's *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897). There, Dewey advocates a belief in active learning, of being attentive to the interests of the child and helping them follow those beliefs: "I believe that interests are the signs and symptoms of growing power…Accordingly the constant and careful observation of interests is of the utmost importance for the educator" (1897). Thus, to achieve alignment between the intentions of teachers, what teachers hope to teach, the operational curriculum, what teachers actually teach, and the received curriculum, what students actually learn, we must first follow the pedagogical notion that students' interests are central. As mentioned, Noddings' application of care theory to the modern classroom is in accord with this belief. Suggesting that students and teachers collaboratively plan curriculum, Noddings (2005) writes, "Students must participate responsibly in constructing the rules and arrangements under which they work, play, and share their interests and resources" (p. 177). Pedagogical understandings of care theory align with care theory's fundamental understanding of defining caring relationships as endeavors with a balance of power between carer and cared-for. Such a relationship requires teachers "to relax the impulse to control" (p. 174).

Finally, as mentioned, today's teaching and learning process often places great emphasis on the evaluative component of schools. This evaluative component is the fifth aspect of Eisner's ecology. In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education published *A*

Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a report that warned the U.S. public that the nation's schools had standards and priorities that made for "a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people" (Fiske, 1983). Since that time, various reform movements have placed great emphasis on the accountability and measurable achievement of students, most notably in the form of standardized tests. As in her belief against the standardization of curriculum in the form of Adler's "Paideia Proposal" (Adler, 1982), Noddings argues against standardized assessment, a prominent element of evaluation during the 21st century under "No Child Left Behind" (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Noddings heavily critiques the bill, asserting that the emphases of accountability and equity and the proposed ideal outcomes of raised achievement scores do not express care for children: "We do not feed hungry children so that they do well on tests. We feed them because they are hungry" (Noddings, 2007, p. 2). Noddings sees the application of care theory to evaluation resulting in quite different outcomes.

Instead of defining success through test scores, Noddings does not believe in "competitive grading" (Noddings, 2005, p. 174). During her time as a professor at Stanford University, Noddings did not assign grades (Amrein-Beardsley, 2010), and she encourages "self-evaluation" (Noddings, 2005, p. 174) from students and endorses evaluative systems that "recognize that children develop at different rates" (Noddings, 2007, p. 82). Once again, diversity is valued, and care theory asks us to move away from the largely held maxim of "equality as sameness" (p. 81). Noddings seeks an evaluation system that explores more difficult questions than those that can be asked in multiple-choice. Rather, an evaluation system that embraces care theory would be one that

involves many different members of the community: "Nurses…horticulturists – all people interested in the welfare of children can be involved. After a general briefing on what students have been studying, they could meet with small groups of students and examine the materials they have produced" (Noddings, 2005, p. 179). This might come in the form of a review of a portfolio of work or through a public display of one's learning in multiple forms of representation, as discussed by Eisner (1996).

Care theory has application to all aspects of schooling, including the aspects described in Eisner's ecology (Eisner, 1988). However, there is a continued lack of emphasis on social-emotional learning in our nation's schools (Brotto, 2018), complicating the challenge of integrating care theory into the intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, and evaluative components of schooling. When schools emphasize test scores and grades above the holistic care of children, social-emotional care often falls short.

Social-Emotional Learning Emphases

As has been discussed, care theory is grounded in the understanding that the most important element of a school is the relationships between the people who comprise the community. In schools today, however, the emphasis continues to be on standardized test scores. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was replaced by the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) and opened the possibility to an ethic of care being infused into the nation's public school system.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015) was passed in December of 2015 and provides more latitude for states to integrate other metrics, including those around social-emotional learning into their understanding of school

success. Even though states had this opportunity, not one state submitted an accountability plan to the federal government that included social-emotional learning as part of its outcomes. While that might seem to indicate that states will continue to not value social-emotional learning within their schools, even those who are at the forefront of promoting caring traits did not see this as a setback. As Tim Shriver, co-founder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, and co-chair of the Aspen Institute's Commission on Social Emotional and Academic Development, told *Education Week,* "The horse is out the barn…It's policymakers who are trying to catch up" (Blad, 2017).

The crux of what Shriver is saying above is that social-emotional emphases, those that could include elements of care theory, are on the rise within our nation's schools. Measuring them will only hinder their ability to continue to be infused into America's schools, and Shriver, who has testified on Capitol Hill about the benefits of social-emotional learning and also chairs the International Board of Directors of the Special Olympics, has commented in a manner that points to an alignment with care theory. In a Capitol Hill hearing before the Committee for Children, Shriver said:

> ...we believe [a relationship] is the centerpiece of what we have to remind ourselves about education. Teaching and learning is a relationship. It is not supported by relationships. It's not enhanced by relationships. It's not complemented by relationships…It's not a dispassionate transaction between a machine and a part. It's not dispassionate movement of data over a cable into a microchip. It is a relationship…Everything that has to happen in education has to happen through a relationship (Committee for Children, 2014).

Caring relationships are central to the success of schools, and even if they are not measured, states might include elements of care theory in their curriculum because the work can help them solve other problems within their schools that are measured.

Teaching conflict resolution, health and wellness, and self-discipline can all help toward the ends of reducing bullying and absenteeism, and increasing academic achievement (Blad, 2017).

However, that might all change if schools are suddenly required to measure their students' non-cognitive abilities. Currently, there is no formal relationship between ESSA and standardized measurement of non-cognitive skills. Scholars like Angela Duckworth and David Scott Yeager (2015) believe that to be a positive and cautioned against using any current metrics around social-emotional learning in concert with measures of accountability:

> We share this more expansive view of student competence and well-being, but we also believe that enthusiasm for these factors should be tempered with appreciation for the many limitations of currently available measures. In this essay, our claim is not that everything that counts can be counted or that everything that can be counted counts. Rather, we argue that the field urgently requires much greater clarity about how well, at present, it is able to count some of the things that count.

Angela Duckworth's work aligns with many of the tenets of Care Theory. Her bestselling book, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (Duckworth, 2016) emphasizes the importance of continuing when adversity hits. Even though her website features a "Grit Scale" (Duckworth, 2018), she asks an important question in her book that applies to thinking about care theory and assessment: "How do you measure something so intangible…Something those very successful people I'd interviewed said they could recognize on sight, but couldn't think of how to directly test for?" (Duckworth, 2016, p. 8) My study relates to this very question and is looking at how teachers assess students through a lens of care. I'm interested in understanding what

qualities and characteristics show up in those teachers and what intentions they have for their students.

The crux of the matter is that ESSA's allowance of standardized assessments of non-cognitive skills may or may not impact their prevalence in our nation's schools. Regardless, standardized assessments, whether measuring elements of schooling that involve the attributes of care or not, do not promote relationships of care within schools. The next section will outline the literature that expounds on the drawbacks of the use of standardized assessments in schools.

Drawbacks of Standardized Assessments in School

The debate and use of standardized assessments go back nearly 2000 years to the Han dynasty in China where students took Imperial examinations; however, standardized tests weren't introduced to European schools until the early 19th century. While the west persisted in using discussion and debate as their main forms of assessment, influenced by the ancient Greeks, "British India, meanwhile, faced with expanding commerce, adopted standardized testing as a way to efficiently hire and promote employees" (Futterman, 2015). Eventually, this use spread to other parts of the world, including the United States, where open-ended assessments became less prevalent after the Industrial Revolution. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) had a seismic impact on standardization and continues to heavily influence our schools today (Mehta, 2015). In curriculum, it gave momentum to movements like E.D. Hirsch's "cultural literacy" movement (Hirsch, 1988), an idea that prioritized content above all else. Pedagogically, it moved teachers toward standards and content-driven instruction. Structurally, it gave rise to longer school days and school years. Our schools' evaluations

became more data-driven as a result of this report and others. The intentions for public schools became, at some level, about financial returns. It changed the way that the public interacted with schools, expecting them to provide a service to make their children competitive with workers around the world.

For the past 30 years, there continues to be significant debate about the viability and effectiveness of standardized assessment in our nation's schools. One of the leaders in that conversation has been W. James Popham. Nearly two decades ago, Popham wrote, "Employing standardized tests to ascertain educational quality is like measuring temperature with a tablespoon" (Popham, 1998). Popham, however, does believe standardized assessments have usefulness, just not to assess educational quality. They need to be used for what they are intended for, which is to compare students: "To sum up, standardized achievement tests do a wonderful job of supplying the evidence needed to make norm-referenced interpretations of students' knowledge and/or skills in relationship to those of students' nationally" (Popham, 1998). As stated, looking at all elements of schools through a lens of care, including assessment, it is my belief that this comparison of children should not be our goal.

Criterion referenced assessments (CRA) are another form of standardized test that has been employed at various educational levels (Chardon, Collins, Hammer, & Hart, 2011; Schimke, 2019), including the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) tests and Advanced Placement (AP) tests. While not comparing students to one another, and instead, comparing students to a previously agreed upon criteria, such as whether the student is at grade level, the standardized approach of criterion referenced assessments still have limitations with respect to individual care. Chardon et al. (2011) discuss the

limitations of CRAs and identifies drawbacks with respect to developing student creativity and "its capacity to deliver transparency and reliability" (p. 235). CRAs can have use but need to be used in conjunction with other forms of assessment. CRAs do not allow for a relationship between student and teacher to be prioritized, as feedback is not part of the assessment process:

> On its own, the use of criteria and descriptors does not provide students with information about what measures they must take to improve their learning outcomes as good feedback does…feedback is critical in the learning journey…therefore the use of CRA should represent just one of a range of components that make up an effective and feedback strategy designed to assist student learning (p. 235).

Much has been written about the drawbacks of standardized assessment (Au & Gourd, 2013; Brimi, 2010; Morgan, 2016; Wasserberg & Rottman, 2016). There are many important, key points that have arisen about how standardized assessment fails students. Among these is the exploitation of schools for profit by testing companies (Brimi, 2010), placing an emphasis on results over processes. Moreover, standardized assessments contradict best curricular and pedagogical practices (Au & Gourd, 2013) and can lead to stereotype threat and decreased self-efficacy (Wasserberg & Rottman, 2016). These tests also mislead educators on what students actually know, and in the process, lower the level of instruction by teachers and decrease collaboration among students (Morgan, 2016). Au and Gourd (2013) write:

> High-stakes tests are asinine. They are rooted in racism and classism, and as a 2011, National Research Council reports tells us, a focus on high-stakes testing for nearly a decade has not closed achievement gaps, and in cases like the use of high school exit exams required for graduation, they have made it worse (Au & Gourd, 2013, p. 18).

More recently, Florida educator Marion Brady (Strauss, 2017) responded to a court decision in which some Florida third graders were denied promotion to the next

grade for opting out of a standardized test. She outlined 34 problems with standardized tests. Below is a sampling of some of the issues listed by Brady.

- Are at odds with deep-seated American values about individuality and worth.
- Waste the vast, creative potential of human variability.
- Are unavoidably biased by social-class, ethnic, regional, and cultural differences.
- Unfairly advantage those who can afford test prep.
- Give control of the curriculum to test-manufacturers.
- Assume that what the young will need to know in the future is already known.
- Have led to the neglect of play, music, art, and other nonverbal ways of learning.
- Radically limit ability to adapt learner differences.
- Provide minimal to no useful feedback to teachers.
- Penalize test-takers who think in non-standard ways (which the young frequently do). (Strauss, 2017)

Scholars have written widely about a wide variety of forms of assessment besides standardized tests. Self-assessment (Hewitt, 2011), portfolios (Yaghoubi & Mobin, 2015), peer assessment (Agrawal & Rajapakse, 2018), differentiation through multiple forms of representation (Blanken-Webb, 2014; Crim, Kennedy, & Thornton, 2013; Eisner, 1994), and contract grading (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009; Hiller & Hietapelto, 2001) are a few among many potential alternative forms of assessment. From the literature, one can deduce that each of these methods involve two of the central tenets of what it means to care in the age of accountability; a commitment to student choice and an emphasis on formative assessment.

Caring in an Age of Accountability

In an age of accountability, it may seem hard for teachers and students to demonstrate care. With schools prioritizing standardized assessments and test scores, it is challenging for educators to promote meaningful, caring relationships as those described by Noddings (2005).

W. James Popham is not the first scholar many would think of for a discussion of care and assessment in the age of accountability. After all, Popham was at the forefront of the behavioral objectives movement, encouraging teachers to have behavioral objectives across their curriculum. These behavioral objectives were "a statement of instructional intent that set forth a clear description of the post-instruction behavior for learners" (Popham, 1998).

However, Popham came to realize these behavioral and instructional objectives were making little difference in actual instruction, and like Ravitch (2010) after him, his opinion changed. As he said in one interview, "Oh, we made a serious mistake with the behavioral objectives movement. We equated, and I was right there screwing up with the rest of them. We equated specificity with utility" (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012). While behavioral objectives are not the same as standardized assessments, they live under the same structural umbrella of measurement in assessing student learning. Indeed, scholars have argued that as there has been a rise in standardized assessment in our nation's public schools, so too has there been an increase in the use of forms of Popham's behavioral objectives through the narrowing of curriculum and a focus on "mundane skill-drill-kill exercises whereby children do not think for themselves" (Solley, 2007). In the past two decades, as standardized assessment has become even more prevalent in a U.S. public school student's experience, Popham has been arguing from a different angle, one that moves away from narrowed curriculum, behavioral objectives, and standardized summative assessments and focuses on formative assessment, the opposite of the notion of summative, high-stakes, standardized tests that students can never correct or improve upon. Popham cites Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam's (1998) "Inside the Black Box" as

reason for the increasing support of formative assessment as beneficial. The very nature of formative assessment is what makes it an integral tool to consider when thinking about what it means to care in assessment in an age of accountability.

What is formative assessment? The short definition, as Popham (2008) describes, "involves testing students in the midst of an ongoing instructional tool that, if clearly understood and adroitly employed, can benefit both educators and their students" (p. 3). However, Popham goes further to describe the qualities and characteristics of formative assessment, using the definition set forth by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Their definition has many applications to the tenets of care theory, suggesting the presence of formative assessment as one indicator of care in the age of accountability. As Popham (2008) outlines, the key features of the CCSSO definition of formative assessments are as follows:

> Formative assessment is a process, not any particular test. It is used not just by teachers but by *both teachers and students.* Formative assessment takes place *during instruction*…The function of this feedback is to help teachers and students make *adjustments* that will improve students' achievement of intended curricular aims (p. 5).

This definition is not perfect; Popham's definition does not indicate who would set curricular aims and neglects to address a more democratic approach to the student-teacher relationship (Noddings, 2005, p. 174). With that said, Popham's insights provide a potential tenet for what it means to care in the age of accountability. It is an approach to assessment that involves continual iterations of work toward improvement and growth instead of the high-stakes nature of current standardized tests. It prioritizes the relationship between the teacher and student above the teacher's final assessment of the work. It gives students choices, another important aspect of what it means to care in the

age of accountability. Teachers and students alike value process over product. It provides a building block for the kind of approach valued in exploring the topic of what it means to demonstrate care through assessments in an age of accountability.

Caring Teachers, Instruction, and Assessment

As mentioned, there is a significant gap in the research about caring assessments, which is a primary rationale for conducting this study. Searches of the term yield minimal results, and an understanding of assessment through the lens of care theory is part of emerging research from a variety of scholars who have written about the importance of caring relationships in the classroom (Averill, 2012; Cloninger, 2008; Cooper & Miness, 2014; Cridland-Hughes, 2015; Hackenberg, 2010).

Jansen and Bartell (2013) outline characteristics of caring instruction by developing a framework that represents caring instructional practices in a middle school mathematics classroom. Their qualitative study develops the framework through an analysis of student and teacher interview data, and the "framework developed includes four dimensions: Teaching so every student's learning matters, communicating high expectations for students, creating a welcoming and inviting classroom community, and engaging students in learning mathematics" (p. 33). Hayes, Ryan, and Zseller (1994) write about middle schoolers' perceptions of what it means to be a caring teacher through an "ethnographic technique of open-ended written responses" (p. 1). The study found differences across demographics of ethnicity and sex, but the most frequent responses were that caring teachers "responded to the individual" (p. 9), "helped with academic work" (p. 9), "encouraged success and positive feelings" (p. 9), and "provided fun and humor" (p. 10), among other responses. The qualities and characteristics of what has

characterized caring instruction are valuable insights and tenets to consider in thinking about the application of care theory to assessment models.

Similar to my study, Collinson et al. (1999) engaged "exemplary teachers" who were selected by "reputational method" (p. 8) across England, Ireland, and the United States. They looked into "the dispositions and philosophical beliefs that underpinned and informed the ethical dimension of their roles" (p. 3). For those exemplary teachers, respect is essential to effective teaching, and "caring teachers work hard to know students by using multiple sources of knowledge and by structuring their class to encourage oral and written dialogue that reveals students' thinking" (p. 23). The cultivation of teacher-student, student-student, and student-teacher relationships is integral to the work of caring teachers as well (p. 23). Collinson et al. (1999) also broadly address the assessment structure of the participants with whom they worked, describing the assessment model as something teachers "consciously work to create [through] a classroom environment conducive to questioning, self-assessment, and helpful critique" (p. 23). It is understandings like these that can help form the foundation for what it means to assess through a caring lens.

Additionally, there is some evidence that caring teachers, defined by Lewis et al. (2012) as those who "promote prosocial and responsible behavior that helps students adapt to the school environment and school demands" (p. 8), can help students perform more adeptly on assessments in math through an increase in the students' self-efficacy.

Teacher Journeys as Impactful Toward Care

Among the variety of different elements of care at play in this study is that of the notion of the teacher growing into becoming reputationally caring. While some (Geelan,

Moore Mensah, Rahm, & Rivera Maulucci, 2010) have discussed the concept of teaching as a "life-long" (p. 660) journey, encompassed by both "reflection and action" (p. 660). Much has been written about teachers' journeys in changing their individual practices (Harris, 2017; Perry, 2002), some of which fall into the realm of caring practice and Noddings' ethic of care (Cherry-McDaniel, 2014; Hasslen, 2008); however, there is a gap in the literature on the educational journeys of teachers and the impacts environments, events, or contexts have on the journeys toward caring practice. Given the dearth in the literature on the journey of teachers toward overall caring practices, particularly in relation to assessment, this study seeks to build on the research on how caring teachers become teachers who prioritize relational care over content coverage. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) wrote relatedly to this idea in their text *Teachers as Curriculum Planners: Narratives of Experience.* In discussing the work of teachers, the authors provide a variety of different tools for teachers to employ as they work to come to know themselves as teachers. These methods include journal keeping, telling one's biography, as occurs to some degree for the participants in this study, or autobiography, document analysis, storytelling, letter writing with colleagues, teacher interviews (modern-day networking), and participant observation (p 35-58). While not directly writing about care or caring practices, terms that do not show up in the text's index, Connelly and Clandinin are implicitly suggesting that it is helpful for teachers to know themselves to be able to care for others:

> This is a book for teachers. It is a book for preservice, novice, and experienced teachers…We show, often in the words of teachers with whom we have worked, how reflections on our narratives of experience helps us make meaning of our lives as teachers (p. xv).

In summary, the work of leading educational scholars like Noddings, Eisner, Dewey, and others have shaped current scholarship around the investigation of caring practices and their application to assessment and education more broadly. This literature review has explored the definition of a caring relationship, employing Noddings' scholarship to do so. Eschewing standardization, Noddings' care theory examined through the lens of Eisner's ecology suggests an emphasis on student-teacher relationships over content coverage and knowledge. In addition, this review has examined the evolution of social-emotional learning's importance in our nation's schools and the drawbacks of standardized assessments' emphasis. In reviewing the literature, caring for one's students in the age of accountability can mean employing a wide variety of instructional practices, including formative assessment, valuing process over product, and understanding one's self as a teacher. With this review of the literature in mind, this study turns to the methodology employed to undertake this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship. I used this method to research the practices of reputationally caring teachers toward a greater understanding of how these teachers approach classroom assessment through a caring lens and the impact such an approach has on various dimensions of their classrooms. While other studies (Bongo, 2011; Kissinger, 2011) have examined the qualities of caring teachers, these studies employed different methodologies and did not focus on the practices of reputationally caring teachers toward assessment.

In this chapter, I will discuss the method of educational criticism and connoisseurship employed to investigate these research questions. In addition, the study design is presented, including a review of the various research locations and participants. and the data collection and analysis methods employed. I also discuss the credibility of the study, my own background and stance toward the research, and potential limitations of the study.

Educational Criticism and Connoisseurship

To investigate my research questions, I employed the qualitative research methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship, a methodology engendered by Elliot Eisner (2003) in order to contribute to school improvement. This methodology

appropriately allowed me to thoroughly examine the qualities – both obvious and subtle – of what might be considered caring classrooms. I evaluated those classrooms through what Uhrmacher et al. (2017) describe as the practices of "discernment, appreciation, and valuing" (p. 12).

To answer my research questions, I continually reflected on these three practices. As Uhrmacher et al. (2017) write, discernment is "the ability to notice and differentiate qualities" (p. 12) while appreciation is "a matter of knowing what to look for" (p. 14). Valuing, then, "is represented by the knowledge of what constitutes goodness within a particular domain" (p. 18). For example, in examining classrooms through the lens of care, I came to appreciate qualities about the classroom practices and reflections that I may not have ordinarily noticed if I had casually entered the classroom and observed the teacher's practices at face value. My hope as an educational critic and connoisseur is to help answer some of the questions posed by Uhrmacher et al.: "Does it [the idea of study] offer fresh perspectives…Does it increase our discernment and appreciation of life in classrooms…?" (p. 8) My hope was that by looking closely at the practices of assessment within the classrooms of reputationally caring teachers, I would uncover a meaningful perspective about how classroom assessments that integrate Nel Noddings' care theory may impact the various other elements of Eisner's ecology (Eisner, 1988) and the nature of our schools.

The methodology of educational criticism and connoisseurship is appropriate for this work because being an educational critic involves examining more deeply than first impressions. As Eisner (1976) writes, "The task of the critic is to adumbrate, suggest, imply, connote, render, rather than attempt to translate…The task of the critic is to help

us see" (p. 141). The work of being a critic means first also acting as a connoisseur. While one can be a connoisseur of something, someone who engages in the "art of appreciation" (p. 141), without being a critic, the opposite does not hold true: "Effective criticism requires the use of connoisseurship, but connoisseurship does not require the use of criticism" (p. 141). Being an educational critic means engaging in the "art of disclosure" (p. 141).

To be an educational critic, Eisner writes that "one describes, one interprets, and one evaluates or appraises what one sees" (p. 142). In this process of description, the educational critics are providing the reader information about what they have seen or experienced but with an important caveat: "The critic-researcher seeks to describe more than simply what he or she was looking for to begin with. Critics seek to describe what surprises them as well as what they anticipate" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 39). Descriptions not only provide foundational evidence, but they also provide context for the research rendered.

As Uhrmacher et al. (2017) elucidates, it is "often difficult to draw a hard and clear line between description and interpretation" (p. 41). However, where Eisner writes that "descriptive educational criticism is a type of portrayal of the qualities that one encounters without getting into – very deeply, at least – what they signify" (Eisner, 1976, p. 142), interpretation for an educational critic represents "an effort to understand the meaning and significance that various forms of action have for those in a social setting" (p. 145).

Interpretation involves "the application of concepts, often through the use of analyses and metaphor, in ways that foreground the relationships, patterns, or reasons for

events and situations at hand (one's data)" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 41). In this process, the educational critic chooses an interpretive frame to be able to apply both the researcher's views and those theories applied. This study could have employed a variety of different interpretive frames, from eco-justice to feminism to critical theory; however, I chose to use the interpretive framework of care theory. In being an educational critic, this interpretation should not be viewed as correct and serves the purpose of providing relevant structure: "…different interpretive frames offer different ways of seeing and each may be of value…The overall aims of interpretation are to bring meaning, order, or structure to otherwise desperate or poorly understood aspects of an experience" (p. 45). Engaging with interpretative aspects as a thoughtful educational critic requires being attentive to a variety of often overlooked aspects of schools, noticing the details of the profession and stepping into the shoes of another. It requires "an ability to participate empathically in the life of another, to appreciate the meanings of such cultural symbols as lists of books read, handwaving, and time allocation. The interpretive aspect of educational criticism requires the judicious and informed use of a variety of social sciences and the practical wisdom born of experiences in schools" (Eisner, 1976, p. 145).

After describing and interpreting, the educational critic evaluates, making "value judgments…with respect to educational significance" (p. 145). This again requires an attention to detail and an understanding of subtle distinctions and "the practical realties of classroom life" (p. 146). Eisner adds that doing this work also means "hav[ing] a background sufficiently rich in educational theory, educational philosophy, and educational history to be able to understand the values implied by the ongoing activities and the alternatives that might have otherwise been employed" (p. 145). Through my

coursework as a master's and doctoral student and my experiences as a K-12 educator, I believe I have the qualifications to be attentive to the dynamics of schools and use what has been described and interpreted to "arrive at some conclusions about the character of educational practice and to its improvement" (p. 146).

Study Design and Participant Selection

I conducted research in classrooms in public, independent, and public charter schools in a medium sized city in the Western United States using a purposeful sampling method (Merriam, 2009), which is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). This was an appropriate methodology due to my desire to find "reputationally caring teachers."

I contacted seven teachers and administrators in the area by email, phone call, and in-person conversation to ask them who they would identify as a caring teacher in their community and then eight additional teachers by email, phone call, or in-person conversation, to ask if they would like to be a participant in the study.

To be considered for this study, a participant must have been known to be a reputationally caring teacher by teachers and administrators within one's building. This is a teacher who is known to prioritize relationships but also does not neglect the academic development of their students. This definition is purposely ambiguous. As in Moroye's (2007) study of ecologically minded teachers, the participants "were chosen due to their actions related to their beliefs" (p. 6). While the participants in Moroye's study (2007) did have roles with clubs and activities both in and out of school that related to

environmental activism, specific criteria were not elucidated because part of the study was to further understand their caring practices.

Similarly, during the participant selection process for Collinson et al. (1999) to find "exemplary teachers," the authors provide an open-ended understanding of their participant selection process. In the study, exemplary teachers were "defined as those whose professional accomplishments and results can serve as a model for peers" (p. 7). As in my study, this definition of an exemplary teacher is vague, yet the study is effective in helping understand the impact an "ethic of care" has for the participants involved. In short, whether ecologically minded, exemplary, or as in my study, reputationally caring, these are teachers who are easily identified as such by colleagues and school leaders.

To find reputationally caring teachers, I asked participants from my network to refer me to others within their networks and, in some cases, used teachers I have come to know through my work as an educator over the last 12 years. After contacting multiple teachers and administrators at various schools and corresponding by email and phone conversation with various potential participants, four teachers emerged as interested in participating in the study and who were considered reputationally caring within their schools. Each has implemented various assessment strategies with the impetus of care as a central tenet of their teaching philosophy and mission.

This sample size of four teachers is considered typical for an educational criticism, as Uhrmacher et al. (2017) outline, describing that half of the educational criticisms they analyzed had "between 2 and 8 participants" (p. 28).

Participant Selection and Sites

For this study, I purposely collected data at four different sites, providing a lens into a diversity of environments from which to collect data. In conducting this study, it was intentional and purposeful that the participants came from diverse environments, allowing for the investigation of reputationally caring teachers to not be controlled for variables like school type (public, independent, charter), grade level (elementary or secondary), discipline (math, science, history, and special education), or any other factor. Two of the participants work in independent schools, one of which has a religious component and one of which does not. One teacher teaches in a suburban public school district and the fourth in a charter school in an urban district. Two of the participants teach at the high school level, one at the middle school level, and one at the elementary school level. Each teacher teaches a different discipline with history, math, science, and Special Education covered by the four teachers as outlined in Table 2 and the description below.

Table 2

Reputationally Caring Participants

Name	Level	Subject Area	Type of School	Prior Teaching Experience
Rose	High School	Science	Independent, Non-Denominational	Public School
Kyle	Middle School	Math	Independent, Religious	Public School, Teach for America (TFA)
Caroline	Elementary School	Special Education	Charter	Public School (TFA) and Independent
Josh	High School	History	Public	Public School

Rose. Rose is a mid-career teacher at an independent school in high school science. She has taught in a public environment prior to teaching at the independent school where she currently works.

Kyle. Kyle is an early career teacher at a religiously affiliated independent school in middle school math. He taught in a public environment prior to teaching at the school where he currently works.

Caroline. Caroline is a mid-career teacher at a public charter elementary school in special education. Prior to her work at the school where she currently works, she taught in both independent and low-*income*, public environments.

Josh. Josh is a mid-career teacher at a public high school in history. Prior to his work at the school where he currently works, he taught in a low-income, public school for one year.

For this study, I began contacting participants during the winter of 2018, ultimately securing two participants to interview and observe during the spring of 2019 and then two more participants to interview and observe during the fall of 2019. I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval during March of 2019 before I began interviewing and observing any of my teachers. The IRB letter of approval can be found in Appendix B. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling, utilizing the criteria of teachers who were considered reputationally caring within their communities. As it takes time to develop a reputation, I wanted participants who were not in their first year at their respective schools and were known by colleagues and administrators to be reputationally caring. One participant, Caroline, was in her second year at her school; however, she had previously worked with her lead administrator at another school for a number of years, lending credibility to her being someone considered reputationally caring by others within her school. As Merriam (2009) writes, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). In choosing these teachers, I sought to select a group of participants who came from a diverse body of schools and taught a diverse array of disciplines, allowing insight to be gleaned that could not be ascribed to demographic elements of a certain type of school, grade level, gender, level of experience, or discipline.

Each participant met with me three times for semi-structured interviews of approximately 30-60 minutes. After the first interview, I observed each participant teaching their class, and after the second interview, participants reflected on their caring practices by creating a reflective representation of their choosing about their practices as

a reputationally caring teacher. In addition, each participant shared with me examples of their classroom assessments, ranging from quizzes and tests to projects and rubrics.

Data Collection Methods

With each of the four participants, I conducted 1-2 class observations of a full period class. In addition, each teacher participated in three semi-structured one-on-one interviews about their practice and, prior to the third interview, engaged in providing a reflective summation of their caring practices in a form of representation meaningful to them. Participants were given an open-ended prompt and were provided suggestions of journaling weekly about their caring practices, recording a one-minute audio or written reflection each day, making a word cloud of their ideas about care, drawing an artistic representation of care, or creating analogies of how care manifests itself in their classrooms, among a variety of other creative ways. Two of the participants chose to create a mindmap while the other two participants created an artistic representation and journaled, respectively. Participants also shared with me a trove of assessments, including a wide variety of tests, quizzes, projects, and other assessments they have employed in their practice.

Association of Method to Research Questions

Having discussed the research settings, participants, and data collection methods, I will come back to discussing each of my individual research questions and how the various methods employed address answering the question.

Research Question One

Q1 How do reputationally caring teachers approach classroom assessment and why do they have that approach?

Answering this question required a consideration of the ways in which caring teachers approach assessment and an understanding of their reasons for doing so. I collected data through semi-structured interview questions and through an examination of the documents provided from each of the participants. Upon first conversation, none of the participants had ever considered their assessment practices as caring; however, as they reflected on their own practice and learned more about Noddings' definition of care as involving "reception, recognition, and response" (2005, p. 16), they were able to provide insight into their assessment practices and why they approached assessment, and their students more generally, in the manner in which they did.

Furthermore, this question was answered through observation of teachers' classroom practice with their students. Their interactions with their students leant insight into how they approach assessment with their students on a day-to-day basis within the classroom environment. Each class observation involved some element of the assessment process, even if it was not an "assessment day" within the classroom.

Research Question Two

Q2 How do reputationally caring teachers perceive and negotiate external influences on assessment?

Similarly, this question was answered through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with participants. Some participants easily discussed and revealed external influences on assessment while others had trouble conceptualizing obstacles to their work with their students, coming to the conclusion through a more roundabout manner. Since each participant approached this question through the lens of their own contextual environment, it was important to remember the variety of different answers is an expected outcome, given the diversity of environments explored through the variety of

participants. Some participants additionally compared obstacles, or lack thereof, in their current environment to those in previous teaching environments in which they had worked.

Research Question Three

> Q3 When assessments are approached through a caring lens, how are the other elements of the ecology of schooling affected, including curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and intentions?

This question considers how assessments practiced through care impact the other four aspects of Eisner's ecology. My data collection process included interviewing, document analysis, and limited observation of a teacher's classes to witness how the care is practiced and impacts other elements of the classroom. As Uhrmacher, et al. (2017) write, "As a connoisseur, observations require a special kind of perception, one that attends to the events themselves as well as what the events do to our experiences" (p. 30). Being able to enter into the classroom and observe student-teacher interactions even on a limited basis, was immensely helpful. In doing so, I was able to learn about the manner in which my participants interacted with their students and the impact their caring approach to assessment has on the intentions of their classroom, the manner in which it is structured, the curriculum covered, and perhaps most significantly, the pedagogy that is employed.

Research Question Four

> Q4 What are the implications of caring assessments for the professional development of teachers and for assessment practices in general?

This question was answered through interview data, observation notes, and document analysis toward a larger thematic discussion of implications for the intersection

of assessment and care theory and what it might mean for the field of assessment and for the professional development of teachers.

Credibility

In designing this study, I gathered data from a variety of different sources, including classroom observations, interviews with participants, reflections from participants in a variety of different forms, and access to blank assessments employed by teachers in working with their students. Given the variety of forms of data collected, the internal validity of this study can be seen as strong, for as Merriam (2009) writes, "Because human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews…Most agree when rigor is viewed in this manner, internal validity is a definite strength of qualitative research" (p. 214).

While this may be true, and there are wide variety of interpretations about what constitutes credibility and trustworthiness of a qualitative study, I have taken steps to ensure what Lincoln and Guba (1985) would describe as "trustworthiness" in this study. As Uhrmacher et al. (2017) describe, "To achieve trustworthiness, the researcher has many options such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, referential adequacy and member checking" (p. 55). In order to understand the teachers' perspectives deeply, I focused on conducting multiple interviews and in gathering data from multiple sources (interviews, observations, and document analysis), I was able to triangulate my findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 215).

In addition, after conducting interviews and typing up the transcripts, I member checked the information with my participants by sending them both the transcripts and

vignettes, and through conversation about the emerging findings, to ask for feedback about what had emerged from the work. As Merriam (2009) writes, “Although you may have used different words, participants should be able to recognize their experience in your interpretation or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives” (p. 217). To confirm accuracy of my interpretation, I was in communication with my participants throughout the process of writing by sharing them interview transcripts and the vignettes that were written, and each was grateful and receptive to the writing received. As Rose wrote to me:

> Thank you for sharing this, Greg. I can't imagine how much time it took to piece all of your interviews together and to come up with a narrative for each person (among the many other tasks of writing your dissertation). It was very cool to read about myself as an educator from someone else's point of view, and sometimes still cringe-worthy to read my direct quotes 😝.
>
> I feel honored that you included me in your research. Thank you for allowing me to articulate my thoughts and practices to you, I had a lot of fun doing it and found I was able to get to know myself better through the process” (Personal Communication, February 9, 2020).

Finally, it was important to note that for my educational criticism to have validity, it needs to possess what Uhrmacher et al. (2017) describes as structural corroboration and referential adequacy (p. 59). Structural corroboration refers to “presence of a coherent, persuasive whole picture” (p. 59), achieved through the triangulation and member checking referred to above. While the criticism itself will never be wholly complete, as one cannot accurately re-create all elements of any experience, much less those of a teacher’s entire career as might be expected in a discussion of teachers’ journeys, the data needs to utilize “direct quotations, dialogue, rich description, and specific details [to] paint the picture” (p. 59). I have attempted to employ these methods in my narrative vignettes in Chapter IV and throughout this study to do so.

Moreover, an educational criticism's credibility relies on meeting a standard of referential adequacy. Simply put, is the criticism useful in allowing the audience "to see education in a new way and for purposes deemed important" (p. 60)? While I leave that standard to the readers of this study, I have taken painstaking efforts to create a credible study that meets the standard of referential adequacy by employing methods suggested by Uhrmacher et al. (2017) of "member checking, interview questions dealing with the significance of the topic, and attending to contemporary and historical trends in education" (p. 60). While another critic may take a different interpretation about the impacts of prioritizing relational care in America's classrooms, it is hard to argue the relevance of a topic consistently debated among educational leaders behind closed doors and in published media.

Data Analysis

The process of gathering data and analyzing it happened over the course of the 2019 calendar year. I interviewed, observed, and collected artifacts from two participants, Rose and Kyle, in spring of 2019. After transcribing the interviews and sharing them with my participants, I began to analyze the data from my observation notes, interview transcripts, participant reflections, and documents shared. Glesne (2016) describes this process:

> Coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data (e.g., observation notes, interview transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature) that are applicable to your research purpose (p. 195-196).

In coding my data, I first began by reading through all of my transcripts and interview notes during the summer of 2019. I employed what Glesne (2016) describes as taxonomic coding: "…this method attempts to get at how participants categorize and talk

about some aspect of their culture" (p. 197). In this study, I coded the interview transcripts by how participants described some aspect of their classroom culture and work as a teacher, in relation to my research question. I did this as preliminary work, knowing that I would still be working with two additional participants after the summer.

In the fall of 2019, I gathered data from my third and fourth participants, Josh and Caroline. After conducting interviews and observations of their classes and gathering artifacts and documents, I re-read each of the transcripts for all of my participants and re-coded the data, using "taxonomic coding" (p. 197) and what Saldaña (2016) describes as descriptive coding (p. 102). Similar to hashtags on Twitter, descriptive coding helped me have quick reference to come back to the use of quotations and stories from my participants and describe what I witnessed in shorter form. As Saldaña (2016) writes, "Descriptive coding is a straightforward method for novices to qualitative research…This method categorizes data at a basic level to provide the researcher with an organizational grasp of the study" (p. 105). Utilizing these codes, I was able to compare participant data and see commonalities and differences across my participants.

Researcher Stance

In conducting this study, it was important to be mindful of maintaining my objectivity and acknowledging my bias and position as a researcher. As an educator, I have prioritized relational caring in my own teaching. Over the past decade, I have been heavily influenced by the work of Noddings (1984, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2015, 2016), Dewey (1897, 1938), Eisner (1988, 1994, 1996), Uhrmacher et al. (2017), and McConnell Moroye (2007, 2009). While I have implemented many techniques that attempt to approach assessment through a lens of care, I tried to maintain that I am a

researcher who holds beliefs about the power of approaching assessment through the lens of care theory. Among the many techniques I have implemented in my classroom in this manner are audio commentary on student papers, contract grading, choice projects that encourage multiple forms of representation, and arts-based integration into assignments and assessments. With that said, it is important to acknowledge that my views are not the only way in which an understanding of assessment through care theory can be developed. In short, in conducting an educational criticism, it is important that I recognize that, as Uhrmacher et al. (2017) writes, "The criticism provides one way to look at and understand the educational situation" (p. 53).

With that said, it is important to acknowledge that, in conducting an educational criticism, I cannot eliminate bias within this study. Rather, my perspective and experiences become part of the work itself. As Eisner (2017) writes, while structural corroboration and others' perspectives should be considered, "It should be recognized that most situations about which is written will not be crystal clear or unambiguous…there are always virtues to be found in the most troublesome classrooms and vices in the most virtuous ones" (p. 111)

Potential Implications and Limitations

The present study has potential to help us think about the nature of caring in the classroom and examines classrooms of a wide variety of natures, including public, independent and charter schools. In addition, the participants in this study come from a variety of different disciplines (history, science, math, and Special Education) and grade levels (elementary and secondary). While future studies may hone in on specific subject disciplines, ages, grade levels, school settings (e.g.: urban, rural, suburban), school types

(e.g.: public, charter, private, parochial, boarding), or demographics (gifted and talented, Title I, etc.), this study seeks to begin to reveal the impact that approaching assessment through the lens of care theory may have on the ecosystem that is a classroom.

Study Structure

The structure of my dissertation follows that of an educational criticism of "description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 37). The first chapter provided in-depth understanding of the rationale for such a study. Chapter II engaged with a review of the relevant literature on care theory and assessment, noting the application of the theory to assessment over time. There has been a gap in the literature of care theory's application to assessment in classroom, and this study seeks to fill that gap while also building on the studies of others, including those of Cooper and Miness (2014), Averill (2012), Hackenberg (2010), Cridland-Hughes (2015), and Cloninger (2008). These studies all address the exploration of caring relationships in the classroom, but do not do so through the lens of assessment. Chapter IV will delve into the interpretivist epistemological aspect of the study, describing and interpreting the data collected. It will be a main chapter in helping answer my first two research questions about how caring teachers approach assessment and why they do so in that manner, as well as looking at how teachers negotiate external influences on assessment practices. Chapter V then turns to the final two aspects of the educational criticism, evaluating what has occurred and thematizing the data into possible implications for teachers and the work they do in their classrooms. This chapter will be focused on my third research question, how does assessment through a caring lens impact the other four aspects of Elliot Eisner's ecology of schooling, including intentions, structure, curriculum, and

pedagogy, within their classrooms. I am hopeful that this study will yield insight into how a caring approach to assessment can help positively affect the various other elements of a classroom toward an end in the spirit of Noddings' vision:

> In direct opposition to the current emphasis on academic standards, a national curriculum, and national testing, I have argued that our main educational aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people. This is a morally defensible aim for education in the 21st century (Noddings, 1997).

This chapter will also address my fourth research question about larger potential implications this study has for teachers' professional development and for assessment practices in general.

Educational criticism and connoisseurship is an appropriate methodology for this study because I seek to look at subtlety in the caring classroom and show who these teachers are as human beings, the very essence of educational criticism. As Uhrmacher et al. (2017) write, "The aim is to *make the familiar strange...*[and] *make the strange familiar"* (p. 5). Readers have experienced assessments that impacted them and those that shut them off. The same is true of teachers. This study seeks to look at the "meanings of social and educational experiences…and there is often more than meets the eye" (p. 5). Moreover, as the authors point out, "Educational criticism …allows us to interpret educational products and events from particular theoretical standpoints" (p. 5). Here, this study will look at how caring teachers approach assessments given in their classroom. It is my assertion that the words caring and assessment need not be diametrically opposed. Teachers demonstrate care through their assessment structures every day.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTIONS OF REPUTATIONALLY CARING TEACHERS

Introduction

The four research questions that guide this study are repeated below, and the following discussion seeks to draw upon the interviews, observations, and document analysis I conducted to reveal major findings and implications, and to provide impetus for future areas of research, which is explored in Chapter V. Table 1 provides a chart of the various sources used to help answer each research question.

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Question	Data Sources
How do reputationally caring teachers approach classroom assessment and why do they have that approach?	Document analysis, interviews with teachers, observation of classes
How do reputationally caring teachers perceive and negotiate external influences on assessment?	Interviews with teachers (primary), document analysis and observation of classes
When assessments are approached through a caring lens, how are the other elements of the ecology of schooling affected, including curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and intentions?	Document analysis, interviews with teachers, observation of classes
What are the implications of caring assessments for the professional development of teachers and for assessment practices in general?	Document analysis, teacher journaling and reflection, interviews with teachers, observation of classes

To begin to understand how teachers are interacting with the reality of data-driven instruction, I sought out teachers who were considered "reputationally caring" at their respective schools because I wanted to look at how teachers who were considered caring approach classroom assessment, specifically the progress of their students.

As discussed in Chapters I and II, the world of education has moved away from relational care toward an emphasis on data-driven instruction. External pressures from various constituents, most notably government entities in the public sector, have rendered some teachers focusing on standardized testing outcomes more consistently than teaching and learning. As Eisner's ecology (1988) describes, schools and classrooms are like ecosystems. With the evaluation of individual students taking priority, the intentions,

structures, curriculum, and pedagogy have all been influenced to accommodate for an evaluative component that lends emphasis to the standardized tests, Common Core standards, and state ratings based on testing data. In conducting this study, I am examining how teachers navigate a world that, in the broader educational sphere, emphasizes educational data over caring relationships and am interested in exploring how reputationally caring teachers have done so. This different approach, antithetical to the one implicitly desired by government officials tying growth and performance to data, creates a different set of impacts in Eisner's ecology (1988).

In Chapter III, I introduced the qualitative method of educational criticism and connoisseurship utilized in this study. This methodology is firmly entrenched in the traditions of qualitative research, and as Eisner (2017) Uhrmacher et al.(2017), and Flinders and Eisner (1994) describe, this work is personal: "Connoisseurship is grounded in the connoisseur's interests and belief in the importance of what he or she seeks to understand" (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 11).

I care deeply about the experience of children in and out of classrooms, and thus, I sought to discern what makes for a positive, caring classroom experience for students through researching the participants' work. Uhrmacher et al. (2017) describes three aspects of discernment, appreciation, and valuing (p. 12) as integral to the work of educational criticism and connoisseurship. Discernment rests in "the ability to notice and differentiate qualities" (p. 12); appreciation "is a matter of knowing what to look for" (p. 14), and valuing "represents what constitutes goodness within a particular domain of study" (p. 15). Another educational critic, looking through the lens of state assessment, might see the participants' emphasis on social-emotional learning, student experience,

and care as unnecessary or even harmful. However, my experience as a classroom teacher and belief in the power of relational care represents my perspective that the work of reputationally caring teachers, individuals respected and even idolized in their communities, is demonstrative of their goodness and effectiveness.

Flinders and Eisner (1994) write that educational criticism rests on two basic analogies, both appropriate for this study: "…the researcher-as-critic and teaching-as-art" (p. 343). In this study, I look at caring teaching as one would look at a work of art, unique, individualized, open to interpretation, and unfettered by formula. Flinders writes that not all teaching is art, but "…we can also recall those adept teachers who exploited the possibilities of pedagogy, and who therefore encouraged a climate in which students were able to deliterize perception, explore ideas, and take satisfaction from their own achievements" (p. 343-344). These are the caring teachers showcased in this study.

In this chapter, I describe vignettes collected from the interviews, class observations, and artifact analysis that I conducted with my participants. I describe these interviews and experiences with a narrative approach, re-creating scenes and stories from the lives and lived experiences of the participants as they relate to the research questions of this study. As Uhrmacher et al. (2017) describe, these descriptions "provide the evidence on which interpretations are built" (p. 38), and they also "contextualize a study's results" (p. 39). In the following, I provide narrative snapshots into the lives of the teachers. This is the intersection of description and interpretation in my study, two of four dimensions integral to the process of educational criticism. As Uhrmacher et al. (2017) describe, "In a well-crafted educational criticism, description and interpretation fit hand in glove…We define interpretation as the application of concepts, often through the

use of analyses and metaphor, in ways that foreground the relationships, patterns, or reasons for events and situations at hand" (p. 41).

In employing educational criticism, I am drawing out what Flinders and Eisner (1994) would analogize to the artistry of teaching, ironic and perhaps appropriate in that this study's examination reveals the aesthetic beauty of the work of caring teachers. As Flinders and Eisner (1994) write, "What artistry is to teaching, criticism is to the qualitative study of classroom life" (p. 344). My approach in this chapter of utilizing narrative vignettes paints a picture of the lives of the participants: Josh, Rose, Caroline, and Kyle.

These experiences and snapshots are presented through the lens of my lived experience of working with these four participants. While I seek to describe these past stories and current observations as accurately as possible, many of the descriptions are born from the dialogue and re-telling of stories from the perspective of the participants, filtered through my own interpretation. It's important to note that educational criticism accepts that educational critics may have differences in interpretation. As Flinders and Eisner (1994) describe, in educational criticism, it is reasonable for readers to find some overlap in understanding, description, and interpretation from two researchers who visit the same school, what Eisner (2017) describes as consensual validation. However, as Flinders and Eisner (1994) describe, "Consensual validation is not the same as inter-rater reliability…our main point…is that differences among critics are not necessarily a failed measure of reliability" (p. 349).

In some cases, thematic overlap exists between the four participants, which is explored throughout this chapter. These themes, as Uhrmacher et al. (2017) describe, can

help inform the reader of the study's purpose: "The themes distill the major ideas that run through general educational matters and provide guidance, not a guarantee or prediction, for understanding broader educational contexts" (p. 54). Flinders and Eisner (1994) summarize and expand upon the purpose of educational criticism, writing that the study "seeks to create compelling and richly textured accounts of classroom practice. In doing so, the critic's aim is to enhance the perceptions and understandings of the qualities that constitute an educational performance or product. The achievements of skilled teachers are made most visible through informed accounts of their work" (p. 355). Flinders and Eisner's summation still holds true today; however, as these vignettes reveal, classroom practice only begins to describe the work of these reputationally caring teachers. The work is a reminder of what can occur in journalistic practice.

In the film "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" (Heller, 2019), fictional journalist Lloyd Vogel is assigned a profile of Fred Rogers, the children's television show host. Per the movie's screenplay, Vogel is first charged with a brief profile of 400 words by his editor. He approaches the work cynically, seeking to finish his assignment and get back to the real work of uncovering truth as an investigative reporter. What he finds is an investigation unto itself, a complex man who lives his life as he hosts his show. In the movie, Vogel ends up writing 10,000 words about Rogers, but the story is about more than the television program host's life. The film implies Vogel's profile and work had really only just begun.

I mention this interlude about a cinematic venture only to say that the fictional Vogel's work is the kind of work endeavored here. Uhrmacher et al. (2017) describes educational criticism as having overlap with "ethnographic and case study research

because educational criticism often involves fieldwork and seeks to contextualize data by attending to the particulars of what educational critics observe" (p. 3). The narrative vignettes and discussion to follow conceptualizes the caring work of these four teachers. I wish that I had the opportunity to embed myself in their classrooms more consistently, watching them each day as they went about their work. Their teaching and approaches were inspirational, and I am hopeful I can re-frame the practice of teaching through the lens of care in a new, positive light that inspires others to follow their lead.

Finally, in this chapter, I describe a series of educational criticisms through narrative vignettes that provide a glimpse into the lives of the participants. With each participant, I described their journey to becoming a caring teacher, their negotiation of various obstacles or pressures in their respective context, and their own ideas about their caring practices. These themes are explored in this chapter, as I try to answer my research questions.

The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A) that I utilized were designed toward answering my research questions listed previously in this study and in Table 1 (p. 11 and 63 of this study). In speaking with the teachers, however, the interview questions often strayed to other elements of their teaching lives, allowing me to bring in the work of educational theorists I had not previously explored, such as Parker J. Palmer (1997, 2007) and Peter Hlebowitsh (2012), and others with whom I was familiar with, including Nel Noddings, John Dewey, Willard Waller (1932), Dan C. Lortie (1975), and F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin (1988).

Bringing to Life "Reputational Care"

What does it mean to be a teacher in 2020? Moreover, what does it mean to be a "reputationally caring" teacher? In conducting this research at four different sites with four participants all who teach different disciplines at various K-12 levels, the research revealed that this study trended toward understanding what it means to be a caring teacher in the current climate of big data, high-stakes testing, and accountability through evaluation. In fact, participants spoke little of their specific assessment practices as important or integral to their work. Rather, they spoke of their students, and of care, leading to the belief that caring assessment actually has little to do with assessment as an evaluative mechanism. An orientation to caring assessment is an exercise in how one orients themselves to their students every day in all facets of teaching, not just when the testing day arrives. Assessment – testing, quizzing, evaluation more generally – is not viewed by participants as separate entities to the enterprise of learning. Care is part of their ethos of being a teacher, someone who exhibits care for their students the moment they walk through the door and continues long after they leave. In addition to this finding, others are described throughout this chapter and are summarized here. While external influences can compromise the ability for teachers to demonstrate and enact the relational care they seek, the participants of this study did not make excuses when obstacles arose to their care. These reputationally caring teachers prioritized the people in the room, focusing on the students in front of them as opposed to the obstacles to their care. Participants believed that good teaching is not "reduced to technique" (Palmer, 2007 p. 118), and comes from the teacher teaching who they are (Henriksen & Mishra, 2015; Palmer, 2007). The caring teaching practiced here rests on a foundation of relational trust,

understanding one another's stories. For caring relationships to flourish, individuals must be recognized for who they are, received by that individual, and responded to in kind (Noddings, 2005).

Given this, the concept of a "reputationally caring teacher" is an important one to consider before delving into the first research question about reputationally caring teachers' approach to assessment. The traits and characteristics associated with being reputationally caring – open-minded, relational, receptive, connected – puts teachers on a pedestal within their respective communities. What has earned them that status? To introduce these participants, I have crafted a series of vignettes that seek to capture snapshots of who these teachers are.

Kyle

Kyle is the youngest and least experienced of the four participants, but that has not stopped him from quickly becoming a reputationally caring teacher in a community where he holds alumni status.

As one of Kyle's administrators wrote to me by email, "Kyle relentlessly believes in kids and reinforces a 'not yet'/growth mindset. Along those lines, he pushes kids to not have a fixed view of themselves as bad mathematicians" (Personal Communication, November 28, 2019). Kyle's administrator also included that Kyle is always available to students before and after school, gives them lots of feedback, sees and supports them at various extracurricular events (drama productions, athletic events), and holds various roles in the school to get to know kids outside of the math classroom. He went on to write, "Before break, I saw Kyle go out of his way to find a kid who normally struggles

with math to share the news that they got a score in the 90s. He gave them a lot of credit for their hard work" (Personal Communication, November 28, 2019).

Another colleague wrote of Kyle as caring for similar reasons and wrote of his intentionality, thoughtfulness, high expectations, willingness to go the extra mile and joy as representative of who Kyle is as a teacher: "He is real, honest, and genuine with his students…he is very intentional in his words and actions" (Personal Communication, December 6, 2019). The following vignettes elucidate these remarks.

Turning Yelling into Care

A student is yelling at Kyle. She has a D in his class. She has bombed the test. Kyle attempts to diffuse the bomb. He keeps the student after class. They talk, break down each mistake. He demonstrates that she can do this, can earn points back. The assessment, the failure on it, led to care.

This was Kyle's first year teaching at an inner-city public school, so perhaps he has always acted like this. His instincts have always been sound, a young man who came out of the womb more mature than many adults will ever be. Growing up, he had mentors to look up to, people he could count on when his own challenges presented themselves. They demonstrated care in ways that helped him see what it meant to be a caring teacher: 7 am for four straight weeks to work on college applications. All he had to do was show up.

"I always knew if I needed assistance, if I needed help, my teachers would be there for me. Whether it was an academic concern, a social concern. And coaches, I should say honestly. I should say coaches as well for sure. I always knew that I could turn to someone, and they would always have my best interest and help me in some way."

So when Kyle started his teaching career, he expected the kids to flock to him the way he had flocked to his teachers and coaches. Unlike for Kyle, in his first inner-city school, respect had to be earned.

> And after two weeks, I reflected. It was a weekend. I reflected on why aren't things going as well. What am I either doing or not doing? And in fact, what can I do to better the situation? And what I came to was something that I feel like that I've been able to do fairly well my entire life is interacting, you know, communicating with people. Learning who they are as people. And I realized I wasn't doing it. I wasn't connecting with the kids nearly as much as I should on multiple levels.

Kyle changed his approach. He started using lunch times as study halls. He created activities where students learned about each other through the math content and problems he created. He shared who he was and where he was coming from, a recent college graduate who had no idea what he was doing and was making it up along the way.

> Those created those small opportunities to really interact, learn more about them, have them learn more about me too, which I realized I did not do a great job of at the beginning either, which was sharing myself as much as they needed in order to know about me and to want them to succeed.

Students still yell at Kyle, though not nearly as often as in that first year. He believes "care can take many forms," that teachers can become more caring through intentional practice and coaching. However, above all, Kyle's journey to becoming a caring teacher comes back to a simple life mantra:

> When I think about caring, one of the main things that I go to is relationships. So I would tell [students], there's teachers I remember who I'll never forget because not what they taught me academically, but what I learned from them in how to become a person, and what I've learned from them in terms of their care for me. How much did they want me to be successful?

The Young Energizer Bunny

I park my Nissan Rogue in the neighborhood of split-level houses nestled into a quiet suburban neighborhood. As I pull on my windbreaker to brave the elements of an uncharacteristically gray May day, I meander around the gated community of the independent K-8 school where Kyle teaches and punch the button to gain entry to the pristinely manicured grounds. A fire drill is imminent, so the office staff asks me to wait on the soccer field and enter the classroom building after the event. Kyle emerges from the building with his class. We wait in the cold, making small talk, his gaze and manner seamlessly code-switching between fire marshal seriousness and cordial participant.

We enter his classroom. Small circular tables create a small box-plot around the room in a similar formation to the Algebraic graphic exercise that the students are attempting to solve on the overhead projector. The classroom was neither designed nor designated for math. Posters of great Americans line the walls, though a math poster here and there has been tucked away in corners. Kyle is relatively new to the school. It is clear he is teaching on borrowed turf.

The fifteen students follow Kyle with the gazes of middle schoolers, respectful of the authority figure in the room and negotiating how much or little they might have to do on this foggy morning. Then, it happens. Kyle flips a switch for the students. His energy bounces around the room. Each student gets an individual one-on-one conversation about their opening activity; he quickly shuts down a mean comment from one peer to another; he's a whirling dervish, a Warner Brothers' Tasmanian devil, covering ground across the classroom with intentionality and aplomb. Students can't not pay attention to Kyle.

Later, the class turns away from math toward understanding one's self as a learner.

"Write down one thing you did well; one thing you need to work on."

A discussion of the handed-back quiz ensues, but with each question, Kyle comes over to the students, looks them in the eye, converses with them in a way that requires his engagement in the conversation. Everyone participates. There's an intensity to the class of focused productivity. Kyle wants the class to be described this way. He emphasizes group work, wants his students to know each other and themselves. He hopes "I see smiles…making jokes and stuff too." There is, though on this day, math and the lesson take primary focus.

Obstacles exist, however. Kyle describes the pressure that students feel to do well from parents, their peers, and themselves. Girls in his advanced class are outnumbered, 11 to 4 in this particular section. Kyle's pretty new to the school and to the profession itself. With only a handful of years under his belt, he is fearful to "rock the boat" within the school. He struggles to find colleagues to collaborate with, to push his thinking in meaningful ways.

Kyle has solutions for these obstacles. He turns to math guru Jo Boller for new ideas, expands his network by connecting with education peers outside school, and tries to intentionally engage in professional growth, including summer programming. He feels fortunate to be in a caring environment with supportive administrators, parents, and a group of students who one can tell really respond to him. Yet as he reflects, he knows that more joy could be infused into his assessments and his daily work.

"I can honestly say I don't think there's a lot of joy during those [test] days for sure."

No matter how much positive energy Kyle exudes, he strives for more. The question for Kyle remains as he progresses on his journey: Is the well of energy bottomless?

The Final Impression

Kyle's school gives two sets of grades on report cards. The first is a traditional academic mark, an A+ through F scale correlated to the student's percentage in the course. The second is called an effort grade, rating the student on a scale of 1 to 5, in how hard they are working in the class, among other traits.

"It's a willingness to take risks is what that looks like," Kyle says.

Upon reflection and through conversation, Kyle wishes the word effort became care. It more accurately represents the relationship he's trying to convey. He wants a reciprocal relationship, one where his students and he are delivering feedback to one another about their work. Said another way, Kyle wants his students to "grade" him.

> And I'll actually tell them afterwards, I appreciated your feedback...Because I could see that feedback that they might see as critical, that could be hard to give to a teacher. I get that. So just encouraging them in that way, I think that has helped them – those particular students who have done it – has definitely helped them continue to give me feedback.

Kyle wants feedback from his students, builds it into their assessments as part of the questions that they answer. Every trimester he asks for more, and he acts on it. When described Noddings' idea of relational care (2005) involving reception, recognition, and response, Kyle adds a fourth word: action. Teachers have to act on the responses they receive. If students feel they don't have enough time for assessments, Kyle alters his

approach, scanning the room during the opening stretch before making a determination as to how much longer the test or quiz should go. Feedback, adaptation, and responding to his students needs means as much to him, perhaps more, than how well they can graph the equation of a line or solve for x.

I asked Kyle to journal about his caring practices, the things that he does that help him reach students and show that he cares for them as humans, not as test takers. Assessment drives anxiety in his environment, so Kyle did something new this year. He showed his students the front cover of their final exam, including a quote about fear from the popular film, "Coach Carter":

> Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
> Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
> It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.
> Your playing small does not serve the world.
> There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
> We were all meant to shine as children do.
> It's not just in some of us; it is in everyone.
> And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others (Carter, 2005).

Before the exam, Kyle goes through the instructions for his students, allows them to clarify what will be expected of them. He's not trying to trick them or surprise them. They discuss the quote and the confidence he hopes they come into the test with.

"Yeah, I think it was just a great way to, already seeing the front page, feel confident, have an understanding of what it's going to be all about, have something that they recognized, to start off, to look at [that was familiar]."

Kyle's caring practices with assessment often involve quotes. Students are asked to write their own motivational quote at the top of the assessments all year to help them

get into a confident mindset. Sometimes, they're simple ("Good luck"); other times, they make Kyle laugh out loud ("Leave it all on the paper"). During standardized assessments given at one point during the year, Kyle has his students make motivational posters to give them "imagery to be in a positive state of mind."

Kyle is only scratching the surface of his caring practices. He realizes during the course of our conversation that he probably could do "whatever he wanted" with assessment. He doesn't have to give individual tests. The assessment day environment could be a lot more joyous than it currently is. However, Kyle's most caring practice currently comes after the test ends. When students do poorly, he requires them to come in and meet with him. The test doesn't end when the pencil leaves the child's hand.

That final exam? One student, even with "Coach Carter" quotes and previews of material, bombs the test. The year is ending; Kyle could drift into summer, allow the student to leave for high school and figure it out later. She's not his problem anymore. He doesn't.

Kyle calls home. The student should meet him before school departs for summer, discuss what went wrong, figure out ways to improve and reflect on the great progress she'd made all year, not the disappointment of one test.

"I didn't want her to see it and have that be her final lasting memory of her performance or her overall performance for the entire year, knowing that she worked so hard this year and learned so much as well."

The conversations serve as care for Kyle too:

> I realized I didn't feel nearly as worn down after a day because I'd had those conversations and realized those conversations built me up. And it definitely, in my opinion, helped significantly. I definitely took that, and I've taken the power of building relationships with me ever since.

Josh

Colleagues of Josh echoed similar sentiments about his care for students in their community. One of Josh's colleagues wrote to me by email:

> Josh engages with his students and makes them feel seen and cared for. He goes out of his way to talk to them about what matters to them and works with them on a person to person level as opposed to a teacher/student level. And he does all of this while being a teacher, which is a tough line to work with (Personal Communication, December 2, 2019).

The following vignettes introduce and bring to life Josh's work.

Understanding Inflection Points

In the study of history, the discipline that Josh and his students grapple with each day at his suburban public high school, there are moments, turning points that signal landmark shifts: elections, wars, significant events that change the course of history.

"It was just really a wakeup call. The kids matter. The state: I don't give a shit about state standards."

Josh's first period class during his fourth year had an empty desk for the worst of reasons. A student in his first period class had died. She had taken her own life.

"It shook me in my role to my core."

Today, Josh has become a reputationally caring teacher at his school. Self-critical, self-reflective, and earnest, Josh sits across from me in Starbucks, full beard, shirt and tie after coming directly from his day at school. He describes his journey to becoming a caring teacher. Josh teaches high school history. He talks about moments in history that were turning points, those on which the economic, political and social ramifications of history were considerable and influential in shaping who we are and how we got that

way. These inflection points changed the course of history, leaving indelible marks on influencing what was to come.

In Josh's journey as a teacher, losing a student was an inflection point, something he tried to submerge until he was asked about how and why he cares for his students in the way that he does.

Talking about tragedy opens the flood gates. A silver lining: the best teaching experience he ever had came in the wake of that student suicide. Administrators, putting students above content in a "rare" move, advised teachers to do whatever their classes could handle. Josh dove into a study of Gandhi with his students, a unit that ordinarily would last a few days became week after week of inviting work.

"They were just eating up Gandhi," Josh said. "They couldn't get enough, so I said, okay, let's keep going."

A project with student choice led Josh to a new understanding of his students. Care meant relinquishing control, allowing his students to drive their educational experience more significantly, to be in the driver's seat of what they wanted to study and how they went about doing so. His perspective had changed. For the worst of reasons.

As Josh and I converse, he opens up further, reflects on who he is as a teacher and why. Tragedy may have led him to take risks with permission that he had never felt he had; however, this wasn't the first time Josh's inclinations led him to put students before standards. Before Josh worked in this school, he saw what happened where putting standards or policy above relationships would have led kids to jail. Prior to coming to this high school, Josh worked in a high-poverty school, a place that had major disciplinary problems, low test scores, and pressure to meet state standards and increase test scores for

fear of the school being closed or the staff being dismissed. Despite these significant consequences, his own teacher evaluation lacked thoroughness.

"I got evaluated one time. Vice principal stuck her head in, looked up at the board [to see the standard written], marked three things and then left. You're fucking kidding me…They're going to create a list of 10 whatever...It was mundane."

His students were immigrants, homeless, pressured by gangs. In the face of adversity, Josh's inclinations turned to the students; he ignored what he didn't believe in, implemented what he did and put relationships with his students first to the degree he could.

"Some kids just need a place to be. And legally, if they're not there, they're going to jail. If I hit that absent button, they might have to go to jail. That's a different sort of power to have over someone."

Josh wouldn't hit absent in those cases. That action might have led to a negative inflection point for a child, one that put one of his students out of his classroom and into a jail cell. Care meant meeting kids where they were, keeping them in the classroom and helping those kids however he could. The kids who caused trouble, who took up the most time, who tested the patience of others, those are the kids Josh cared for most. His journey has involved not giving up on his students, even when they did the dumbest things a teacher could encounter.

"I was rooting for [this girl] so hard, and she just kept getting in trouble," Josh says. "She literally dropped a vape pen at my feet, like literally at my feet, by accident."

The girl stopped coming to class; her grades dropped. She skipped the final. Josh went into the summer disillusioned, upset that the student hadn't met him halfway, hadn't reciprocated the care that he had shown.

Three months passed. When Josh arrived back to school, before school began, the girl sought him out.

"You're one of the few people who has ever cared about me," the girl cried to him. "I'm going to do well because of you."

She received the care eventually, or as Josh says, "She received it all along. She just couldn't let me know."

Care takes time, and Josh chooses to take it and to see all the things right in his students. His journey as a teacher, and now as a parent of a young child, has led him to see students through the lens of everything that is right with them. They can walk and talk, hear and see, answer and ask questions, make and lose friends. Josh's journey to care, the tragedies and the everyday struggles, has led him to remember what really matters in school from his perspective:

> [When the suicide happened], I was only a probationary teacher, but that was another key component that shaped my thinking was, what the fuck really matters? It really, when…thinking back on that, that really opened my eyes, nothing that takes place in a school matters aside from the development of these kids.

Obstacles of Self and System

Josh does not think of himself as a great teacher. A caring teacher? Yes. A great teacher? No.

"Any obstacles I face are sort of my own creation or my own lack of creativity," Josh said. "The school would back me up in any way; I really feel that about the school; they don't provide any obstacles to me doing what I want to do."

Josh and I meet in early August before the school year begins. Optimism abound, Josh speaks quickly and authoritatively about the love he has for his current environment. He's self-critical, saying on multiple occasions how much he has to learn; however, as Josh goes through the beginning of his school year and reflects on his experiences and the obstacles to his demonstrating care in his assessments, one in particular springs forth: Class sizes and the number of students taught.

"It's 220. So he teaches 220 kids every single day. So if you care about caring, you can't care for 220 kids a day."

Josh is describing his homeroom partner, a teacher with whom he shares an advisory type of class. Josh himself has 25 students on this day. He's reduced his workload to part-time to care for his own young child at home. He's created conditions to be able to have the energy and wherewithal to provide the relational care seen in his U.S History class on this day. Codebreaking is the topic at hand.

Enter Josh's classroom. No windows, 35 desks lined up in rows to every corner of the classroom. Josh had a choice with this room. He regrets it, after a school shooting at the school, he wanted an enclosed space, thinking it would be better to give up natural light for the purpose of safety. He makes the most of the space, however, with student work lining the walls and references to the U.S. history that the students will engage with all year.

Students enter the class, and this is where Josh's care begins.

"How's it going, Julie?"

"How was the soccer game, John?"

"We missed you yesterday, Doug!"

Students, usually engaged in Snapchat and Instagram, look up from their devices and engage Josh in conversation with a smile and energy. They seek to match Josh's enthusiasm. It is the expectation and the culture of care he has cultivated.

Class begins with announcements and the Pledge of Allegiance. Students begin by writing notes to one another as announcements occur. "Just small random acts of kindness," quick thoughts that are complimentary of character or thanking another person in the class to be shared with students at a later date. Announcements end, the Pledge is recited, and Josh breaks into a mini-introduction about the intelligence wars of World War 2. He's created an "escape room" type lesson, a series of tasks where students have to break into locked boxes around the room to come up with the next clue to figure out what they need to know about the codebreaking of World War 2. Learning about codebreaking, naturally, requires it.

"I wish I was creative enough to do this every day," he reflects later.

Where are the obstacles? The school gives him everything he needs: trust and freedom to explore ideas, to try out new things. The obstacles come from the school system itself for Josh. How do you get to know 220 students in one year? How do you grade their writing when Josh only has time for a couple of meaningful assignments a year?

"I think writing is hugely important, super difficult for me to do that more than a couple of times [a year]. An honest, good writing assignment because I have 35 kids every hour, so it's ridiculous to try to do that…I just kind of scan them. I can't go as detailed in grading."

How do you spend the appropriate amount of time on the "other 30 children" when a student with special needs enters your room? These are the questions that Josh and his wife wrestle with in the evening after their own young daughter falls asleep.

Josh loves the kids who need the most attention. He cares for them. But when there are so many kids to care for, how does one find enough hours in the day to do it well for every single one?

Extra Time

Josh shows me the database of tests, exams, assignments, and lesson plans on his Google Drive. I ask him about how he differentiates his assignments. Josh differentiates through universal acts of accommodation.

"Anyone. Anyone can have extra time. Anyone can come in during an off hour. Anyone who does poorly on a test, you can do the corrections."

Josh is talking about students who have accommodations in his class. Some students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that allows them to have extra time or to take the test in a quiet room, as mandated by the state.

But remember, Josh doesn't care about the state. He cares about his students. So Josh gives all students these accommodations. From his perspective, when it comes to assessment, all students could benefit from the accommodations that are given to students who have a diagnosis.

"They're all anxious; they all have an attentional deficit. My thinking is anyone can have everything because I don't care if it takes you 30 minutes or an hour and 30 minutes to demonstrate what you've learned."

Josh's caring practice starts there – what does the kid need to be successful?

When Josh started teaching, he didn't always have this view. He has grown into caring practices with assessment, challenging the conventional notions of assessment being standardized and taken by an individual. He wishes his tests were less rote, less content-driven; he's working on the evolution of their content, particularly after reflecting on whether the questions could really be justified in the age of Google.

"If an educated adult could do well, then I think it's a good test…Let's use the testing period as a lesson in which they can still learn. Like learning should take place during the test."

It seems like an obvious concept, but Josh feels testing is often seen as separate from learning. After all, students learn the material *for* the test. Josh has flipped the concept on its head.

Students enter for class, and Josh tells them he has a "surprise lesson" for them. He pulls out a stack of papers and drops them on the table.

"Oh my god, pop quiz," a student cries.

"Even better…," Josh replies.

"Oh my god, a pop test!"

"A pop test!"

The students take their exam in groups.

"One of my students said [about the last test], I thought it was good. I learned a lot. I think there were three or four things I didn't know, that I didn't understand, but then my group explained it to me, and I understood. You know, they're learning. That's, to me, the point."

Josh has gotten pushback about grades on occasion from students and parents, even about his group test once from a parent who thought her child was getting an unfair shake by carrying others within his group. Josh's response: That's fine. Your child can take the test individually in another room.

The student didn't like that very much and was in a group the very next time.

Unconventional approaches to grading don't bother Josh. As a student who struggled in school himself, he wishes he had the opportunity in school to use assessments for learning, not for finding out what he didn't know, which was often quite a bit.

To that end, Josh grades softer skills too. He calls them "Responsibility Points", turning in assignments on time, coming to class on time, paying attention and not being a "constant pain in the ass or distraction to other kids." He assumes students want to do well, makes a contract with them that if they show him and their classmates respect through these actions and others; he'll respond in tow through their grade. Josh's assessment practices influence his intentions for students. He spends time in his class on things that will never be graded but that demonstrate the kind of people he wants his students to become: "One more thing as a caring practice – this little thing on the side Little slips of paper, so they write a kind note to someone in the class."

Josh's students don't balk when he enters class and asks them to begin with their compliment notes. It's part of the classroom culture, a place where kindness is rewarded. Above all, he wants his students to remember what happens in the class as fun, enjoyable, and exciting.

> If I just did the PowerPoint, I think I could cover a lot more…But this was something I remembered coaching soccer. At halftime, if you tell them eight things to think about, they're going to get zero. If you give them two, they might get two. It's kind of like that. My students are not getting nearly the [amount of] information the others are getting, but maybe it sticks.

The caring approach to assessment attempts to make that happen.

Rose

Like Josh and Kyle, Rose puts students at the forefront of her care. Her colleagues shared to me by email similar ideas about her care for her students. As one colleague wrote, "I see her meeting with her students outside of class… she is frequently asking them how they feel about things related to her class" (Personal Communication, November 26, 2019). The following vignettes capture a snapshot of Rose's caring work in and out of the classroom.

Always Been Good at School

"I was the type of person who really liked to do well in school," Rose says. "I've always been good at learning things and school and things like that."

Rose works in a college preparatory independent school, a place with high expectations, ambitious students, motivated parents, and intense pressure around grades and assessment. It's a school where care can be interpreted by families as the teacher creating an environment to earn an A for a college application. Rose knows this. She

works well in this environment. After all, she thrived in a similar kind of environment in her own school, earning top grades at a school like this one.

Seeing many of her students as a mirror of herself, however, Rose realized what their reality may look like without adaptation and learning. After leaving school, Rose went to go learn something on her own, and she felt scared, intimidated, overwhelmed. The student who had always done well didn't know how to learn without "someone else to curate [the experience] for her." It made her angry, upset, focused on creating a different reality for her students, so they didn't graduate from high school with 4.0 grade point averages and no knowledge of how to learn outside of school. Rose said:

> So I thought that's stupid, in fact so stupid, that I could get through school and be a successful student and then be a horrible student of the world. So it has definitely been an intentional mission of mine, especially for those students – a lot of them exist here – who are so focused on their grades, to try to bring them back to, 'Well, what are you actually learning?' Are you getting anything out of this experience?'

Rose's journey to become a caring teacher didn't begin on day one. She knows it took years, a change in environments, for her to begin to see herself as a teacher who looked through the lens of student experience as paramount. Now, her science department colleagues banter with her, trade ideas, consider the problems she's wrestling with. At the end of the day, however, she knows that the only reason she has become a caring teacher is because she stopped thinking about teaching as about her: "If you didn't care about the student experience, then you can observe these things, and you won't do anything about it. Or you might not even observe them in the first place. You might not be paying enough attention to your students."

Rose has implemented a series of caring practices with respect to her assessments to move students away from this fixed mindset around grades as self-worth. She says she

has the freedom to try out ideas, colleagues to engage in conversation with, meaningful professional development experiences, and the time in the summer to reflect on her practice and implement some of the ideas that have become her most caring. Conditions coalesced into an environment that allowed her to "talk about the seeds planted in her head." Her journey to care happened because of a variety of factors. Whether her journey is replicable for the larger public is just one of many concerns she has. The current model makes that "tricky". She pauses to reflect.

"You won't have a model of it on your own without context, and so connecting novice teachers with caring teachers is really important, not just the people who want to get more money because they have a mentee."

Confidence Under Pressure

Rose has fewer students than Josh, no more than 16 or 17 in an hour. Her independent school provides her a large classroom with a whole designated lab space complete with the funding to engage in most any lab she would want her Chemistry students to experience. The obstacle is not having too many students. She has a reasonable load of students and the support to provide them individual attention. The pressures on those students, however, are intense. The stakes for high school Chemistry, the potential blowback she might receive to her grading has her on high alert.

> I try to check myself multiple times when there's a multiple point question. I will almost always check-in with another chemistry teacher because of fear a student will be upset by the percentage of points that they got, and I want to be sure I am really confident in why I chose that many points.

Grades are social currency and not only for students. Parents at Rose's independent, college preparatory school have challenged Rose's grades, undermining the

relationship with her students. In Rose's environments, grades can impact other elements of her classroom.

> [Grading] isn't my favorite thing to do, but I do think about it because I have had some experiences where a bad test can kind of create a rift in our relationship…And while I try to make it about how can we learn *from* this assessment, I think actually tests can be a really great learning opportunity. Last year, I was calling them LOPS.
>
> LOPS?
>
> "Learning opportunities!"

When I observe Rose's class, her students enter prepared to engage with a LOP. It's a sophomore Chemistry class in April. The energy is low in this second period class. Students enter quietly, put their phones in the phone wall case, a cubby-like contraption that holds their devices, and sit down for their Knowledge Check (KC), a formative assessment that allows them to see where they are in the middle of a unit. They'll be able to make corrections, to learn from their mistakes, to take advantage of the opportunity if they screw up today.

Students receive the KC and have to answer how confident they feel in their studying. At the conclusion of the KC, they answer another question about their confidence levels, as shown in Figure 1 below:

3.) <u>After completing the KC</u>, rate how much you agree with the following statement:

I feel confident that I did well on this KC.

Figure 1. Confidence Rating Chart from Rose

Rose has been charting this data all year, seeing how students' results are correlating to their confidence levels. She's been conducting her own experiments to

improve student outcomes throughout the year. The more data she has, the more she can intentionally adapt her practice, take advantage of all she knows.

After the KC, students transition into a laboratory exercise, engaging in reactions with various chemicals that create various colors. The mood lightens, the assessment is over, and kids can now talk to one another, collaborate, joke, even sneak a peek at that phone they turned in earlier. How can Rose make her assessments more like the rest of her class, joyful, fun, energetic? Smiley faces of confidence levels on assessments is a place to start, but Rose has so much more in mind.

Caring Practices

One doesn't have to look much further than Rose's reflection on caring practices shown in Figure 2 below to see who she is as a teacher.

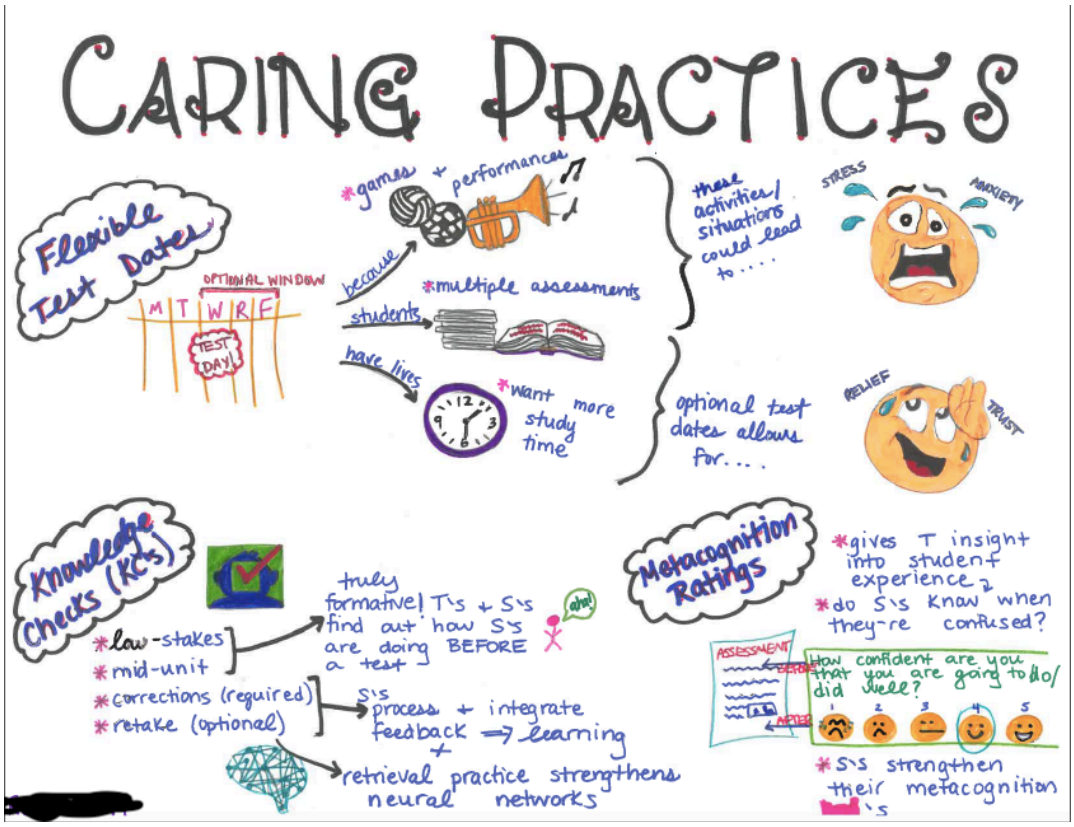

Figure 2. Rose's reflection on her caring practices as a teacher

Creative, outgoing, artistic, and always thinking of something new, Rose reflects on three major practices she has implemented in her classroom this year around assessment that have made for a more caring practice.

Knowledge checks (KCs) and metacognition ratings have already appeared in describing Rose's world; however, it's important to note why she has implemented these assessments. The reasons roll off her tongue fast. How do teachers know what's going on with a student without asking? How do students know when they are confused? How can students strengthen their own metacognition muscles? Like practice scrimmages in sports, KCs give the student an opportunity to see where they are before the major assessment, the big game, so to speak, comes forth. They can answer any question over again, earn back any point, integrate feedback into their learning and practice strengthening their neural networks. Rose's nightmare is hearing from kids that all the information they just learned fell out of their head right after the test. She cares about content, but more than that, she cares about her students' growth: "What I hope that emphasizes is, I don't care when you get it; I just want you to get it at some point."

Rose's students are stressed. High school at a competitive, college preparatory school is rigorous, and that workload comes on top of numerous other obligations and passions, sports teams and band practices and speech and debate competitions. Rose found her students often stressed by the number of exams they had, or when coming back from a faraway game or performance, studying in the less than ideal conditions of a loud, rumbling, cold bus. How could she remedy the assessment situation to demonstrate care for her students, to show them that she understands they "have lives" outside Chemistry?

She turned one of the fundamental assumptions of test-taking on its head: That students all have to take it at the same time.

Henceforth, Rose's students have flexible test days. Take the test on one of the following dates, and that's good. Why throw one's hands up at the problem everyone complains about?

> When I got to college, I was shocked at how much free time I had to figure out my life, and I remember thinking [high school] was silly, that was such a silly way to live our lives where every day we had so many things jam packed into it. I think the schedule is pretty crazy... So let's work with them where they are.

Rose reports this as one of the most caring practices she has, even though it's a small thing. Her students are stressed out around assessment, especially when they were going to be absent on the day of the exam. This changes the messaging about her class.

"I do give a lot of homework, so they have work for my class consistently, but I think this sends the message to them that I get that life happens and that's okay."

Rose does other small things to make the assessment more enjoyable. She'll put scratch-off stickers on her test as hints that students can utilize if they're feeling stuck. If it's an eight-point question, the student can scratch off for a hint and only lose a point. Memes of jokes, like the one below in Figure 3, break up what can be dense content of chemical equations.

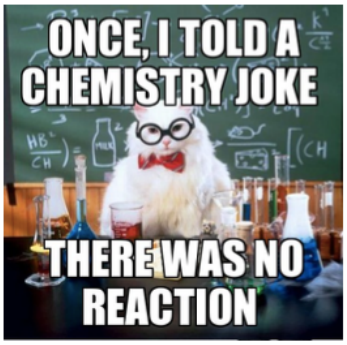

Figure 3. Meme of joke from Rose's assessment

Rose wants her students in a good headspace when they take tests; however, she knows that these small things only matter because of the positive relationships she's built and the culture of respect she's cultivated. To reference Noddings' definition of care (2005), she receives her students, recognizes them, and then responds.

> I'd say, one of the things that I do in class that I make a really conscious effort to do is use my students names a lot, so that they know that I know who they are. And when I have an opportunity to, to kind of empower them with something that I know they do really well.
>
> The caring practice is knowing the person much better than the test.

Caroline

Caroline works with the youngest group of students, elementary students in need of additional support as part of her charter school's Special Education program. Caroline's administrator echoed similar sentiments by email and through in person conversations around a willingness to go the extra mile and a relentless belief in students as contributing to her reputation in the community as a caring teacher.

> I think her work-ethic, to some extent, can be a fault as she is one to never ask for help and always puts students' needs first. Another thing I admire about Caroline is that her passion is focused on the students she works with. She does not seek attention or praise for her efforts and is self-motivated by the outcomes of her students (Personal Communication, November 27, 2019).

In addition to the indefatigable work ethic, Caroline's administrator described the kindness and respect she shows for students and her sincere valuing of each individual voice, creating a "personal bond." In fact, Caroline's administrator has seen her be reputationally caring in two separate communities where they have worked together. He admires her as an educator:

> She is one of those educators you always want to be working with because you know you're going to get her best every day…She is an amazing educator, and I feel as though I've learned as much from her about how to treat students compassionately, while holding students to an incredibly high standard more than almost anyone (Personal Communication, November 27, 2019).

Always Like This

When Caroline began in education, she did so through the organization Teach for America (TFA), an organization that places recent college graduates in high-poverty schools to close the achievement gap of test scores between subgroups of students (e.g.: wealthier, white students and poor, minority students). Caroline planned on medical school and becoming a doctor, following in the footsteps of her mom. Teaching was a stopgap for the short-term. She would do two years in North Carolina, then move on with the rest of her life. But her calling happened. The high expectations she set for her students, even as her neighbor next door neglected her students, came from herself, even as it was preached by her mentors at TFA.

Caroline believes she became a reputationally caring teacher because she was unwilling to sacrifice her high expectations for her students. Even when she was managing a pool as a teenager, she cared about those kids "just as much as these students." She was willing to put the time in to build relationships with them.

> If a kid doesn't feel supported, they're not going to perform. I feel like what I've noticed is when they feel like their teachers truly care about them, they feel like it's more of a safe place to try things that really are truly hard for them. And without that level of care, they'll never actually try to make the mistakes, and they kind of get like stopped and they just shut down. So I think creating a very safe, caring community, it's more than just the teacher, it needs to be the whole community.

And that's why Caroline moved schools after her Teach for America experience, left for an independent school that had the makings of a caring community where she was

not a one-off teacher doubling down on her efforts while many of her colleagues bolted out the door as the final bell rang. Her new school had its benefits, but she felt underappreciated by colleagues and families. A few years later, Caroline moved again, looking for a place where she felt more valued by administrators and families, where she could be part of a "community of care." In her new environment, she feels all the ingredients she needs to approach assessment and her students in a caring manner: high expectations, the opportunity to build relationships, rigorous lessons, a safe learning environment, and time – all exist in a fashion that leads to her success. It's like baking a cake; one can make a dessert without an ingredient, but over time, it's bound to fall apart, lack flavor, fall short of its potential. Each ingredient plays a crucial role.

It's not to say obstacles don't exist, but with collegial colleagues, supportive administrators, and a sense of purpose, Caroline feels she is making progress with her students. Her journey has led her to a place where she is making a difference. And yet…still…something nags at her soul.

Caring Teacher and Mother

"I don't know if I have advice for that because it keeps happening to me," Caroline says through tears. She has allowed herself to cry in our final interview. This was not intentional, of course; however, Caroline has been thinking about her reality as a caring teacher for a while now. Mother of one, a two-year-old at home, Caroline is struggling to wrap her head around what it means to be both a caring teacher and a caring mother. Her work, as a Special Education teacher at a charter elementary school, has her questioning whether she can be both.

"I can't not be a caring teacher. If I'm going to be teaching, this is going to be who I am," she says. "And…like…I feel like something has to give, and it's not fair either way. It's either my family or my classroom."

Caroline has deep investment in her students. Walk into her classroom, and student work lines the walls, folders are set out, an agenda is on the board. For 30 minutes a day, not even every day, students pull out of their regular classroom to get interventions to help them with reading, writing, spelling, and math. She is unwilling to relinquish high expectations for her students, even when others might.

"It could be so easy to shut my door with my few kids in here and do whatever I wanted to do and then, every now and again when I get observed, actually do like a real lesson. It'd be super easy to do. I've seen that."

Caroline won't do that. She won't make excuses for obstacles to her reaching her students, the limited time she has with them, the lack of resources or funding. Even in this environment with supportive administrators and colleagues, "a culture of care" as she describes it, it's been "hard, the hardest thing" to balance the efforts required to be a caring teacher and a caring mom.

"Burnout is real."

On this gray day, three students enter and immediately sit, two more trickle in after and immediately get to work. Their folders are set out, and Caroline takes time to bring goal setting to the class.

"Remember, we want to reach our goals by the end of the year. But take a few minutes to reflect and to make a personal goal for the month of October."

Goal setting ends and sounding out words through chunking letters begins. A tired student withdraws, and Caroline helps her return to the group.

"Sit up, sweetheart."

She explains the definition of the word humble with humility; she re-focuses students without raising her voice; Caroline has created an environment where students can be productive and thrive, where they call her by first name and want to stay after the lesson has ended, not to dilly-dally, but to continue to learn. Care means adapting to the students in front of her while not relinquishing expectations, walking a tightrope in a way.

"We're not like always…it's not super strict. Like I very clearly have expectations that are going to guide the way. But if things get off task, I'm going to laugh with them. Like you know, we're human. I get that things happen."

Caroline understands this for her students, demonstrates empathy for her kids when they are having a rough day. She says there aren't obstacles to her being effective with her students. But does Caroline have care for herself? Can she give herself a break to not be caring at every moment?

"Always on my Mind"

"A lot of it is hard to put into words how you care for your students…but they're always on my mind."

Caroline works with a population of students who come to her significantly below grade level in a variety of disciplines. It is her job to help them catch up, close the gap, get on par with their peers. She hasn't always worked with this population. From 6th grade science to Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd graders, Caroline has worked with other

populations, but she kept wanting to come back to those students who are often "cast aside."

Caroline has a variety of caring practices in her classroom, but she struggles to articulate them with me. To her, the work she does, around gathering data on her students, setting clear and measurable goals, getting to know one's students, making time for creativity are all part of what it is to be a teacher. How could someone not do those things and call themselves a teacher?

One of the caring practices that Caroline keeps coming back to though is the foundational document of her work, the Individualized Education Plan or IEP. Among the most commonly employed acronyms in education circles, Caroline sees the IEP as a caring practice. It requires her to care for her kids on an individual level, to set measurable goals specific to that student's progress. Caroline really likes what her district has done with its new template, focusing not only on where a student struggles but also what strengths they have:

"I think it's great and very valuable and helps shed light on, yes, these kids may have deficits, but they also have a lot of strengths and a lot of great things to bring to the table."

Caroline looks at her desk, grabs *The Dyslexic Advantage* (Eide & Eide, 2011) off of it and speaks about the recent conversation she had with her fifth graders about the advantages of being dyslexic. She wants her students to see themselves as strong and capable, not deficient and abnormal. The IEPs she writes seek to have goals that are "measurable, specific, and attainable for that kid." It's what sets her work apart from what she has sometimes seen, an IEP that trots out vague goals without specific

understanding or detail of the resources needed to help them get there. Writing a great IEP demonstrates care for her students. It serves as the vehicle for her assessment. If a student doesn't meet the goals, Caroline feels she hasn't done her job. Assessment is built into the work she's been charged to do.

Caroline's caring practices toward assessment though are not without humility or humor. Thinking about her caring practices, Caroline felt that one of the things she really tries to do is allow her students to understand that mistakes are okay.

One student, perfectionistic, enters class each day determined to get everything right. Caroline makes digs at herself, shows "that sense of humanity" that she, as the teacher, makes mistakes too. Her formative feedback moves toward care; she'll write on the student's paper, "You don't need to be perfect." The student was so buoyed by the response, she approached Caroline one day after class when she received an assignment back that had mistakes and didn't have the permission not to be perfect written on it.

"Can you write it?" the student asked.

Caroline recalls the story and laughs and smiles. She wrote it for the student. It was the care required. In short, Caroline's caring practice on assessments is telling her students, often thought of by some as lesser and asked to pull out of their regular classes due to a learning difference or challenge, 'You are enough.'

"I feel like what I've noticed when they feel like their teachers truly care about [students], they feel like it's more of a safe place to try things that really are truly hard for them. And without that level of care, they'll never actually try to make the mistakes, and they kind of get like stopped, and they just shut down."

Fluency graphs and Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA) are often what Caroline has to use to assess; she would love more time to be creative with her students, to develop assessments that allow her to get to know her kids even better. That's not the first priority; however, so Caroline shows care for her students by meeting each kid where they are, developing their skills over time and knowing that growth won't be linear.

Bringing a caring approach is the only way Caroline knows how. It's how she teaches who she is.

Caring About the Who: Relational Trust and Authentic Communication

Q1 How do reputationally caring teachers approach classroom assessment and why do they have that approach?

The vignettes of these four participants described above elucidate the importance of the individual in the execution of care and demonstrate that reputationally caring teachers have a wide variety of approaches for varied reasons; however, many important findings became evident. Among the findings explored in the following pages include a belief that reputationally caring teachers have practices that extend beyond a set of specific techniques. Instead, teachers strive to have "authentic communication" (Cotten, 2017) with their students and to share one's self with their students, teaching who they are and understanding one's "personal curriculum" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). In addition, an important commonality existed among the participants: the prioritization of the people in the room. This represents a finding of this study.

Palmer explores many of these ideas in his seminal text *The Courage to Teach* (2007). There, Palmer writes about how schools often examine the what, how, and why

of what occurs in schools. However, above intentions, curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, and the structure of our schools, the five elements of Eisner's ecology, Palmer would place the "who", the teachers who inhabit our nation's classrooms as of paramount importance: "How can educational institutions sustain and deepen the selfhood from which good teaching comes?" (p. 4).

Moreover, participants also approached the work of assessment through the lens of caring foremost about the who, the students that inhabited their rooms every day. As mentioned, a finding of this study then is that reputationally caring teachers care less about the what, when, where, and why of their classrooms. Most notably, they prioritize care about the who, the people in the room.

In the introductory vignettes above, Josh described the greatest semester of his life as also "the weirdest." It was the semester after a student had taken her life at the school, and Josh was charged from administrators with a freedom unlike he had previously had within his practice:

> We just blew up the regular schedule of how we were supposed to be going through the year. We went way over the amount of time, but they were into it. When you know that kids are into something, you know it's there. They were into it for weeks and weeks and weeks. And we just kept going – I'd do more things; I went to…an old record store and bought the DVD Gandhi used for a couple bucks and played it for one day – we watched an hour of the film, and they were even more hooked. You just knew by the way they interacted.

Josh wishes that strange didn't feel most effective, but it was the first semester where he placed schedules and content and eras on the back burner and put the students in the front of his care. This doesn't mean Josh hadn't been a caring teacher before, but he hadn't garnered the reputation as someone who was reputationally caring in his previous school. There, he had always been fighting administrators, clashing with

students, fearful that if he couldn't control his kids, he wouldn't be viewed by his superiors as effective.

Then and now, Josh had always cared for his students; they'd kept him up at night and are frequent topics of conversations with his wife late into the evenings. However, that one semester, Josh felt he could approach his students in the way that Palmer (2007) would describe as the main premise of *The Courage to Teach:* "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10). This was common across the participants and represents an important finding of this study.

Josh was a struggling student growing up, challenged by traditional teaching practices. He went to an elite liberal arts college, played soccer there and has a humility about him that belies his practice with his students. His friends believe he must know tons about history given that he teaches the subject at the high school level. Josh admits he doesn't know as much about history as a discipline itself than one might expect from someone who spends his days teaching the subject for a living. As he says:

> When my friends say, you teach history – you must know a lot about history. I really don't. I'm really not that smart. I have friends from Canada, and they're like we would probably bomb your American history test. And I was like, I will give you a final for fun, and you give a go at it, and I think you would all get A's.

The test scores are immaterial to Josh when he thinks about his teaching. Rather, now, his approach is far less about the content itself, much more about who the students are in the room. As Palmer (2007) writes:

> Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness…The methods used by these weavers vary widely; lectures, Socratic dialogues, laboratory experiments, collaborative problem solving, creative chaos. The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts… (p. 11).

Caring, therefore, is also about more than the relational care described by Noddings (2003). For reputationally caring teachers like Josh, caring is about authenticity; it is about understanding one another's stories and building relational trust. It is about moving from, as Cotten (2017) describes, expedient to authentic communication. Expedient communication is practical and can have such negative characteristics as being self-serving, defensive, or judgmental. What makes communication authentic?

> The principle aim of such [authentic] communication seems to be to authentically know and be known by, to appreciate and care about, and in turn to be known, appreciated and cared for by others…authentic communication [is] communication motivated by concern with and attraction to truth, beauty, and goodness (p. 57).

Josh's approach to his students sought out authentic communication. He wanted to know who his students were above all else, prioritizing the who over the what, an approach that was not unique among the participants. Striving toward authentic communication represents another important finding of this study and was seen across participants.

Sharing One's Self with Students

While also a high school teacher who might be typecast to care more about her Advanced Placement (AP) Psychology or Chemistry curriculums than the students who occupy her classroom, Rose spoke more about students than about balanced equations or Freudian theories.

Rose's work puts students and herself at the forefront of her caring approach. This manifested itself in many avenues of her work, and Rose created an intentional approach to assessment that helped her reflect on why she's doing what she's doing:

> I try to be thoughtful about] the time and manner in which I give things back and how it's directed. Part of this is I want to know whatever work I'm doing is beneficial for me and for the students. I started to be more thoughtful about what kind of feedback I'm going to give as opposed to just writing things down.

Rose's response comes as an answer to a question about Noddings' definition of relational care as having three elements, reception, recognition, and response (Noddings, 2005). However, again, the response, and approach, does not prioritize content or structure; it prioritizes people. She has this approach because she wants her students to understand and learn about themselves much more than she wants them to learn Chemistry or Psychology:

> When I asked students on my survey, what do you think is the most important to Ms. [Rose]? A lot of it was that we learn and that we're interested or things like that. And I think that is in fact true, that I care a lot more about them growing as humans than how well they do on assessments.

Why does Rose have such an approach? She was a student who cared much more about assessments than about herself through her own schooling. As a high-achieving student who performed well on assessments, earned high grades, and went off to a highly ranked post-secondary university where she again achieved well and has considered doctoral studies at even more highly selective, prestigious universities, Rose has always been at the forefront of academic achievement.

Put simply, one might conclude that Rose would value similar qualities in her students. Yet, as one who cares about self-awareness and seeks to inculcate such qualities in her students, Rose does not. She has diagnosed herself as someone in need of healing after, by all societal measures, a successful academic career as a professional student that is likely to continue at some point:

> In retrospect, I can very much recognize – and even at the time, I probably had the awareness to recognize that it was very unhealthy [to care so much about grades]… I was thinking about learning about something outside of class like economics. I never took an economics class, but I thought to myself, I should really learn about this. And immediately the thought was daunting to me that I would have to teach something to myself or that I would have to find resources, and I thought, 'That's weird.' I'm a 'good student.' I've always been good at learning things and school and things like that. Why should I feel intimidated about learning something on my own? And I realized I was very dependent on someone else to curate that for me…So I thought that's stupid, in fact stupid, that I could get through school and be a successful student and then be a horrible student of the world.

Palmer (2007) writes that "the way we diagnose our students' condition will determine the kind of remedy we offer" (p. 42). He writes this in describing a common problem among teachers in schools, a predilection among educators to treat their students as if they are "brain-dead" (p. 42). It is an unfortunate common practice among teachers who are struggling. Fearful to reveal their own weakness or struggle, they believe and posit that their teaching would be different, more effective, more inspired, if only a different group of individuals had entered their room.

Palmer's work is highlighted by others (Major, 2017; Meyers, 2009) as connected to care and compassion as well. As mentioned, Rose teaches Advanced Placement Psychology, a course for which students can receive college credit if they earn a high enough score on a summative year-end examination. Given the objectives of the course, coverage of content matters, and as Meyers (2009) outlines: "…faculty members doubt that caring has a place in college-level instruction, and instead believe it is more appropriate for younger children. They suggest that caring implies the absence of academic rigor or lowered expectations for students."

Rose doesn't think that way. She has diagnosed her students to have a similar challenge to her, a highly motivated disposition to school that results in valuing what she

views as the wrong aspects of the educational enterprise. In the process, Rose has shared a bit about who she is with her students, discussing why she approaches her teaching in the manner that she does with her charges. As Meyers (2009) writes, sharing one's self can have a positive compounding effect: "A cycle often emerges in which students reciprocate the care that they receive from their professors in ways that renew purpose and give faculty a sense that they are making a difference in students' lives in important ways."

Rose's work is also in line with the ideas of Danah Henriksen and Punya Mishra (2015). In their article "We Teach Who We Are: Creativity in the Lives and Practices of Accomplished Teachers", the authors suggest that "outside pursuits always factor into how creative teachers think about their classrooms, because teachers tend to 'teach who they are.' They begin to see connections between their own interests in anything from rap music, cooking, and travel, to school subject matters like math and language arts, and thereby find interesting ways to teach and develop creative lessons" (p. 36). During my observation of her class, Rose did not share specific elements of her life outside of work; her kickball league or her taking up ceramics, swing dancing, or bachata did not inform her pedagogical practice. Though when asked, Rose said she has taken time to get to know herself, something she is encouraging her students to do and something she did not do as a young teacher:

> The biggest thing that has impacted my relationship with students is the exploration of my relationship with myself. In the past few years, I've really shifted my mindset into thinking that I can learn from every experience I have (the good, the bad, and the ugly), and as that becomes more and more true for me, I can relay that to students.

Rose is willing to share herself with her students, and that is her caring approach to assessment. She wants her students to learn from the mistakes she made on her very successful path. Even during her recent change to pursue the "extracurriculars" she could not find time for in her early years as a teacher, Rose recognizes that it has helped her empathize with the learning experience her students are undertaking and how busy her students are. She also has become more willing to reveal who she is as a person, more confident in understanding who she is:

> As I grow as a teacher, and as a human, I find myself getting to know myself better and sharing more with my students, still conscious of finding a healthy balance. In general, though, I think my students might say that they felt like they knew me as a person without knowing much about my life.

Caring and the Undivided Self

Rose's words and actions also bring to mind Palmer's (2007) idea of the undivided self. As he writes in describing a successful teaching candidate, "Alan taught from an undivided self – an integral state of being central to good teaching…In the undivided self, every major thread of one's life experience is honored, creating a weave of such coherence and strength that it can hold students and subject as well as self" (p. 16). This is the work that Rose has brought to her students, sharing herself, the perceived success, unintended consequences, and current realities of her own academic journey to bear with her students, drawing out the understanding from her students of the caring approach she brings to assessing their growth:

> It has definitely been an intentional mission of mine, especially for those students – a lot of them exist here – who are so focused on their grades, to try to bring them back to, 'Well, what are you actually learning?' 'Are you getting anything out of this experience?'

How much should a teacher share with their students is often a topic of debate when considering Palmer's work and its intersection with care. Some scholars (Meyers, 2009) even write in a manner of warning:

> Faculty must maintain an awareness of interpersonal boundaries when creating supportive relationships with students. This is important because increased investment and involvement in students' lives can potentially blur the distinction between faculty and friend.

However, despite this reality, caring teachers like Rose approach their care with their students as Palmer (2007) recommends, in an undivided state. These teachers echo the sentiments of scholars like Major (2017), who tragically lost her own 14-year-old son unexpectedly and grappled with what she could or should share with her students in the face of tragedy:

> I still consider how much teachers should share with their students. What is the line? But during the time I was at my most vulnerable, I allowed my students to see me as a person. I still made lesson plans and graded papers, but I accepted their care because that is what people do when given a chance. They show their compassion (p. 33).

Allowing one's students in can be challenging and takes trust and time. Kyle works in a similarly pressured environment to Rose, albeit with younger students, and brings to bear a similar high achievement background. Highly successful as a student, attending one of the most selective universities in the country for his undergraduate degree, Kyle comes from and now lives in the environment from which he came. His perspective as an alumnus of the community in which he works only heightens his credibility.

Reflection is part of Kyle's daily work, part of having a place to share his undivided self on his own before peeling back layers for his students. He has journaled for years: "In the past, I remember in college, there'd be times where I was just like I just

got to write something. To be able to reflect is something I've done for years, so it felt very, very comfortable." Kyle approaches assessment more conventionally than Josh and Rose. While he talks about his students, the people in the room, and he consistently asks them for feedback about the process of his assessment and his pedagogy, Kyle is at a stage in his career where he is thinking about his content to inform the understanding of his student: "One of the things I hope to be able to do this summer is emphasize more different units and create assessments that aren't as rigid as, you know, you have multiple choice questions, you have short answer questions." Kyle takes a lot of factors into consideration when thinking about how he assesses his students. He asks students to write a quote at the top of their assessment to get them in a positive mindset to take the test. Among his favorites were "Leave it all on the paper."

Kyle asks for feedback after each assessment, requires students to self-reflect about what went well and what has been a challenge in the class. On the annual occasion of standardized testing at his independent school, Kyle's students make posters to hang up around the room to keep them in a positive mindset. When students enter Kyle's room, they flock to him, balancing a healthy intensity of mathematics instruction with an infectious joy as Kyle "sits up on his perch," a place in the room where Kyle sits and enacts a southern accent, a playful tone that lightens the mood of middle school mathematics.

Yet, despite the rapport Kyle has developed with his students, the intentional steps he has taken toward the positive mindset around test-taking and projects, Kyle knows that tests breed anxiety for his students.

"So yeah, I can honestly say I don't think there's a lot of joy during those days for sure."

Assessment is equated to test-taking for Kyle; however, he is moving toward a model that broadens that definition and focuses on him knowing himself as a teacher. The reflections over three weeks that Kyle shared with me about his caring practices spoke little of tests and assessments. Instead, Kyle reflected on his interactions with his students, on the community he has built. Kyle's students may be reliant on him for grades. Many of his students, even at the middle school level, are focused on outcomes, preparing for the next step of applying to private high schools that many seek to attend, as Kyle did, after graduating from his K-8 independent school. However, as Palmer (2007) writes, community, the byproduct of the relational care with which Kyle approaches his students, is threatened by a difference in power; rather, it ceases to exist when students are dependent on teachers for grades and teachers are not dependent on students: "What are teachers dependent on students for? If [teachers] cannot answer that question with something as real to us as grades are to students, community will not happen" (p. 142).

Kyle is dependent on his students to help him know himself. Journal reflections reveal that Kyle's approach to teaching is one that is challenged by the constraints of traditional assessment. He is a teacher, to draw on the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1988), who is learning his own personal curriculum (p. 31).

Reading the entries from Kyle's journal that he shared with me is to see a teacher who abhors traditional assessment and is grappling with how to help students see beyond

the grades and test scores in the same vein that Rose hopes to do. It's noteworthy what he most enjoys and where he exhibits what Palmer describes as "an anatomy of fear" (p. 36).

Kyle's Journal

May 13. I was able to talk to one of my 7th graders who was starting to get worried about finals…I was able to figure out that she already started studying last week…I then let her know that this trip will be a lot of fun and shared a Dalai Lama quote I love about living in the present.

May 15. We all went to the [park] today. The day started with ensuring students had everything they needed for the day. Once we were on the dunes, I went hiking up with some of my students. It's a more difficult feat to get to the top then people realize. I noticed that one of my students was starting to doubt if she was going to be able to get to the top based on what she kept saying (this is too hard, I'm exhausted, etc.). I gave her a strategy to step into places where others have already stepped as you won't slide back as much as you rise. I also told her that if just keep taking one more step (and just think about that one more step), it would become easier. Her friend and I also distracted her with funny stories until we reached the top.

May 22. Today was a big review day for both of my math classes. I decided to show them all what the front cover of the test would look like, so they could feel comfortable about the general directions and ask me any questions they may have. The first thing on the cover was a quote that discusses "a greatest fear," which tells them to let their wonderful, individual light shine bright every single day. Then I provided them with the directions for the entire test. The students asked me very good questions afterwards, which helped me change the directions, so they were clearer.

May 24. During our ice cream social, I ended up playing games with our 6th graders and their 1st grade buddies. All of us played hide and seek and duck, duck goose. It was awesome seeing their smiles and hearing their laughs.

May 29. I left for our 6th grade trip on this day, but I conducted a final review session with my 7th graders before I left. I am grateful [my principal] has set aside time for me these last two years because it has allowed me to answer any last second questions the students may have. Also, it gives me the opportunity to "build them up." I talk to the 7th graders about how far they have come this year, and how much they have learned. I tell them that they are ready in order to help them build their confidence. Finally, I help them to relax by laughing and joking with them to attempt to put them at ease before our final exam. The review session always is an opportunity for them to both learn and to have some fun.

May 30. I went on our Mt. Eagle (pseudonym) hike today with the 6th graders. I spent a lot of time with one of the students who was struggling to keep up with the others. This gave us the opportunity to talk about his interests and see how the year had gone. We were even able to talk about some of the things he maybe could do differently next year to set him up for even more success. I also continued to push him to keep hiking while playing some games with him to keep up his pace.

June 3. This always is the hardest day for me. We give back exams and have 30 minutes to wrap up our classes for the year.

The first, third, fifth, and seventh entries Kyle writes all happen in the classroom. Here, Kyle spends time approaching caring assessment through the lens of mollifying fear. As Palmer (2007) writes, "From grade school on, education is a fearful enterprise.

As a student, I was in too many classrooms riddled with fear, the fear that leads many children, born with a love of learning, to hate the idea of school" (p. 36).

However, the second, fourth, and sixth journal entries occur outside the classroom. Kyle's approach to caring assessment here is free of fear; he shares himself, a favorite quote from the Dalai Lama, child-like games of younger students, shared interests with an upcoming student. These entries from Kyle's journal reflections reveal a teacher who heeds the wisdom of Connelly and Clandinin (1988):

> Once we recognize that understanding our students is an important task, we also realize that no amount of test-giving will tell us the important things. This realization will come about as you ask yourself very hard narrative questions. Your curriculum is a metaphor for understanding your students' curriculum (p. 31).

Kyle knows himself outside of the classroom, leading to approaching assessment in a caring manner with confidence. When asked about assessment, Kyle does not think of the moments on the river rapids or on Mt. Eagle (pseudonym). His mind defaults to his own school experience of assessment: tests, quizzes, and projects, and he's working diligently to create an environment that is comfortable and positive for his students. The enduring question remains however, if Kyle and others are having such a successful, positive, happy, even joyful experience with assessing their students and helping them grow, outside of the classroom, what is so different about assessing students in traditional academic disciplines in the classroom? It is a question worthy of future investigation.

Care as Ontological Teaching

One of the participants for whom this balance of content prioritization, assessment, and relational care might be most complicated was with Caroline. Caroline's charge from the state is to help struggling students catch up with their higher-achieving

peers. As a Special Education teacher, she works with a population that is significantly below grade level in her elementary special education classes. Each student has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and Caroline works with the family to create IEP achievement goals. Utilizing fluency passages and directed reading assessments (DRA), among other evaluative mechanisms, Caroline has her students charting their own progress each month:

> All my kids have goal folders…So we graph their goals every month, so we can keep track of it. They actually know what their reading level goal is for DRA. What their fluency goal is for the end of the year. Some of them have writing goals and spelling goals. And some of them have math goals as well.

If Caroline sounds like a data-driven instructor, that's because in many ways she is. Her job requires her to be: "My evaluator was just in here, and he was like, whoa, this is like a little mind-boggling that you have this much data on your kids."

For Caroline, however, data is the approach that allows her to know her students and know if she's being effective with and caring for them. Given that, one might consider Caroline someone who cares more about numbers than people, who is, as Goldstein (2014) writes, acting in the manner of present policymakers: "Testing is a part of any functional education system, but in recent years it has often seemed like the horse of school improvement has been driven by the cart of collecting student data to be used in teacher evaluation" (p. 231).

Caroline, however, has never worried about her evaluation. She has always had full support from her administrators and evaluators, and she doesn't have to do as much data collection as she currently does: "It could be so easy to shut my door with my few kids here and do whatever I wanted them to do and then, every now and again when I got observed, actually do like a real lesson. It'd be super easy to do. I've seen that."

Caroline won't do that. As a reputationally caring teacher in her community, as someone who too has achieved highly in school herself, Caroline had plans to attend medical school, be a pediatrician, after completing two years as a Teach for America teacher. She never planned to be an educator and has always put forth her best to care for others, and she holds herself to a higher standard with her students when it comes to how she cares for them. Her approach to care is uncompromising and always has been.

> Before I was a teacher, I taught in and managed a pool in a hard neighborhood, and I cared about all those kids who came to the pool just as much as these students. I think a lot of it comes from maybe that I have worked in these communities that are lower economic status or lower, or not the background I've come from basically. And seeing a lot of their hardships first-hand, and that was ultimately what drove me into teaching in the first place.

For Caroline, like Josh, care and assessment are synonymous. She can't not care for her students without constantly assessing their progress; however, she knows that successful data outcomes do not mean she is a good teacher. It is a component of her approach, one that she has been charged to do by families and by the state in her role as a Special Education teacher. However, Peter Hlebowitsh (2012) would describe Caroline's approach to teaching as ontological:

> To judge the quality of teaching against an ontological standard is to minimally ask whether the decisions made by teachers are professionally defensible or whether they demonstrate receptivity to the nature of the learner and the values of society, and in the end, whether they produce learning experiences attuned to the moving purposes of the school's normative project. In this way, good teachers are still concerned about outcome measures but in a way that speaks to a vital and dynamic learning experience (p. 2).

Caroline's caring approach prioritizes relational care with her students. Enter her room, as seen in Figure 4 below, and folders are laid out, packets pre-arranged, the board meticulously prepared with questions already written for the day and what will be practiced. Like Josh, Rose, and Kyle, she shares herself with her students: "Whenever

little things happen, if I make a connection to my own life, I'm happy to share it with them. I think there's value to that. I think kids need to understand that I'm human as well and when I make mistakes, I try to really point that out."

Figure 4. Caroline's classroom

Caroline believes she approaches her job with humility, and that has led to her success. It's what led her away from Teach for America (TFA) into the world where she currently resides. She struggled with the 'savior' mentality of many of her TFA peers.

In only her second year at her current school, despite her professional expertise and success at both low-income, public and independent schools, she has come to the school not believing she already knows better. Her approach to assessment and care has been one that prioritizes her own learning, growth, and humility:

> These teachers have been here; these teachers know the community. These teachers know these kids. I don't. I needed to learn from them rather than I'm going to teach you. And I think that's why I was always accepted. I'm coming into your community; what gives me the right to say that I know how to do this better than you.

Her caring approach has little to do with assessment at all. Like her fellow participants, it's about learning the community and about the people who comprise it.

Obstacles to Care

Q2 How do reputationally caring teachers perceive and negotiate external influences on assessment?

Nearly a century ago, Willard Waller (1932) suggested that teachers had a different set of variables to navigate when considering how to be considered a teacher of "prestige":

> The more important traits known to affect the prestige of the teacher and his ability to control the classroom situation may perhaps be discussed under the following heads: age, social background, physical characteristics, dress, manners, manner, attitude toward students and subject matter, voice, expression of features, tempo of reactions, range of mental personality, and the nature of the organization of the personality (in which are included such factors as complexity, stability, etc.) (p. 212).

In discussing the external influences, the obstacles to be a caring teacher, at each of their respective schools, none of the participants mentioned any of the factors discussed here by Waller. Instead, teachers perceived the obstacles to their ability to be caring, to take heed of the progress of their students, as outside of their control. A finding of this study is that external influences impact and limit the ability for reputationally caring teachers to care to the degree they wish and expect of themselves.

For Caroline, the main obstacle as a special education teacher is one of time:

> Sometimes, I hate to go into the [general education] classroom. They're doing this really fun assignment, but it's our time to work with each other. That hurts my heart a little bit, but I also see the value in what I'm doing. So that is also part of why when I do pull you out, I'm going to make sure it is exactly what you need, and the 40 minutes that we have together is organized and planned out, and I know exactly what we're doing.

Time in the school day is one thing for Caroline to contend with, and she has navigated that challenge through efficiency and intentional planning. The primary obstacle that Caroline is running up against to her care is being able to be a reputationally caring teacher and a caring mother. Caroline has an infant son at home. During our third interview, she tears up: "I feel like the hardest part about teaching, in general, is finding a balance between putting all your energy and effort into your classroom and then also your home life and finding that balance. When you care, it's very hard to find that balance. And burnout is a real thing."

Caroline's comments are borne out in the data. Half of new teachers leave the profession in the first five years, and one third of teachers are considering leaving the profession in the near future (Brasfield, Lancaster, & Jade, 2019). When Caroline thinks about being a caring teacher, about charting the progress of her students, the biggest obstacle in her way is her life outside of the classroom that she wants to share with her students. She isn't sure if she can do both with a two-year-old at home. She's talks about how she's conflicted about the choice, especially thinking about how her mother made the choice to continue being a practicing doctor during her early childhood. Caroline isn't willing to negotiate the external influence. Being a caring teacher, setting goals for her students, constantly thinking about them, approaching her work genuinely and earnestly each day is the only way she knows how to be.

> I can't not be a caring teacher. If I'm going to be teaching, this is going to be who I am. And…like…I feel like something has to give basically, and it's not fair either way. It's either my family or my classroom. And I don't really feel okay with either of those.

Earlier in the interview, Caroline references a Netflix show she and her husband recently watched, an episode of the program "Explained" that featured the pay gap, how

the pay gap isn't really between men and women but between mothers and everyone else. Caroline is feeling that pressure. A myriad of blog posts about the dilemma of being a mom and teacher at the same time are easy to find. Catchy blog titles like "First Belle: Balancing the Homeroom with the Homefront" (First Belle: Balancing the Homeroom with the Homefront, 2016) and articles on education blogs (Brown, 2016) provide tips and tricks to help teacher parents contend with the challenging pressures of being enough for the children in their stead at school and their own kids at home. A gap in the literature on this dilemma in care appears to exist, perhaps suggesting a place of future research about how caring teachers contend with the challenges of also being a parent.

None of Caroline's discussion of obstacles ever moved toward the demographic categories suggested by Waller. Neither was that the case for any of the participants. Caroline, Kyle, Josh, and Rose didn't speak about the fact that they were all in their late 20s or early 30s and had held teaching positions in at least one other school. Kyle didn't mention that he was black, nor did the other three participants mention their race in relation to their students, and no teacher talked about their physical appearance, dress or their personality. The obstacles they perceived to be caring and assessing the growth of their students came in other forms.

For Rose, obstacles also all pointed to time, but in a different manner than for Caroline. One of the courses Rose teaches is an Advanced Placement (AP) Psychology course, a course that is advertised as a college-level course with a major examination at the conclusion that, if a certain score is earned, can earn a student college credit. Even in AP Psychology, Rose is unconcerned about that particular assessment. She knows that

relationships take time to develop, and she wishes she had more time to do so with her students.

Over the past year, Rose has developed a few different mechanisms that help her navigate the obstacles of her particular context. Students in her school are under intense pressure from a variety of different sources: teachers, college admissions committees, their parents, and perhaps most notably, themselves. Rose, as mentioned, had a similar experience in her own educational experience; she reflected on how she sees herself in many of her students. However, the obstacles of Rose's particular environment have to do with time, and the lack of it for students to immerse themselves in the study of a subject. Below, as published earlier in Figure 2, is a reflective representation that she created for me about the caring practices she has implemented to help navigate the obstacles of time within her school.

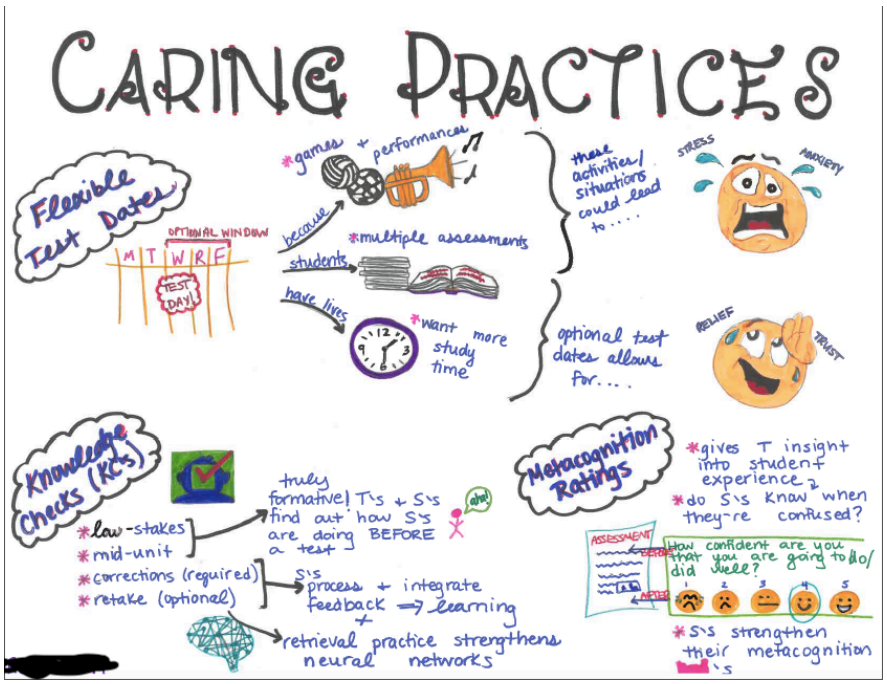

Figure 2. Rose's reflection on her caring practices as a teacher

As shown in Figure 2, Rose allows her students to take tests on flexible days, before or after the actual scheduled test day. With students involved in a wide variety of extracurricular activities with varied schedules and students taking a myriad of different schedules that have their own assessment calendars, Rose found she was always negotiating with students about when they would take the test. Rose views this as a practice that is implemented to demonstrate care for her students, even those that don't utilize it.

> I want my students to be focusing their time on their performances and games, and the things that they love doing… Students feel a sense of relief, even if they're not taking advantage of the tests dates, the fact that they know it's available creates less stress around that test, as opposed to the anxiety that can come when their lives are super-duper busy.

Rose has reflected on her own educational experience as she navigates these obstacles. She initially thought about this problem with colleagues, and she even stopped herself short in thinking that students needed to have a valid "excuse" to be eligible to take advantage of the flexible test days. Then, she reconsidered, and she spoke to herself, to her true identity as a teacher, and reconsidered her notions about the obstacle at hand:

> I considered whether or not I should let students take it on a different day if they didn't have some sort of thing getting in the way like a test or a performance, and then I realized, if they want to spend more time getting to know this information, why would I stop them from doing that?

Rose laughs and goes on, "…Except for me being like stubborn and stuck in my ways, which a part of me was thinking that, but then I realized I was just being stubborn and stuck in my ways."

Palmer (1997) writes about the heart of a teacher being of identity and integrity. Rose's approach to a problem is not how all teachers would approach an obstacle to teaching. Traditional notions of assessment mandate that students all take the test at the

same time and under the same conditions. Such is the model of standardized testing. However, Rose did what Palmer (2007) suggests teachers must do and speak to themselves:

> The teacher within is not the voice of conscience but of identity and integrity. It speaks not of what ought to be, but what is real for us, of what is true…The teacher within stands guard at the gate of selfhood, warding off whatever insults our integrity and welcoming whatever affirms it (p. 19).

While some traditional teachers would have ascribed the accommodation to catering to students, going beyond the bounds of how teachers should be interacting with their students, Rose thought about the obstacle to her care as an opportunity.

Rose has also implemented what she views as caring practices in the form of "Knowledge Checks", formative assessments that allow students to see where they are in relation to content throughout a unit, and metacognition ratings, data that she is collecting on how confident students feel going into a traditional assessment and how confident they feel after taking the test or quiz. Rose didn't always have these tools; she's in her seventh year at her school, and when she arrived, she didn't know that these would be caring practices she would need. An obstacle to her care was her inexperience in understanding the context of a place; however, she quickly recognized it because of her identification with her students through her own experience.

> In my first few years, it felt a little bit like, my students get the information and they can take it on the test, and it leaves their brain immediately, and I really hate that because I was that student. And I don't think it's a good habit to build, and I wanted to make sure that my class didn't reinforce those bad habits.

However, over time, as Rose learned the community, what it cared about and who it was, she was able to adjust her practices to meet the needs of her students and affirm

the identity of who she was as a teacher. She spoke candidly about the need for a teacher's identity to align with what's important to the school.

> So the other thing, I think, and maybe it's a reiteration of what I just said, but it feels a little different is what does the school seem to care about and do teachers feel like that aligns with who they are as a teacher…Some of these do come with time and therefore, you won't have a model of it on your own without context, and so connecting novice teachers with caring teachers is really important, not just the people who want to get more money because they have a mentee.

Kyle's obstacles did not come in learning the community or with time. After all, as an alumnus, Kyle had spent nine years of his childhood in the community. He had sat in the desks where his students currently resided and collaborated with colleagues who used to grade his papers. Rather, for Kyle, the obstacle to his care rested in his inexperience as a teacher. Kyle knows the program of his school well; after all, he was a student in it. Yet, in being a new teacher to his school, despite knowing the program, Kyle felt that he could not "rock the boat" in trying to change too much about his math classes, even if those changes would better serve students and help him more intentionally care for them.

> Knowing all of our math classes pretty much follow this format and have since I was a kid for sure, and I know that personally. So I think that's a huge obstacle. I think…you know, I do wish that as a department we collaborated more…We don't collaborate as much as I would want, I would say.

Kyle aspires to be an administrator or policymaker. He has big visions about education, seeks to start his own network of schools perhaps one day. When he speaks about obstacles, he talks about collaboration and change processes, envisions a process in which all departments come together and are aligned toward a culminating project for students. He does this in the name of kids thinking about their futures, understanding who they are as learners and sharing themselves:

> I think, well, maybe that's another obstacle. In terms of coordinating all the different departments to accomplish that goal. Some teachers have taught years and years and years and have different topics that they want to teach during that period, and changing that could definitely be difficult to do. But ideally, that would be amazing. I would love to be able to create that to be very honest with you. Being able to collaborate, coordinate, I would just enjoy that. Ideally, that would be a really cool way to assess. And it may have something tangible at that point that they could talk about in their futures and different things going forward.

The obstacles Kyle sees are those that get in the way of students knowing themselves, not particular content. At this point in his career, he's unsure of how to navigate them, and he may just need time or a position that allows him to have greater influence in directing larger-scale projects to influence students.

Goldstein (2014) writes extensively about the need to empower teachers in her book *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession.* The kind of obstacles that Kyle foresees and wants to attack are those that are supported in academic circles:

> …research shows that when teachers promote more interactions among students and focus their lessons on concepts that are broader and more challenging than those represented on multiple-choice tests, children's scores on higher level assessments – like those that require writing – actually go up. Rigorous, interactive classrooms promote higher student achievement (p. 233-234).

Walk into Kyle's classroom, and a rigorous, interactive classroom is one you'll see. There are obstacles to Kyle's teaching that he will never reference. He's teaching in an American history classroom, the lines dotted by posters of Uncle Sam and Abraham Lincoln. Small groups of students segregate by gender. Only four girls are in the class. Kyle, who is African American, looks out at his class, and all but one white face stares back. Yet Kyle doesn't mention any of the demographic or structural constraints of his school as obstacles to his care or the way he assesses growth among his students. He appears to be thinking much bigger than the cosmetic challenges at play. From speaking

with Kyle, one can see why Goldstein (2014) suggests that teachers like him pursue and realize their dreams of becoming administrators and policymakers:

> It has recently been popular to recruit principals from fields outside education, but this could be a misstep. Instead, effective teachers with exceptional leadership and organizational skills should be identified through the evaluation process and encouraged, after a number of years, to consider transitioning into administration (p. 234).

Kyle's challenges mirrored those of the other participants. Time and experience were described as the biggest obstacles in his way toward being able to exhibit care for students on a more macro-level.

On the other hand, macro-level conversations about education are the antithesis of what Josh is interested in. Focused on the fiefdom of his individual classroom and the students in his charge, Josh viewed a different obstacle to his caring practice: himself.

As Josh says, "Any obstacles I face are sort of my own creation or my own lack of creativity."

Josh is self-critical, and despite being an established teacher, reputationally caring within his community, he believes he is only scratching the surface of the kind of innovations he could be having in his classroom. He connotes his coming up with creative ideas as related to his ability to enact relational care. Dig a little deeper with Josh, however, and I find that Josh views the greatest obstacles to his caring and assessing the students in the way in which he hoped comes in the systematic challenges of being a high school teacher in a large public school. Kyle and Rose work at independent schools with small class sizes of no more than 17 to 18 students and a maximum student load in the 60s. Caroline's special education position presents her with some of the school's most challenging cases, but she never teaches more than six students

at once. Observing Josh's class, students continue to file through the door. The class is arranged with 35 desks and is often filled. One of Josh's colleagues, a math teacher, has 200 students across his classes.

Josh now teaches part-time. The teacher-parent conundrum was one he was fortunate to be able to avoid, so in the interim, he works a modified schedule to help care for his young daughter at home. His student load is far less than the average teacher, but when it wasn't, caring for his students and assessing them on a regular basis in the way he would hope simply couldn't happen.

> An honest, good writing assignment because I have 35 kids every hour [is really hard to do]. So it's ridiculous to try to do that. So writing is one of the most important, so what I've done now is well, I guess I'll get back to how I deal with writing but shorter segments, and I just kind of scan them. I can't go as detailed in grading as I used to [with other obligations].

Josh speaks further of perceived obstacles of having to cover a survey of U.S. history from the American Revolution to the present day and of making sure his students complete a certain amount of work; however, he doesn't really try to negotiate these obstacles. From his perspective, that doesn't matter nearly as much as the relationships and trust he's building with his students.

> Some of the people who I feel like don't care much – one of things that many of them have in common is that they believe the content is the most important thing. That this matters so much, and there's no reason that you shouldn't have completed the homework.

Josh's perception of obstacles is in line with Hlebowitsh (2012) and his thinking around the purpose of teachers and classrooms. The ontological side of teaching, defined by Hlebowitsh as "the actual experience had in the classroom" (p. 2), is where Josh focuses his energies. He would agree with Hlebowitsh's understandings of the purpose of his classroom care: "The first order of business is not to lift test scores; it is to secure a

normative and conductive learning environment. And such an undertaking calls for deep psychological and emotional commitments and understandings" (p. 8).

Before Josh became a reputationally caring teacher at his current school, a place where he has worked for the past decade, Josh reflected that he was perceived as uncaring by others in the low-income school where he spent just one year. Perhaps Josh would have become reputationally caring with time and an understanding of context. However, his lived experience did not mirror the experiences of his students, many of whom were, as Josh reflected, reliant on school "for two free meals a day" and a place to stay out of trouble. There, the first order of business was to lift test scores. Obstacles included a lack of trust from students of teachers. Administrators did not trust teachers who needed help with behavioral support. Students cursed out Josh, mocked him to his face after administrators didn't support him. The heavy lifting required to receive what Noddings (2003) would describe as caring relationships between Josh and his students did not occur in his view:

> I would not consider myself [caring at that point in my career]. I did care for a lot of the kids, but no, if I was a fly on the wall and Greg Chalfin wanted to interview a caring teacher, I would have chosen a lot of other people before me. And it wasn't for actually lack of caring for these kids. It's weird.

What was different for Josh in becoming a reputationally caring teacher at his second school and not his first is a topic worthy of future investigation.

Summary

Chapter IV has examined how reputationally caring teachers approach their practice and the obstacles they perceive to enacting that care. Narrative vignettes about the participants illustrated the journeys of these teachers, the manner in which they

approached their work, the obstacles to their care, and the caring practices they have enacted.

The participants of this study did not make excuses when obstacles arose to their care; rather, they prioritized the people in the room above content, pedagogy, and the evaluation of their students. Moreover, the participants of this study were willing to share their own story with their students, teaching who they are (Henriksen & Mishra, 2015; Palmer, 2007) and enacting their own personal curriculum (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Reputationally caring teachers understand that caring relationships foundationally rest on trust, and they approach their work in an ontological fashion (Hlebowitsh, 2012) and with humility. Obstacles of time, experience, learning the community, curriculum, having one's identity misalign with the mission of the community, work-life balance and, relatedly, burnout can get in the way of teachers providing the care that they deeply believe in. The reputationally caring teachers of this study, however, know no other way to approach their work.

CHAPTER V

THEMATICS, EVALUATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview of the Study

As the world has become more invested in data, tracking, and measurement across many disciplines, so too has the world of education. Over the past nearly four decades, since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Fiske, 1983) accountability and measurement have become commonly used buzzwords in the landscape of schools. As discussed in Chapters I and II, this focus on educational accountability through testing has changed the very tenor of public education (Ravitch, 2010). In this landscape, the relationships between students and teachers can become buried in discussions of ratings, data, and metrics. Speak to teachers, administrators, students, and parents at a school, and one can quickly learn about the teachers in a school who know students, prioritize relationships, and have earned the status as someone who "really cares." This study focuses on those teachers and examines how those teachers approach their work, assess their students, and the impact such an approach has on their work. The term care is not often associated with assessment, and a search of the term "caring assessment" in multiple databases commonly yielded results related to nursing, but few to education, a significant dichotomy that will be explored later in this chapter.

In this process of conducting this study, I found that asking reputationally caring teachers about their approach to assessment had them speaking hardly about assessment

at all. Instead, the findings of this study demonstrated that reputationally caring teachers approached assessment through a prioritization of meeting their students where they are and demonstrating a genuine respect for the child and for the local community in which they taught. Reputational care in one community does not equate to an immediate nor automatic carryover of that status in another, a fact I have recently learned in my own professional journey as an educator and which I will discuss later in this chapter. Rather, reputational care is earned through attention to a variety of variables, a calculus that includes a willingness to go above and beyond for one's students, a lack of care about receiving credit or status for a teacher's contributions, and an understanding of what students in that particular community need to thrive.

To come to these and other broader conclusions, takeaways that will be delved into in the pages ahead, four questions guided this study: 1) How do reputationally caring teachers approach classroom assessment and why do they have that approach? 2) How do reputationally caring teachers perceive and negotiate external influences on assessment? 3) When assessments are approached through a caring lens, how are the other elements of the ecology of schooling affected, including curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and intentions? 4) What are the implications of caring assessments for the professional development of teachers and for assessment practices in general? I employed the research methodology of Educational Criticism and Connoisseurship to answer these questions. Elliot Eisner (1976) developed this research methodology, and I used it for this study because it allowed me to dig into the work of teachers through connoisseurship, which as Uhrmacher et al. (2017) outline, stems from three main criteria:

> The first is that connoisseurship is grounded in the connoisseur's interests and belief in the importance of what he or she seeks to understand. Second, this understanding is built on firsthand, sensory experience. And third, the direct experience can be enhanced by learning from the knowledge and skill of others (p. 11).

In the process of employing this methodology, the researcher is both a connoisseur and a critic. As Eisner (1976) describes, this methodology is particularly helpful in thinking about research in reference to evaluation: "Educational connoisseurship… is but half of a pair of concepts I believe to be particularly promising for thinking about the conduct of educational evaluation. The other half of this pair is educational criticism" (p. 140). Eisner goes on the describe how both connoisseurship and criticism have roots in the arts, and since he believes that "teaching in classrooms is ideographic in character" (p. 140), this methodology has important relevance. To truly understand what is happening in classrooms requires the act of connoisseurship, the noticing of subtleties and details that the casual observer would miss. Eisner (2017) defines the term connoisseurship as "the ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities" (p. 63). However, the act of connoisseurship is not enough for this study. As Eisner (1976) describes, "If connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure" (p. 141). In combining these two elements, the goal of the methodology is to improve the "process of education" (p. 149), a goal that is in line with the goals of this study. I am hopeful that this study can contribute to the improvement of the lives of students and teachers by helping them prioritize the reason many decided to become teachers in the first place: to care for and work with children (Marsh, 2015). As Noddings (2005) writes, "A child's place in our hearts and lives should not depend on his or her academic prowess" (p. 13). The participants of this study

approached their work in this manner and believed in all elements of their students, not only providing care if they had a certain level of academic prowess. They approached the care for their students as a non-negotiable, unconditional in their desire to help and support their students.

This study focused on how reputationally caring teachers approach assessment in their classrooms. To frame such a discussion, key terms in need of definition were those comprising the component parts of the term "caring assessment." By care, I employed the definition from Noddings (2005) as a reciprocal relationship between two individuals. Caring relationships have the qualities of "engrossment and motivational displacement" (p. 16), attending to the needs of another regardless of what else was going on in one's life. Importantly, for Noddings, however, care must not only be given, but also received: "The caring relation is completed when he receives my efforts at caring" (p. 16). Thus, a teacher's care must be received by students to be considered care.

In this study, I initially thought that I would seek to examine how caring teachers approached giving grades, thinking that they might employ unconventional approaches to evaluation such as contract grading (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009; Hiller & Hietapelto, 2001), self-assessment (Hewitt, 2011), portfolios (Yaghoubi & Mobin, 2015), and peer assessment (Agrawal & Rajapakse, 2018), among others. What I found was that evaluation shortchanged how teachers thought about their students through the lens of care. I will explore this further in the coming pages.

Instead of focusing on assessment practices, I found that in asking teachers about their caring practices, they spoke about topics that extended far beyond the realm of only

assessment. In short, the participants of this study felt that their caring practices had little to do with assessment at all.

In this study, I sought to capture educational criticisms that explored the nature of being a reputationally caring teacher in a variety of different environments, teaching disciplines, and grade levels. All of the participants had attained status as reputationally caring teachers within their communities, and I employed the concept of reputation in the same manner as others in previous studies (Collinson et al., 1999; Khaki, 2005; Salim, 2016). In finding my participants, I sought "reputationally caring" teachers, those teachers who are thought of by colleagues, administrators, parents, and students in their schools as caring and who prioritize student-teacher relationships in their classrooms. Tomlinson's (2015) definition of care helped simplify what I was looking for in participants: "Caring for the students we teach means adapting and planning to their needs rather than expecting them to adapt to us" (p. 90). The participants are teachers who do not count hours or calculate their pay before raising their hand to help. The participants "actively accept responsibility for each student's academic, social, psychological, and cultural well-being" (p. 90). Future studies could employ this methodology to focus on specific demographics of participants. One participant, Josh, suggested that I look at reputationally caring teachers in high-poverty schools, as he had, by his own admission and account, been unsuccessful in attaining status at his previous school that served this demographic. Others, like Caroline, suggested that I examine caring communities, places where reputational care was an expectation within a community, not supernova "caring" teachers flashing through the sky before burning out and often leaving the community, a topic explored later in this chapter.

In Chapter IV, I presented vignettes that explored each teacher's journey to becoming a caring teacher, their negotiation of various obstacles or pressures in their respective context, and their own ideas about their caring practices. The vignettes show teachers going out of their way for students, providing significant feedback, holding themselves and their students to high expectations while also navigating the pressures of the classroom with joy, honesty, and authentic respect for seeing and caring for each individual student. These vignettes demonstrated findings that the participants prioritized the students in the room, not the external pressures from other stakeholders, including parents, administrators, colleagues, or the government.

Finding these teachers required asking principals and colleagues at various schools about those teachers in their communities who are viewed in this manner by students, families, colleagues, and administrators. Each of the four participants are teachers who have taught in multiple communities. All had taught for at least five years, but no more than 15. Two of the teachers teach in independent schools, one in a public school, and one in a public charter school. One teacher was an elementary special education teacher, one teacher was a middle school educator, and two were high school level teachers. I selected my participants based upon my connections with various schools and through talking to administrators and colleagues at respective sites. I chose to have variety in my demographic because I wanted to examine the general approach by reputationally caring teachers to assessment without controlling for variables of discipline taught, age of students, school type, point in career, or any other controllable variable. In conducting the study, I intended to examine the practices of reputationally caring

teachers, not how reputationally caring teachers approached their work in a certain kind of environment, with a certain discipline, or at a certain point in their career.

I conducted interviews and observations of classrooms with my first two participants, Kyle and Rose, in the spring of 2019. Between the second and third interview, after I had observed their class, each participant represented their caring practices in a form that felt true to them and spoke to me about that representation and reflection during our third interview. I concluded my data collection by a similar process of interviewing, observation, and journaling during the late summer and fall of 2019 with Caroline and Josh. With all participants, I first conducted two formal semi-structured interviews ranging from 30-60 minutes, utilizing the questions from Appendix A. The interview questions were designed to help me answer my research questions; however, often, the interview led me to other topics related to their classroom practice. Due to the nature of qualitative inquiry and educational criticism and connoisseurship, I followed the line of thinking presented by my participants in these interviews. At the third follow-up interview of approximately 30-60 minutes, we discussed the reflections about their caring practices they had made, the class observation I had done, and other topics the participants wished to discuss about their caring practices. The final interviews helped me understand how the participants viewed their own caring practices, their journey to becoming reputationally caring educators, and the impact those practices had on various elements of their classroom.

Discussion of Themes and Responses to Research Questions

In Chapter IV, I illustrated vignettes about the reputationally caring teachers of this study to demonstrate their approach to care aligns with the ideas of Parker J. Palmer (2007) and Nel Noddings (2003).

Palmer's work explores the work of teaching through the lens of understanding the identity and integrity of the teacher, the "inner life" (Palmer, 2007, p. 3). Through his work, his thesis rest on what he describes as a "simple premise" (p. 10): "…good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10). This theme came through across each of my participants, and in educational criticism, themes represent or contribute to the findings of the study (Uhrmacher et al., 2017). The participants of this study taught who they are and demonstrated their care through sharing their lives and selves with their students.

Similarly, Noddings (2003) work aligns closely with the approach reputationally caring teachers of this study had. Along the same lines as Palmer's comments above, Noddings (2005) writes that care is "the very bedrock of all successful education and…contemporary schooling can be revitalized in its light" (p. 27). Like the participants of this study, Noddings believes in prioritizing care:

> The new education I envision puts a very high valuation on the traditional occupations of women. Care for children, the aged, and the ill must be shared by all capable adults, not just women, and everyone should understand that these activities bring special joys as well as burdens (p. 51).

The participants of this study believed greatly in the power of care and prioritized doing so. They also spoke extensively about the benefits of such an approach, and the

challenges it brings to their work. The following sections examine my research questions and the findings from each question.

Approach to Care and Assessment

Q1 How do reputationally caring teachers approach classroom assessment and why do they have that approach?

Nel Noddings would likely be heartened by the practices of the participants of this study. Many of the qualities of care that she describes in her writing shine through in the narratives in Chapter IV, helping us see various characteristics and actions of reputationally caring teachers coalescing around Noddings' ideas of care.

For example, Noddings (2005) writes about the difference between a teacher's beliefs about their own care, even their desire to care, and their success as a carer: "It is not enough for someone to say, 'I care', and to work hard imposing her educational ideas on students…To be credited properly with the virtue of caring, one must regularly succeed in establishing caring relations" (p. xv). The reputationally caring teachers of this study have established themselves through the success of their work, as evidenced by the manner in which they speak about meeting students where they are and in prioritizing relational care with their students, the observation of their classrooms, and the comments of their colleagues and administrators. As Tomlinson (2015) writes,

> If I teach with the intent to provide equal access to quality learning to students from the broadest possible range of backgrounds, I need to care *for* each of them as individuals. That means that I will actively accept responsibility for each student's academic, social, psychological, and cultural well-being (p. 89-90).

The administrators and colleagues of the participants wrote of close relationships with their students, and as Noddings illustrates in defining care, "No matter how hard teachers try to care, if the caring is not received by students, the claim 'they don't care'

has some validity" (p. 15). Each of the teachers of this study has demonstrated success of students receiving care, even if some cases, like Josh's student who took the entire summer to acknowledge and receive his care, took a little bit longer.

The participants of this study also demonstrated care through their willingness to give choices to their students, a key aspect of their approach to classroom assessment. For Kyle and Josh, this choice came through in their curricular offerings and in the manners in which students represented their learning. For Rose, choice came through flexible test dates and the opportunity to choose to correct one's work on formative assessments. Like the participants, Noddings (2003) believes self-direction and choice in a student's own journey honors the learner and cares for them, aiding the wellness of students and society:

> A liberal democracy should generate aims more focused on the needs of individuals. Indeed, it must do this because it depends for its legitimacy on the capacity of its citizens to freely endorse and maintain it. And how is such a capacity developed? Surely, it grows, at least in part, out of guided practice in making well-informed choices (p. 88).

Additionally, the participants of this study consistently spoke of prioritizing their students' growth and well-being above other external considerations. Josh said he did not care about state standards in the least, and while not all of the teachers of this study were beholden to state expectations, each did have high expectations for their students.

Noddings believes that an orientation to high expectations is not about "passing" uniform standards; rather, she writes, "…middle school years should provide the opportunity for such exploration, and much time in those years should be spent on discussion, guidance, and trying things out" (p. 76). This theme came through across participants as well, regardless of the age of the students being taught. For Kyle, a middle

school teacher, a foundational principle of his teaching came in exploration of real-world scenarios by his students, things that they will encounter as they move through the world beyond his classroom walls. In our first interview, he described a project he had recently engaged in with his students where his class looked at the incomes of various individuals in his local community. From the model, students then explored the pay gap between various races, genders, and education levels. Through this exploration, Kyle wanted his students to embrace how math could impact their life and watch them run with it: "[I'm] realizing that, sometimes, you just really have to let go and allow students to learn from their experiences, whether it's positive or negative."

Rose, too, believes in the power of exploration for her students and prioritizes it. She has developed a number of different caring practices to help students do exactly that. She has implemented a series of formative assessments in her class that spark and require exploration by the student. Rose believes feedback to be one of the most difficult things for a teacher to do well; however, she uses it to prioritize exploration, not the fulfillment of a set requirement. Through the "Knowledge Checks" she gives and the manner in which she provides feedback, students are required to respond back to what she writes. Instead of shoving the test in the backpack, never to be seen again, students must use the feedback to help them improve. Rose said:

> I think the fact is it comes to caring not only about their learning, but the awareness of their learning…Students don't know how to take feedback particularly well. And not just in their emotional response, but how do you take it and learn from it. And this is literally how we learn. We try something. We figure out whether or not it works and then we make a choice. And we don't allow for students to do that when they take a test, they don't do well, and then it's done. That makes no sense with the learning cycle at all.

Josh, too, prioritized the exploration of ideas with his students. In the wake of tragedy at his school, Josh was given license to not have to cover all of the same topics as he had in the past. Administrators guided him to follow the lead of his students, something Josh now realizes he wishes he had been doing all along. In that time, Josh decided to throw out the curriculum and set plans and see what his students wanted to explore. The topic became the impact of Gandhi. He reflects on his exploration unit as "the greatest unit I've ever taught."

In his view, what made Josh's unit so great was prioritizing the interests of his students and removing the fear and judgment of not getting through certain content or of having students be assessed in a uniform way. The regular schedule was "blown up" and his class went "way over the amount of time." It didn't matter to him: "When the kids are into something, you just know it's there. And they were into it for weeks and weeks and weeks…And then the next day, [they] want[ed] more."

Josh developed a choice project to allow kids to explore Gandhi through the form of representation that felt most interesting to them: "Some kid is like – can I paint? Yeah, sure, whatever." His work aligns with Eisner's ideas around the power of allowing for students to represent their learning through multiple forms of representation (Eisner, 1996).

Finally, Caroline's work, while directed by the goals of Individualized Education Plans (IEP) of her students, also values exploration. She spoke of the importance of having her students feel supported and excited about learning. Posed with the question of only being able to ask her students one question at the end of the year, Caroline said she would want to ask her students how they felt as learners: "Not how do you think you did?

How does it make you feel? My hope is that it would make them feel challenged, but supported."

Caroline said she speaks often with her school's psychologist about the mindsets of her students, considering how to help her students have the confidence and willingness to take risks. Her approach, like the other participants, importantly aligned with the expectations of her community, a finding of this study discussed next.

Caring as Local

The participants' approach to students, to assessment, and to integrating one's self into a community echoed an idea from Hlebowitsh (2012):

> The act of teaching always inherits a local condition, with variations that cut across and within schools and classrooms, making it difficult for educators to align their own particular instructional dynamic with what others are saying is 'best' from an evidence-based perspective (p. 3).

Like teaching, care also must inherit the local context of the environment, an important finding of this study. Each of the four participants have acclimated themselves to the environments they are in, allowing them to gain status as reputationally caring teachers within their communities. For some, knowledge and familiarity of the environment, alumni status or a similar educational experience in their own childhood as in the case of Kyle and Rose, respectively, may have made the acclimation easier. Were Josh, Rose, Kyle or Caroline to enter another community of a different stripe with different students in a similar role, their approach would not automatically grant them status as reputationally caring in the new environment. To understand locality, one must understand the children in the room, the families from which they come, the narrative of the school environment in which they have lived, and the external forces that impact the

ability to have care received in that environment. To care means to attend to a variety of factors.

The participants of this study did just that. For Kyle, his inheritance of the local condition meant examining his role and stage in the school. While he has grand ideas about how to improve the school's practice, he understands that tradition has power, and he seeks to, in his words, not "rock the boat" too much. It has allowed him to earn status as a reputationally caring teacher, even if he is only scratching the surface of his potential impact on the community.

For Caroline, a similar mantra existed. In each community she has joined, she has tried to approach with an attitude of open-mindedness and attention to the place and people she is joining. It's one of the challenges she had with Teach for America, the organization through which her teaching career began:

> [I am challenged by] the savior model and that is never the model I came in with. I came in with humility. These teachers have been here; these teachers know this community. These teachers know these kids. I don't. I need to learn from them rather than I'm going to teach you…What gives me the right to say that I know how to do this better than you. Because I don't, and that's always been my attitude.

Becoming a caring teacher in one community rests, in part, in the attitude and approach the individual teacher takes to the community they join, the time the teacher allows for the care to blossom, and the support felt to be able to let care develop. Josh stayed only one year at his previous school, a low-income school with challenging behaviors from students and many disciplinary issues. When Josh would bring issues to administrators, the challenges he brought boomeranged back to him from administrators: "One of the ways [the administrators] dealt with it was to tell teachers, if you come to us,

that means you can't handle your job. You can't handle your classroom, so that makes us wonder about whether you really care for these kids."

Variable levels of autonomy and support, and the incoming attitude of the teacher can influence the ability for a teacher to become seen as caring in a local community, regardless of prior history. As Caroline said in reference to the kinds of schools that Josh did not succeed at:

> It's very different coming from a school that is doing well than a school that is struggling. At a school that is doing well, they are given a lot more leeway because they are performing on the assessments. They are looking good on paper. They are given more autonomy. But I think the schools that are struggling need that [autonomy] too…It just seems more micromanaged because they're not performing…It's actually making it worse. People aren't feeling supported so they're leaving after a year or two, so they're never actually able to figure out the school and figure out the community and how to help the kids.

However, despite these potential variable differences across communities, commonalities of care for these participants did exist. Each of the participants' approaches has prioritized the kids in their respective classrooms; the approaches put emphasis on the relationships between people, not the content, pedagogy, structure, intentions, or most notably for this study, the evaluative components of the classroom. Would these four teachers become reputationally caring in another community? Is their approach generalizable to achieving care at another school? While one can't know for certain without additional research, a finding from these four participants suggests teachers should concern themselves with the culture and stories of the people in front of them before attending to what curriculum they seek to cover or what assessment method they should employ. Hlebowitsh (2012) writes that to theorists like Joseph Schwab, theory cannot be disengaged from the lives of real students and schools. Schwab (1969) writes:

> The stuff of theory is abstract or idealized representations of real things. But curriculum in action treats real things: real acts, real teachers, real children, things richer and different from theoretical representations. Curriculum will deal badly with its real things if it treats them merely as replicas of theoretic representations (p. 12).

This is an important point; the work of this study demonstrates that teaching practices, even those that have been tried and true in past environments, may not work in a new setting.

Scholarship on "contextual teaching" can help inform this discussion. Drawing on the work of Dewey's (1916, 1934, 1938) writings about experience and education, Darcy (2000) writes that while contextual teaching can be defined in a variety of ways, "At the heart of contextualist philosophy is the belief that behaviors are seen as acts-in-context. The act of learning, like all other human behaviors, does not occur in a vacuum. People learn in a variety of contexts and from a variety of situations" (p. 272). Williams (2007) relatedly adds, "Contextual teaching has been described as a methodology of teaching that connects academic concepts to real-world conditions and encourages students to see how what they learn relates to their lives" (p. 572). For the participants of this study, practicing contextual teaching, relating their instruction to the lives of their particular students, was integral to their success as caring practitioners.

In summary, in answering my first question of how reputationally caring teachers approach assessment and why they have that approach, for the participants of this study, caring for their students had little to do with assessment at all. Instead, teachers spoke of their authentic, human connection to their students and of bringing their whole selves to the classroom, bringing forth ideas from Palmer (2007). They approach their care for their students this way because their care for their students is inherent in who they are as

teachers; they can't not care for their students this way. In fact, compromising their care leads teachers, such as Caroline, to consider leaving the profession before bending on the manner in which they care for their students.

A focus on students, however, requires navigating aspects besides only the students in the room. Such discussion segues nicely to the second research question of this study: "How do reputationally caring teachers perceive and negotiate external influences on assessment?" Here again, context is critical.

Navigating Obstacles Toward Care

> Q2 How do reputationally caring teachers perceive and negotiate external influences on assessment?

In conducting this study, I initially believed that examining teachers' assessment practices through the lens of care would allow me to understand how caring teachers approach assessment in their classroom. I asked the second research question of this study to dig into what obstacles kept them from being able to assess in the manner in which they hoped. For example, I thought I might find that teachers who, for example, had to prepare for standardized tests, were required to have a certain number of grades in the gradebook, or because of pressure from parents or administrators to inflate grades also had to change their assessment practices, negatively impacting their ability to care. I sought to examine how teachers navigated those obstacles.

Instead, in conducting the study, I found that teachers spoke little of the obstacles to assessing in the manner they wished and more about obstacles to caring for their students, regardless of the manner in which they assess. A finding of this study is that teachers perceive a number of external influences as obstacles to their care, including time with their students, the structure of school day and school system, the number of

students in their classes, the amount of experience one has in the school system as correlated to authority, and their understanding of the community.

For Josh, all of these obstacles have led him to make a choice as an educator, to reduce his workload and teach part-time. Josh has the ability to do this, and he did it in part to be able to care for his infant daughter at home; however, he has no idea when he will go back to full-time. Recent budget cuts have the district cutting jobs at his school, and he knows that asking for increased hours at his current school may not be possible. Josh spoke about obstacles in systemic terms. He struggled with how to provide adequate feedback to his students on writing assignments when he has 35 students each class or how his advisory partner, who teaches 220 students in mathematics, is supposed to adequately care for his students. Josh also brought up another important, complicated obstacle to teachers' ability to care. What happens when one student requires a greater level of attention than others? How does that impact a teacher's ability to care? "Any kid that could possibly be there should be there. But in these massive classes, I had a boy last year who was a big boy, 6'2", 6'3", well over 200 pounds, and he was mentally, cognitively, emotionally, a small child."

Josh said he made progress with the student, but his comments bring up an important question for how teachers are supported to care for their students, particularly those with development needs who are integrated into the classroom. He has addressed obstacles in his classroom through creative pedagogical approaches. On the day I observed Josh, he had created an escape room type lesson to help students engage with the topic of codebreaking in World War 2. Students teamed up in groups, and Josh, whirling about the room as a cacophony of questions filled the room, helped students

move from task to task to uncover information about how and why codebreaking occurred in World War 2. Before the lesson he told me, “I’ve never tried it and never done anything like this. So it could crash and burn.” The lesson did not; students left wanting more, excited for the next class. A finding of how teachers navigate obstacles is through a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), a willingness to try things that they have never tried before, as Josh did in this lesson.

That, too, is the approach Caroline takes with her students in the elementary grades. In speaking about her use of data, Caroline said: “If you’ve been trying this strategy for two months and they’ve completely plateaued, then obviously you’re not doing the right thing and need to re-assess. So it’s more just constantly assessing your own practice and meeting your kids’ needs.” A related finding of this study is that reputationally caring teachers approach obstacles as opportunities to examine their own practice, not to make excuses about those obstacles existing in the first place.

With small class sizes and more homogenous populations of academic ability at their independent schools, Rose and Kyle have a different set of obstacles in their stead than Caroline and Josh. However, they too approached obstacles to care through a lens of opportunity. When Rose’s students continually complained about feeling stressed about her class, particularly assessments, she implemented flexible testing dates. While the change may not be a perfect solution, students appreciated the effort and communicated that to Rose: “The feedback I’ve gotten from students is that, by getting these optional test dates, students feel a sense of relief. Even if they’re not taking advantage of the test dates, the fact that they know it’s available creates less stress around the test.”

Kyle, too, has viewed obstacles to his care as opportunities. Before Kyle joined his current school, he taught in a low-income school to begin his career. There, his first months did not go as planned, and he felt challenged by students who did not automatically grant him respect as he did with his teachers. He went home, reflected, and came to a realization that he was not giving his authentic self to his students: "What I came to was something I always felt like I've been able to do fairly well my entire life is interacting, you know, communicating with people. Learning who they are as people. And I realized I wasn't doing it." Kyle changed his practice and begin to break through to his students.

As mentioned in the discussion of my first research questions, themes of prioritizing student experience first, having the humility and patience to understand the community in which one works, and an unyielding commitment to being one's authentic self as a caring teacher appeared across all of the participants. This was all true of Kyle in this instance, allowing him to navigate obstacles to his care.

Participants also spoke of navigating obstacles within a community being easier in communities that had similar values around care. As Caroline said,

> With our conversations, I sort of realized where I've felt like I was able to make the most difference was when I was in a community that valued a lot of the same things...That was like a big 'Aha!' moment. I went home and talked to my husband about it.

Noddings (2003) has written about how systematic obstacles to care, such as a lack of time, can be overcome through creative approaches to scheduling that prioritizes relational care. Other scholars (Chirichello & Chirichello, 2001; Cooper & Miness, 2014; Hitz, Somers, & Jenlink, 2007;) have also written about the benefits of looping on caring relationships. As Hitz et al. (2007) writes, "One of the most positive elements of looping

is that …It provides time – time for children to grow and develop at their own rates and time for teachers to get to know each child and family in a personal way" (p. 82-84). However, looping is not what the participants of this study talked about, nor the approach they sought. This study's examination of caring teachers and the prioritization of relational care, a practice that takes time to develop deeply, may suggest that looping could help facilitate care in communities, and it may. Further research would be required. However, while looping may be a possible aid to helping teachers navigate care, this study more significantly adds to the body of research on how teachers navigate obstacles to relational care by demonstrating steps taken by individuals that are not reliant on systems, to effectively implement a caring approach. It's a growth mindset that the participants of this study possessed that allowed them to approach obstacles to their care as problems not yet solved. What impact such a mindset has on the other elements of a teacher's classroom beyond assessment is the subject of the third research question of this study and is explored next.

Eisner's Ecology and Caring Assessment

Q3 When assessments are approached through a caring lens, how are the other elements of the ecology of schooling affected, including curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and intentions?

I went into this study believing that the third question of this research study would examine how the caring practices of teachers related to assessment would impact the other four elements of Eisner's ecology (1988). In working with the participants, I found the caring assessment practices came through in a de-emphasis of grades and numeric valuations.

As Rose discussed, she re-named her tests LOPS, short for Learning Opportunities. She wanted students to understand that the nomenclature mattered and that tests and assessments should be learned from, not consumed. It has influenced the way Rose has thought about how her students receive her grades and changed her feedback structure. For one project Rose discussed with me, she used to provide feedback in the form of a rubric with boxes checked, indicating what students had completed and what they had not. She has moved away from that to narrative comments and was intrigued by the concept of audio commentary on student writing, a topic I and others (Cavanaugh & Song, 2014; Chalfin, 2018; Gould & Day, 2013) have written about. Rose's practice puts her students' interactions with qualitative feedback as the priority. For that same project, she described her thinking:

> Right now, I am working on little mini-paragraphs to give them about their presentations. And that was strategic because I was thinking what information will they actually consume and what will they be able to take with them…in being thoughtful about my response, and trying to make it more digestible based on whatever the assignment was, it can then be received differently from my students.

Josh had a similar perspective to Rose. Much of what he does in class is graded in a non-traditional fashion. The numbers and points of grading structures are less meaningful to him, so he chooses to emphasize other elements through his assessment practices, including receiving points for being responsible and acting kind to one another. Students have ownership over some grades around content as well. Josh said:

> I have them do these small group seminars, and they kind of grade themselves. It doesn't go in as a formal grade, but I observe. I don't know if you would count this as an assessment, but I'm assessing whether they're getting it, but there's no points attached to it.

This practice suggests that Josh does not see learning in his class as represented solely by the grade his students receive. He says the only pushback he ever receives from students or parents comes around grades and from students who have not turned in any assignments.

In addition to similarities in how participants de-emphasized the evaluative components of Eisner's ecology (1988), commonalities also came through my participants in the intentions they held for their students, the structural ingredients helpful to having such an approach, and the curricular and pedagogical priorities they made in their classroom.

As Moroye (2017) offers, Eisner (1988, 1992) employed the ecology of schooling framework toward school reform efforts, but it can also be used as a tool for analysis:

> We might look at a school to identify the operational aspects of each dimension and then evaluate their relationships with each other. A school whose intention is to foster creativity might want to see ways in which curriculum or pedagogy support or work against that aim (Moroye, 2017, p. 4).

In this study, I am employing Eisner's framework toward similar analytic ends, to discern whether and how care pervades various elements. A focus of this study has been examining how reputationally caring teachers approach assessment. As mentioned previously, the term assessment was intentionally chosen for its distinction from the term evaluation. Garcia (2011) outlines that these terms are often used synonymously, but there are important subtle distinctions in their application to education. While evaluation described judgment of value, assessment can be defined as gathering information toward better understanding a student's progress.

Eisner uses the term evaluation as one of his five dimensions; however, his desired definition more closely resembles what this study is seeking to examine through the word assessment. As Eisner (1988) writes:

> Our standard evaluation mechanisms – essentially a narrow range of achievement tests – are inconsistent with much of what we need. They are too narrow, they neglect personal forms of achievement, they encourage educationally conservative practices, they foster an instrumental view of education, and they direct our students' attention to very limited goals. One of our major tasks is to invent better ways to reveal to the public what they have the right to know, namely how we perform as professionals and how their children perform as students (p. 29)

What Eisner hits on in this passage is the crux of this study. I chose not to use Eisner's definition of evaluation and instead chose the term assessment because it is a term that removes value judgment and can be more broadly defined. While Garcia (2011) outlines assessment as attending to "the collection of data about student progress in order to infer about the student's knowledge, skills, and abilities," we can also assess aspects of a student's progress even more broadly than those defined by Eisner, and it has done not have to be done in a quantitative fashion.

The teachers in this study have proven in their communities that they are professionals by being known as reputationally caring, and as demonstrated in this study, discussion of what it means to care in schools has evolved over time. Yet in the 30 years that have followed since Eisner published his work on the ecology of schooling, the evaluative mechanisms utilized today in the vast majority of schools have remained largely static. A narrow range of achievement tests are still the main evaluative mechanism, and, to read the historical work of Goldstein

(2014), are even further emphasized today than when Eisner's comments were made.

Sports teams often use big data to make decisions about how their teams can become more effective. In baseball, teams use the statistic Wins Above Replacement (WAR) to calculate "how many more wins [a player is] worth than a replacement-level player at his same position" (Wins Above Replacement, 2019). Another term is Win Shares (NBA Win Shares, 2019) that attempts to divvy up the number of wins a team has into percentages allocated to each individual on the team. If a team wins 40 games and a player is credited with eight win shares, he is deemed responsible, by this statistical analysis, for 20 percent of his team's wins.

Education has attempted to move toward such analytical metrics with respect to teachers, essentially ascribing point totals to the difference that individual teachers make in a student's growth. Put simply, if a student received an 89 on a test one year and, by calculation, should be thought to earn a 91 the following year and earns a 93, that teacher is considered responsible for the two points of growth (Goldstein, 2014, p. 205): "Value-added measurement changed pretty much everything in our national conversation about student achievement" (p. 205).

However, describing the difference between advancements in sports analytics and educational analytics is similar to describing advancements in aviation since Kitty Hawk and advancements in the slicing of bread; sports analytics has seen immense strides, education metrics have remained largely the same. In the 2000s and 2010s, a series of quantitative research studies often tied the best teaching to value-added test scores and the subsequent policy decisions. In conjunction, President Barack Obama decided to pass

over educational researcher Linda Darling-Hammond for Arne Duncan for the post of Secretary of Education. Darling-Hammond has written extensively about the future of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2000) and teaching systems around the world (Darling-Hammond, 2017) while Duncan, while superintendent of schools in Chicago "shut-down underperforming schools, opened new charter schools, and experimented with teacher performance pay tied, in part, to value-added measurement" (Goldstein, 2014, p. 213). From there, the train continued down the tracks of measurement with students taking increasingly more tests ever year. Goldstein (2014) writes:

> In one district I visited, Harrison District 2 in Colorado Springs, the typical child experienced at least twenty-five testing days each school year, which cut down on time for instruction, field trips, group projects, and any other classroom activity not associated with collecting student growth data (p. 217).

Like many teachers, the participants of this study found the emphasis on data and metrics to be problematic in school reform initiatives. As Rose discussed, the idea of holding schools accountable makes conceptual sense; however, it is rooted in a faulty assumption: "To expect that every child is going to get the same thing out of their education is, I think, unrealistic. Depending on where they are, they may have different things that are valuable to them, different skills or sets of knowledge than others."

Kyle agreed with Rose's comments and believed standardized testing and value-added measurement had gone overboard. While it might be the "easiest" way to measure progress, that does not mean it is best. Asked if he could ask only one question to measure his students' progress, Kyle did not turn to a question that came from his content knowledge of Pre-Algebra or a word problem from one of his tests. Instead, he chose a non-cognitive topic: "I think it would be something along the lines of, describe a scenario in which you either had to challenge yourself to fully grasp a concept, and within that

answer, I would also want them to describe the challenges and how they overcame it." Kyle is describing a question around the intangible learning qualities of grit (Duckworth, 2016) and what scholars have described as being anti-fragile (Haidt & Paresky, 2019), the quality of getting stronger when exposed to stress, such as occurs with one's immune system.

The teachers in this study add value to their classrooms, but a finding of this study is that the value can't be measured through a score on a test or a raised average grade point average. Their varied constituents consider them caring in their communities, and they assess their students in a wide variety of ways. That approach, however, which moves away from standardization toward individualized understanding, impacts the various other elements of Eisner's ecology: the intentions they hold, the structure of their classrooms used, the curriculum they cover, and the pedagogy they employ, and as discussed above, the evaluative methods utilized. The diagram below in Figure 5 outlines themes of how a caring approach to assessment, one that adds value in unquantifiable metrics of immediacy, manifests itself in the ecosystem of the classrooms of reputationally caring teachers. The explanation of the findings from Figure 5 come next.

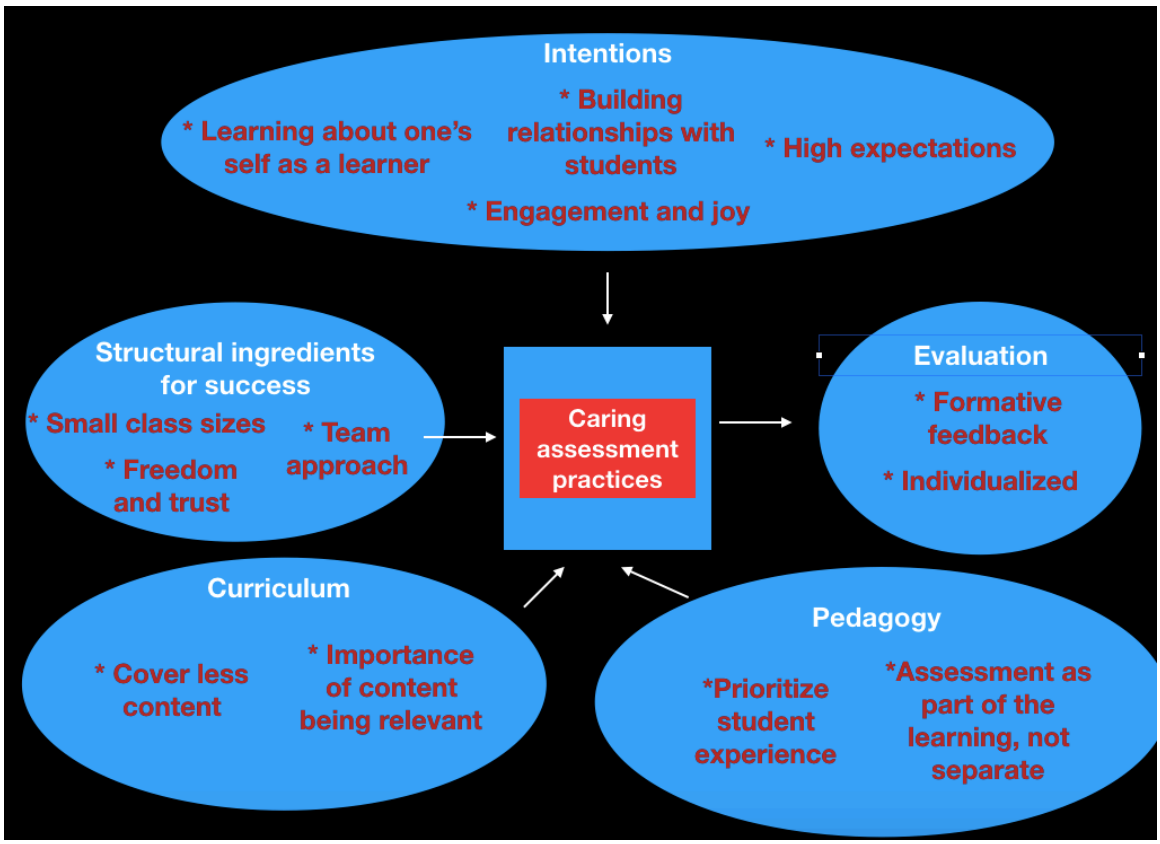

Figure 5. Outline of Eisnerian Themes Related to Caring Assessment Practices

Intentions: Building Relationships with Students; Engagement and Joy

When Eisner (1988) wrote about intentions, he was talking about the priorities and direction for a school: "Because intentions legitimate what schools pay attention to, they influence the kinds of opportunities students have to develop their minds. And intentions tell the young what is important to learn: they convey our values" (p. 25). I am not utilizing intentions in the same manner as Eisner here, as this study focuses on the intentions of teachers; however, the intentions of the teachers in this study also convey what they care about for their students, the values they hold for the classroom.

For each of the participants, the intentions for their students informed their caring practices. Each participant started with the intentions they had for their students, and across all participants, Josh, Rose, Caroline, and Kyle all had high expectations for their

students while prioritizing relationships, engagement, joy, self-awareness, and learning about one's self as a learner as traits they wanted their students to pursue.

Engagement and joy came across as major themes of intentions for students of the participants. As Josh said, "So what do I hope they get out of the class – friendships, understanding of high school, that they enjoy learning, but when it comes to the actual learning component…we didn't arrive at 2019 out of nowhere."

Kyle had a similar approach to his intentions for his students. He wants them to know that the relationships are of paramount importance.

> So I would tell [my students], there's teachers I remember who I'll never forget, not because of what they taught me academically, but what I learned from them in how to become a person, and what I've learned from them in terms of their care for me…What's at the root of it is people understanding people – you want them to be successful, want them to feel better, want them to do better. How powerful a particular feeling can be in any individual, I think it can drive students.

For Rose, the relational care piece mattered as well, and from survey data she has received back, she believes her students know it to be true.

> I really care about my students learning and them learning about themselves. And I think the more experience I have as a teacher, the more clearly that comes across to my students is something that I'm learning. When I asked students on my survey, what do you think is the most important to Ms. [Rose] …And I think that it is in fact true that I care a lot more about them growing as humans than how well they do on assessments.

Caroline too prioritized relationships as core to her intentions for her students, and she built on that.

> So I was just thinking about the different things that I find super important when you're thinking about care in the classroom, and I really thought building relationships was super important, and to build relationships, you have to have communication, trust and mutual respect…Like you have to have a relationship with the kids you work with.

These intentions inform the assessment practices of the participants in this study. They are inputs into how assessment operates in their classroom. The same is true of the curricular and pedagogical aspects of each individual's classroom.

Curriculum and Pedagogy: Prioritizing Student Experience over Content

In Elliot Eisner's text *Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered* (1996), the author questions the validity of standardized tests:

> A national examination…to take the educational temperature is likely to be as useful for curing the ills of schools as taking a patient's temperature and publicizing its magnitude would be for curing the patient…As one Nebraska teacher told me, 'You can't fatten cattle by putting them on a scale' (p. 4).

I bring up Eisner's comments to frame the conversation about the impact a caring approach to assessment has on the curriculum and pedagogy of the participants of the study. When external forces subjugate teachers' abilities to have control over their curriculum and pedagogy, it challenges teachers to be able to prioritize relational care.

Eisner argues for a broader definition of what curriculum and pedagogy mean. Arguing for students to be able to use multiple forms of representation to unlock their own learning, Eisner (1996) describes the importance of allowing humans to construct their own meaning of curricular elements. He goes on to advocate for wide representational opportunities for students, moving beyond the powers of traditional testing. In this, there is a deep and natural bond between curriculum and evaluation:

> The foregoing ideas have relevance not only for curriculum; they have relevance for evaluation as well…some students might represent their understanding through visual images, others through literal language, others through choreographed movements, others through literary and poetic forms…As I have already indicated, in life outside of school this is precisely what occurs (p. 86).

For Josh, getting students engaged, excited about the material, and willing to uncover their own learnings follows this line of thinking. He doesn't follow the traditional script that others in his department do. He is prioritizing the engagement of his students, and to do so, he feels the relevance of content is paramount.

> So I've also sort of ditched the traditional school schedule for the year, where you have to start in 1900 and have to move to this and then that. No, we're starting in 2019… Are you interested in 2019 and what's going on now? And I think the answer for most of them is yes. So if you can convince them it relates to their lives, they have way more buy-in.

Josh goes on to echo the concepts of Eisner. He describes a project called "Tech Docs", a year-long investigation in which students take a topic in American History and follow its evolution politically, socially, and economically through the eras. While there are guidelines, Josh provides opportunities for kids to pursue their own passions: "I mean, shit, some kids, all they think about is cars, so it's like you can hit up every single unit – and you can do the skills, while you just focus on cars the entire year…I think having some choice in [what they study]…They don't have to know x."

Josh wants to prioritize relevance in curriculum, and in doing so, he is engaging in the very ideas that Eisner (1996) advocates to help increase the importance of meaning and the transfer of understanding:

> One of the ways to increase relevance and transfer is to help students see relationships across fields; another is to increase the variety of forms of representation through which meanings can be construed by the student. Thus, increasing the variety of forms used to teach a field and relating that field to other fields, or using a variety of fields to address a key idea, are ways not only to provide more handles for students to grasp but also to make what students learn more transferable (p. 84).

Other participants echoed similar sentiments to Josh. For Caroline, finding the time to infuse creativity, to not be so goal oriented with younger students who are considered behind their peers, is important and intentional:

> Like having a day, like having some art. Or trying occasionally to have some sort of creative output, which is what I would have liked to have to put into this. It's a really bit of a crazy aspect. I often don't have time, and I often feel when you only work with kids for 30 minutes a day, it's often the thing that goes. But I miss that a little bit, and I try to incorporate it, but it's hard to do.

Of the four participants, it is Caroline who is most confined to a narrowed curriculum and pedagogy of direct instruction focused on the set goal of Individual Education Plans due to the systematic valuing of students that has occurred. It was Caroline who spoke most of the traditional notions of educational measurement, helping her students reach grade level and not be behind: "I work with a population of students who are significantly below grade level, and I feel this sense of urgency that I need to get them to grade level so they can succeed. Beyond this grade, like more long term."

Caroline has been subject to a system that places higher value on those students who don't have to come see her. After all, as Caroline described, the goal is for her curriculum and pedagogy to help her students no longer have to come see her. Noddings (2003) challenges this notion of value:

> The soul-destroying discrimination arises when we regard one track as better than another and place the one loaded with academic information and skills at the top. A bad situation is made worse when were refer to the students in the top track as the 'good kids', and teachers often do this (p. 86-87).

Given this system, it is Caroline who faces the greatest obstacles in broadening her vision of curriculum for her students due to systematic constraints.

Freedom Drives Innovation

Conversely, for Rose and Kyle, curricular and pedagogical freedom has helped drive innovation in assessment. Both have reported that each summer they have felt the freedom to develop new projects and assessments, to dig into moving their class away from traditional assessments and provide more opportunities for problem-centered learning. As Eisner (1996) writes, "Problem-centered tasks are tasks in which there is a problem to solve, one about which students care and which often, but not necessarily always, they will have had a hand in formulating" (p. 82).

Kyle is still early in his career; however, he has the ambition and drive to create the kinds of opportunities for students in his classroom. His curriculum and assessments are being driven by the concept of student ownership and relevance:

> [What] I hope to be able to do this summer is emphasize more different units and create assessments that aren't as rigid as, you know, you have multiple choice questions, you have short answer questions. But perhaps it could be framed in terms of care is understanding what their futures will look like…What can push us as an education system, as a society, towards educational experiences that don't just have pen to paper, answering multiple choice questions, etc.

This is where the concept of multiple forms of representation lives out in Kyle's educational philosophy and in his vision. While he has been wary to "rock the boat" too significantly, a problem described by Eisner (1996) in which young teachers are often encouraged "to forget what they were taught in teacher-education programs" (p. 7) and where "risk of failure for the experimental exploration of new pedagogical possibilities is likely to be professionally costly" (p. 7), Kyle is excited to take these ideas forward and is already developing new projects that allow for students to more consistently take ownership of their own form of representation, even as he grapples with the potential challenges that would come from such work.

> Just providing students with different ways to display their knowledge, which would be extremely hard to grade though. That would be the one thing that would make it perhaps impossible, but if that was my, if I had the power to do it, I would probably allow students to show their knowledge in that manner, to open up the project in that way.

Rose, too, is working on utilizing multiple forms of representation for her students to engage with as part of her curriculum. She spoke candidly that the environment of the independent school she has worked in has allowed her to develop in a way that she doesn't think possible had she stayed in the public school environment from which she came. The small class sizes, freedom to direct her curriculum and pedagogy, and overall opportunities to push herself professionally through outside conferences and time with colleagues has allowed her to grow her practice significantly. Still, she realizes that designing a good assessment based on the curriculum that has been covered is "one of the hardest things you can do as an educator."

In *The Educational Imagination: On The Design and Evaluation of School Programs,* Eisner (1994) goes on to describe how multiple forms of representation in assessment is essential:

> Finally, and most important, the features of the particular symbol system or form of representation used both constrains and makes possible particular types of meaning…Because the quest for meaning, it is argued, is part of human nature, the ability to represent or recover meaning in the various forms in which it can be experienced should be a primary aim of schooling (p. 80).

Rose agrees, and in designing ideal assessments, she would like to provide that diversity of representation. When asked how she would modify her current assessment structure, Rose said,

> I think more often than not there would be choice built into assessments. So students would have the option of how they wanted to process the information…So you could create a visual representation, you can record yourself talking, you could write it out…And so I try to at least have various forms that they can do it, and if there are words, they can also draw pictures and things like that.

As the participants reflected on the manner in which they assess and the impact it has on their curriculum and pedagogy, all said that the curriculum they chose to cover and pedagogical approaches they employed drove the assessments that they offered, not vise-versa. While, as Rose said, "there's a reciprocity between the processes," she did not feel "particularly driven by testing" and neither did other participants, particularly Josh and Kyle. As Josh said in reference to his engaging with more creative lesson planning and less lecture-based direct instruction, "My students are not getting nearly the information the others are getting [in colleagues' classrooms], but maybe it sticks."

As discussed, Caroline felt the most pressure around her curriculum driving her assessment, given the population of students with whom she works; however, she too spoke of broader aims than just academic goals:

> A child is a whole child, and there's not just this one piece to them. That one piece is not like this specific test. I want to also make sure that they're good people and know how to advocate for what they need. They learn how to love reading or writing, even if it's hard for them right now. You just look at the one component, it's just not going to work. To me, that's just not an option.

Such a mindset, prioritizing the student experience, has been a key component of how offering caring assessment has interacted with the curricular and pedagogical practices of the participants. Rose has been intentional in her practice in trying to think about the experience of her students and trying to live the experience:

> It can be a bit easy to separate ourselves into the teacher role versus the student role. And really not understand the ways that students live their lives and how often they're going from one class to another and whether or not their friends are in that class or if they don't feel confident about the assessment they just took so they're feeling really bad about their grade, or they have something going on with their family members. All of the ways in which the student experience is, in a way, almost out of our control, but then how can you, if you factor that in, try to bring them back in by recognizing that experience is not just about us being in the front of the room.

Rose, Kyle, Caroline, and Josh all describe empathy for their students. The students of these caring teachers are "always on my mind," as Caroline says, of these individual teachers, and they see teaching for holistic care and development as core to who they are. The curricular and pedagogical practices are driven by a student-centeredness that is unbending.

In his book *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, Henry Giroux (1988) describes the impetus for teachers to utilize their classroom toward social change:

> [Critical pedagogy] points to the role that teachers and administrators might play as transformative intellectuals who develop counterhegemonic pedagogies that not only empower students by giving them the knowledge and social skills they will need to be able to function in the larger society as critical agents, but also educate them for transformative action (p. xxxiii).

I bring up Giroux's views because, while different than the contributions of this study, they orient themselves in a manner that is forceful, a required orientation for reputationally caring teachers to have to challenge the traditional notions of assessment and the current testing environment of schools: "Schools are not neutral sites, and teachers cannot assume the posture of being neutral either" (Giroux, 2013, p. 173).

Moreover, Giroux's ideas demonstrate an orientation to pedagogical understandings as firm. For him, teachers should drive social change. The teachers of this

study are not engaging in critical pedagogy in the manner Giroux considers. Rather, in this study, the participants have a different unbending perspective, one that prioritizes student growth and development, understanding of one's self as a learner, enjoyment of school, and a valuation of choice through multiple forms of representation above achievement. Their comments suggest that they orient themselves to curricular and pedagogical notions by thinking first of their students' experiences in and out of the classroom, not of the state, the test, the parent, or the school. Depending on the school context, this might take a strong-minded individual like Josh, one who goes against the grain regardless of the potential consequences from administrators:

> When I teach, when I do assessment, state standards do not play a role…I don't even care a little. I probably couldn't even tell you the state standards, and I'm at the point now, if I get challenged, I'm willing to say, I'm going to stand up for what is right, and you can find a way to get rid of me…It's bad practice.

For others, like Rose and Kyle, a liberal, trusting independent school environment has allowed them the freedom to prioritize students above other considerations. For Caroline, a similar trust from her administrators does not require her to have the same obstinate view as Josh; however, Caroline is similarly strong-willed in her beliefs about the importance of thinking beyond grades and test scores. She described how she is trying to help students understand the importance of the learning environment being safe and removed from judgment and comparison among each other. When one student accused another of looking at her paper, Caroline approached the situation through the lens of formative growth and collaboration, not static measurement: "Like this is not a test. We're all here to learn together and figure this out together…This is a caring community, and what we're doing is hard. And we need to value each other's hard work."

Curriculum and pedagogy are foundational elements of any teacher's classroom. These two elements have had important impacts on the development of caring assessment practices for these participants.

Structure: Using Challenges as Opportunities

As described, each participant in the study came from a different school environment. Each taught a different subject area with variation among the type of school (public, charter, independent), age of students (elementary, middle, and high school), and access to resources and facilities. Commonalities among the structure of schooling for the participants included each of the schools being on a traditional calendar with extended time-off in the summer, a five day week for students and teachers, and the environment being that of a day school with boarding components not part of the student or faculty experience.

When Eisner wrote about structure in "The Ecology of School Improvement" (1988), he spoke to challenges of students in high schools feeling known: "The existing secondary school structure not only separates teacher from teacher and divides what is taught into small units with virtually impenetrable boundaries, but it also exacerbates the anonymity of students" (p. 28).

As participants described the structural aspects of their classes, there was great variation in the how structures (class sizes, classroom spaces, class schedules, etc.) impacted the ability for a teacher to assess students in meaningful, caring ways. Some like Josh described the difficulty of grading student writing with so many students on his course rosters; others like Rose and Kyle celebrated the limited number of students they

had and were able to be more mindful in how and when they provided feedback to students and how that feedback was structured. As Rose said,

> Feedback is I think a really important part of the learning process that is really hard as a teacher to do well. And students don't know how to take feedback particularly well. And not just in their emotional response, but how do you take it and learn from it. And that is literally how we learn… The time and matter in which I give things back and how directed it is [is something I think about more]. And I started to be more thoughtful about what kind of feedback am I going to give, as opposed to just writing things down.

Perhaps a universal structural consideration in schools, time was a component for teachers in thinking about the structures of their classes. Caroline spoke on multiple occasions about the necessity for making the most of each minute of time together. In speaking about elements that have made for a successful caring classroom, Caroline specifically singled out adequate time as an integral component: "You need to have time, and that one stands alone. There's never enough time, but how you utilize the time that you have is incredibly important."

Structure impacted the ability for reputationally caring teachers to provide care, with small class sizes, a team-based approach, and freedom and trust from colleagues and administrators to pursue holistic care for their students as important variables to foster such a practice. Despite structural obstacles existing in each of their schools, it was striking to find the lack of excuse making or bemoaning that came from these teachers. A key finding from this study includes the ways in which structure subjugated itself as a topic of conversation in comparison to the elements of intentions, curriculum, and pedagogy in the consideration of caring assessments.

As Rose described, after a few years at her school, she noticed that tests led to an increased level of stress and anxiety. She could have blamed and problematized the

myriad of athletic events, clubs, activities, and performances as intractable and thrown up her hands. Instead, Rose took a different approach, viewing a structural consideration of what authors like Vicki Abeles (2015) have argued is a generation of overscheduled kids. Abeles (2015) writes,

> The way to reclaim a childhood stuck in overdrive has a lot to do with time…I recognized this when the film crew and I went to interview Kelly, a close friend of Devon, the girl in my community who committed suicide…Kelly, an eighth grader had just one surprising request: we had to schedule the interview at 11 p.m. on a weeknight, after all her assignments, sports practices, and piano lessons were done (Abeles, 2015, p. 42).

Abeles' comments inspire a move for action, more than an individual teacher can take on. However, Rose, instead of taking a cynical view toward a seemingly overwhelming problem, took action steps to provide accommodation and care for her students through flexible test dates, the implementation of formative knowledge checks, and providing guidance to help students understand not only the content, but also themselves as learners. As Rose said, "What I hope in my heart of hearts is that they're learning the structure of what works for them."

Josh echoed a similar sentiment about the structural challenges of his teaching world. Instead of bemoaning a lack of time with his students or an inability to do as he wished, Josh looked inward and believed that any obstacles to his inability to care were because he had not yet figured out a solution:

> Honestly, I think my greatest hurdle might be the classes are big. The hurdle for U.S. History is that we have a lot of material to cover and only one year to do it…The school would back me up in any way; I really feel that about the school…They don't provide hurdles. Any obstacles I face are sort of my own creation or my own lack of creativity.

From the participants' own words, a finding of this study suggests that, when it comes to structure, reputationally caring teachers care much more about what they can

control, the time that they do they have with their students, the relationships that they can develop with them, the strategies that they can employ to make the most of the students in front of them, and the broad range of assessments they can utilize than the factors outside of their control: financial resources for curriculum, the number of students in the class, the length of the class period or school year or the room in which the class is situated. It prioritizes the students and their experience above all else.

In summary, in examining how the elements of Eisner's ecology are impacted when assessments are approached through a caring lens, this study found that the participants de-emphasized numeric valuation and grades and had qualms with the recent emphases of value-added measurement and increases in standardized testing practices. Instead, they held common intentions of prioritizing relationships with their students through their practices to promote engagement, joy, self-awareness, and learning about one's self as a learner. For each of the participants, the curriculum and pedagogy of their classrooms informed their assessment practices, and they were not guided in any fashion by teaching to a specific test, even if, as in Rose's case, an Advanced Placement examination ended one of her courses. In short, the participants prioritized student growth over achievement. Finally, the participants found obstacles presented by the structures of their respective schools, such as overscheduled students, class sizes or limited time, but they approached these challenges positively as problems yet solved.

Given these findings, it is important to examine how one might cultivate such a caring mindset in future teachers. That will happen in the exploration of the fourth and final research question next.

Cultivating Caring Teachers

Q4 What are the implications of caring assessments for the professional development of teachers and for assessment practices in general?

At the beginning of conducting this study, I asked this fourth research question, thinking about how to develop reputationally caring teachers and how their approach to assessment, the manner in which they chart the progress of their students, might have implications for the ways we develop teachers and assess students more generally. According to research from Richard Ingersoll (Shepard, 2019), one in 10 teachers will quit after one year, and forty to fifty percent of teachers leave within the first five years. Given these statistics, how does one cultivate such a mindset to prioritize care for students and develop professionally? What can be done to cultivate more reputationally caring teachers?

As mentioned, my own personal experience as an educator had me thinking that the participants of this study would talk about different approaches to assessment in relation to their caring practices. Personally, I have utilized practices like contract grading (Danielewicz & Elbow, 2009; Hiller & Hietapelto, 2001) and audio commentary on student papers (Cavanaugh & Song, 2014; Chalfin, 2018; Gould & Day, 2013). I have seen self-assessment (Hewitt, 2011), portfolios (Yaghoubi & Mobin, 2015), and peer assessment (Agrawal & Rajapakse, 2018) enacted by colleagues. As mentioned, in aiming my arrow toward this, I found that the caring practices of my participants had little to do with assessment at all.

In Paul Tough's book *How Children Succeed* (2012), he describes the employment of a "Character Report Card," employed by the Knowledge is Power

Program (KIPP) charter school network. Tough's discussion in the book draws on the growth mindset work of Carol Dweck (2006), the idea that character and intelligence are malleable, a view that falls in line with the practices of the reputationally caring teachers of this study. A belief in growth mindsets and in formative assessment came through across all of the participants in this study. One of Rose's self-described caring practices was the implementation of Knowledge Checks (KC's), formative assessments that were administered through a unit to give students an opportunity to see how they were doing and to correct their work: "What I hope that emphasizes is, I don't care when you get it; I just want you to get it at some point."

The Character Report Card from KIPP has seven character strengths – grit, zest, self-control, optimism, gratitude, social intelligence, and curiosity – and students are rated on how they perform in these areas by their teachers. When KIPP co-founder Dave Levin originally thought of this idea, he initially thought that students would graduate from KIPP schools with both a grade point average (GPA) and a character point average (CPA) (Snyder, 2014). I mention Tough (2012) and his discussion of the Character Report Card because the concept behind allowing kids to reflect on their character is a good one. In my own practice as an educator, I developed a modified Character Report Card that allowed students to self-reflect on the qualities of character. However, what I found in conducting this study is that concepts like the Character Report Card run into problems when care, and character, are thought of as ratings and boxes. I bring this up in relation to this fourth research question because one finding of this study is that, along the same lines to the challenges with concepts like the Character Report Card, no professional development workshop or checklist exists that can make a teacher

reputationally caring. One cannot be handed a list of caring assessment strategies and see care received by students one and all.

Advocates of the Character Report Card, like Levin, believe that character can be the difference maker in helping kids achieve better in school as represented by grades and test scores. As Levin told Tough, he likes the character report card because it removes judgement: "The thing I think is great about the character-strength approach is that it is fundamentally devoid of value judgment. The inevitable problem with the values-and-ethics approach is that you get into, well, whose values? Whose ethics?" (Snyder, 2014).

Accountability through assessment advocates want metrics that can be quantified because it allows for education to be narrowed to the lens of achievement and to comparison. As Snyder (2014) critiques, "Human beings have never devised an empirical performance measure that has not become fodder for making comparisons." He goes on to point out that the problem with judging character traits, qualities like grit and zest, or for the purposes of this study, care, through a rating system is that it does not provide nuance, nor the ability to distinguish between individuals' purpose, one of the troubling hallmarks of standardized approaches:

> While it takes grit and self-control to be a successful heart surgeon, the same could be said about a suicide bomber. When your character education scheme fails to distinguish between doctors and terrorists, heroes and villains, it would appear to have a basic flaw. Following the KIPP growth card protocol, Bernie Madoff's character point average, for instance, would be stellar. He was, by most accounts, an extremely hard working, charming, wildly optimistic man (Snyder, 2014).

In his own practice, Kyle faces a challenge similar to the one presented by documents like the Character Report Card. Each term, in addition to giving a traditional

academic letter grade, Kyle provides students with an "Effort Grade," a number on a 1-5 scale that characterizes their effort. It has presented problems:

> I think the kids don't fully grasp how to receive a certain number that's associated with their effort grade… I don't know if the effort grade is the ultimate goal of all students – some for sure. But all students, I wouldn't say. They're more guided by the actual letter grade than the effort grade, so in that sense, what is it really going toward?

I asked Kyle if the nomenclature mattered at all. If the Effort Grade term were changed to a Care Grade, given our discussion about Noddings (2005) definition of "reception, recognition, and response" (p. 16) as defining a caring relationship, would it change anything about its effectiveness in his view? Kyle responded that he liked the term 'care' better than 'effort', but it still had challenges:

> I think care, honestly I like that word more, because I think that kids would perhaps understand what we want them to know more, in terms of caring for their grade but also who they are as people, which really gets at the root of what we want to do at [our school].

While Kyle began to warm to the idea of a Care Grade as he spoke, a finding of this study remains that both teachers and teacher educators may seek a formulaic approach to helping care flourish, yet one may not exist. The teachers of this study did not describe a traditional path or approach to becoming caring educators.

In fact, the qualities of caring for students described in the vignettes in Chapter IV have not always been considered desirable in the teaching profession. An historical perspective about this concept may be important to consider through the lens of sociological renderings of teaching in the literature. Nearly a century ago, Waller (1932) discussed the idea of ascertaining the success or failure of a teacher and ascribed some power to that decision resting in how the teacher is perceived by colleagues:

> Therefore it is necessary for the teacher to be rated by his fellow teachers, but this, too, presents difficulties because teachers rate teachers largely from the institutional point of view…The teacher's acceptability to other teachers depends upon his adherence to the teacher code, upon his keeping his students at a distance and observing the proper ritual of aggression and recession in contacts with other teachers (p. 29).

The idea of "keeping students at a distance" runs antithetical to the notions of being a reputationally caring teacher in this study. So too does the idea that teachers are in a power struggle with other teachers. Waller's language comes in stark contrast to how reputationally teachers were described in this study by themselves and by others. As Josh said in reflecting on his impact on students:

> The kids who appreciate me the most, the kids who I most impact are the sort of outcast kids, the kids who get in trouble a lot, who don't have a whole lot of people rooting for them. I think people are fed up with them. Maybe I just have just a little bit more patience, so I'm one of the last people or something around. It's the idea of being open and receptive. I mean, as far as caring goes, some kids stand to learn more and understand new ideas better, and I can help different kids different ways. Those kids who believe I truly care are those kids who don't have a lot of support.

Nearly a century later, teachers have made progress, though they still do not hold the status, or pay, as professionals on par with other professions that require similar levels of education (Goldstein, 2014, p. 263). When it comes to pay, one could argue that teachers are actually declining in status:

> In the 1940s, male teachers earned more than half of male college graduates, while female teachers earned more than 70 percent of female college graduates. Today teacher salaries are in the thirtieth percentile for males and fortieth percentile for females (p. 264).

Salary aside, one can witness the evolution of ideas about the conception of how teachers are to orient themselves to their students through the literature. In Dan Lortie's *Schoolteacher* (1975), one can witness the beginnings of a subtle movement toward relational care in teaching; however, Lortie's research only is willing to go part way

down the path of prioritizing relational care in schools. In writing about how teachers perceive the purpose of their work, Lortie found new insight at the time that many teachers find it rewarding to make a difference with one individual student:

> It is ironic that teachers may consider the special attention they gave such students to be counternormative…Given the organizational structure of schools and norms of universalism, teachers have little justification for making different allocations of affection and effort…But these values of universalism are not central for many teachers in elementary grades who cite as their highest moment of pride successful work with one child (p. 123).

Each of the participants spoke of their work with individual children as paramount to their success. The difference made for an individual child, the relationship created with that kid, lent itself to promoting an ethos of relational care, a breakthrough that was meaningful. Rose said:

> Recently, I had an experience with a student who had been coming to meet with me regularly [outside of class], which was a habit he had picked up mid-year. He had traditionally been scoring in the high Cs, maybe low Bs, and he got an A- on the exam, which was really exciting for him, and I was happy to deliver that news.

What has kept the caring teachers of this study in the classroom while so many leave? In 2017, Desiree Carver-Thomas and Linda Darling-Hammond of the Learning Policy Institute published a report entitled "Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It" (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Among a number of salient and important points, one directly related to this study speaks to dissatisfaction with accountability measures obstructing the ability to care for students: "Teachers cite a number of reasons for leaving their school or the profession. The most frequently cited reasons in 2012-2013 were dissatisfactions with testing and accountability pressures (listed by 25% of those who left the profession)" (p. v). As Ingersoll (Shepard, 2019) outlined, teacher turnover continues to plague American education, and for these four

participants, all part of the teaching profession for at least five years now, they have surpassed an important statistical milestone. Moreover, as Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) outline, the rate of leaving the profession has increased over the past thirty years (p. 3), and leaving or moving schools by teachers has an adverse effect on student learning: "Research is clear that both teacher inexperience and rates of turnover negatively impact student learning, which means that students in schools with high turnover and few experienced teachers are at a decided educational disadvantage" (p. 1).

Why have the teachers of this study stayed? Their answers echo the reasons that many teachers have become teachers in the first place. As one survey of prospective and newly qualified teachers by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers in England outlined, the top reasons that teachers want or do become teachers in the first place are an enjoyment of working with young people, a desire to make a difference in the lives of others, the variety of the job, and having been inspired by teachers in their own educational experience (Marsh, 2015).

Participants of this study echoed these reasons. Caroline had planned to become a doctor, studying Pre-Med courses as an undergraduate, taking the MCAT and securing recommendations from teachers to pursue, perhaps unsurprisingly, a career also ensconced in the practice of care. When she began teaching, she saw the impact that she could make and fell in love with the ability to make a difference in her students' lives:

> I saw the impact you can have on a kid's life and how important that is. And I've seen, you know, these really hard scenarios. I'm able to make connections with these, honestly, hard kids to make connections with. If nothing else, they need people to make connections with, and if I'm capable of doing that, that's what I should do.

Kyle echoed similar sentiments about his reasons for becoming a teacher. He had grown up with terrific role models of his own education, and he knew that he could and wanted to make a difference in the lives of others as his teachers had made for him. In reflecting on his own journey to become a reputationally caring teacher, Kyle said that he would guide teachers to think about their caring practices by thinking about times when their teachers demonstrated care toward them:

> I think how I'd start is probably understanding how my teachers interacted with me at [my middle school] and [my high school], specifically those two places. I always knew if I needed assistance, if I needed help, my teachers would be there for me…There were moments at [my high school] and [my middle school] where people really took an interest in me.

One of the simplest elements of professional development toward allowing teachers to become reputationally caring in a community is the promotion of longevity. While all four of the participants were teaching at either their second or third school, with three moving from low-income, low-performing schools to schools with higher achieving students and better access to resources, each of them had attributed their understandings as a teacher and reputations as caring teachers to the fact that they had stayed in a profession that sees many leave. Rose said:

> After those first few years of teaching, when you really get to, I think, pay more attention to some of your practices or expanding upon them because you're more familiar with how your class is going to run, [you're] making observations about the student experience.

When Rose began teaching, she described her assessment process as one in which she simply wanted to get tests created and administered. Over time, she saw that the lessons she planned allowed students to confidently learn the material and promptly forget it as soon as the exam had ended. She sought to find another way, and that could only happen with time, trust, and a willingness to experiment and even fail:

> The other thing I want to add is it's making observations and deciding you want to do something about it, which I think is actually the hardest part. I think a lot of the time we say, oh yeah, this is something I face every year. And it's not easy to slow down and decide that you're going to do something. And one of the things that helps with that is having colleagues who I like to think through things with.

Caroline, too, spoke to community as an important component of her professional development, and she added that she felt that those communities who actually had the greatest micro-management, the schools struggling the most, actually needed the inverse sort of control.

> It's very different coming from a school that is doing well versus a school that is struggling. At a school that is doing well, they are given a lot more leeway because they are performing on the assessments, they are looking good on paper. They are given more autonomy. But I think those schools that are struggling need that too.

Three of my participants, Josh, Kyle, and Caroline have worked at struggling schools before their current environments, and professional development at struggling schools is often the result of control sought by administrators and politicians to include a one-size-fits-all approach. Goldstein (2014) outlined the story of Alex Caputo-Pearl, a teacher at the historically struggling Crenshaw High School in inner-city Los Angeles. In the last seven years, Caputo-Pearl worked at Crenshaw, he had five different principals and 24 assistant principals (p. 256). Caputo-Pearl managed to wrangle funding to start an academy model within Crenshaw that, drawing on the work of Ted Sizer, would allow for students to use their learning to help solve neighborhood problems. As Goldstein (2014) wrote, "It eschewed most of the popular strategies in the accountability playbook, like mass staff layoffs and turning a neighborhood school into a charter school" (p. 257). The result: Five years later, when test scores had not improved, the district took over, even though graduation rates had improved by 23 percent and there had been a 19 percent

reduction in school suspensions. Trust and time had a limit, and one can only wonder what would have happened if teachers had been trusted to build upon the work they had been doing.

Similarly, for the participants of my study, one wonders if they would have become reputationally caring in their prior communities with simply more time to build on the work being done. An important topic worthy of future investigation from this study is a potential longitudinal study about reputational care among teachers who stay in a community for a long period of time, career educators at a single school. Are teachers who are career educators at individual schools thought of as reputationally caring or as dinosaurs burnt out and unwilling to move on? When asked the difference between reputationally caring teachers and those who are not, Josh said, "I do think people are burnt out. They just…They're like, I have three years left and then I can retire. So they're not great for kids."

In addition, even those improved numbers around graduation rates and a reduction in school discipline from Crenshaw are subject to scrutiny. As mentioned, Josh worked at a low-performing school before landing at his current school. There, support for teachers was lacking, and an inability to control one's students was seen by administrators as a sign of weakness. Josh told me multiple stories of times when students cursed at him or broke school rules in front of him, yet he was asked to apologize to students. Lower suspension rates and higher graduation rates were, from his perspective, just students being passed through, accountable to nothing.

The professional development for teachers at low-performing schools and the characteristics of reputationally caring teachers in struggling, inner-city schools are

subjects worthy of study in future research. However, the larger point remains that any professional development for teachers to become reputationally caring needs to trust teachers for the professionals they are. As Goldstein (2014) writes,

> When American policy makers require every public school to use the same strategies – typically without confirming if their favored approaches are actually effective for kids – they reduce the discretion of the most motivated teachers…whose contributions to the profession should be scaled up, not shut down or ignored (p. 261).

Kyle saw this very phenomenon in his first school. Josh and Caroline did too. A lack of trust, a focus on accountability through measurement only exacerbated the problems of lower-performing schools. Caroline said:

> It's actually making it worse. People aren't feeling supported, so they're leaving after like a year or two, so they're never able to actually figure out the school and figure out the community and how to help the kids, and so it's just this constant revolving door of teachers. And you know, there's potentially a few who are making change, but it's not enough.

A Plan Moving Forward

When I asked the participants how they became reputationally caring teachers, they cited time in the profession and trust from colleagues and administrators, colleagues to bounce ideas off of, and positive mentors they had in their own educational experience as important factors. Kyle described one of his teachers as constantly being available. In one case, he needed help on his college application essays.

> For him to take, I don't know, it might have been three or four times, 7 o'clock in the morning, to help me formulate my thoughts, my ideas, he never taught me. He coached me lacrosse, but he never taught me. That was something I'll never forget.

As Lortie (1975) describes, the apprenticeship of observation allows future teachers to see teachers in action during their schooling, a unique element of the induction process of the teaching profession:

> American young people, in fact, see teachers at work much more than they see any other occupational group; we can estimate that the average student has spent 13,000 hours in direct contact with classroom teachers by the time he graduates from high school…The interaction, moreover, is not passive observation – it is usually a relationship which has consequences for the students and thus is invested with affect (p. 61).

As a result of these relationships, reputationally caring teachers like Kyle have exemplars of how to enact reputational care. As a new generation of teachers enters the workforce, students have come through an educational landscape that has been primarily concerned with testing. It raises questions and concerns about the nature of the profession to prospective teachers. As Stephen Mucher, Director of the Bard College Master of Arts Teaching Program in Los Angeles, writes,

> My own observations, backed by several recent polls, suggest that young people are indeed daunted by a profession that has changed. 'All teachers do now is read from scripts and administer tests all day,' a Senior psychology major at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro told me last spring" (Strauss, 2015).

If one hasn't seen teachers demonstrating care and believes teachers are nothing more than highly trained robots, it's no wonder why young people are backing away from the profession, creating a shortage around the country (Heim, 2016). For these participants, having mentors during their childhood and career has been important. Rose described this importance in her work:

> A lot of the time, the first time they say [an idea], I'm thinking, 'Nah.' But then I sit with it for a while, or I come up with it, and I ask my colleagues…So having other people to chat about these things with is helpful, who also care about the student experience.

Caroline echoed these sentiments and said she has always found support from colleagues and administrators: "[My principal] truly trusts what I'm doing and same with my evaluator…I do feel a lot of trust and autonomy."

However, regardless of support and collegiality, others like Josh, felt that the entire education system needed to be reconstituted, and his approach was a microcosm of how far he could push in his fiefdom without getting fired: "I'm not tweaking. I would break it apart and rebuild it from the ground up. It doesn't make sense anymore."

Josh's comments bring to mind the ideas of Robinson and his aforementioned landmark educational video, "Changing Education Paradigms" (2010). In it, Robinson challenges the notion that we still do school much the same way that we did decades ago:

> Schools are still pretty much organized on factory lines: ringing bells, separate facilities, specialized into separate subjects. We still educate children by batches, you know, we put them through the system by age group. Why do we do that? Why is there this assumption that the most important thing kids have in common is how old they are? You know, it's like the most important thing about them is their date of manufacture (Robinson, 2010).

For Josh, professional development of teachers would be helping re-frame the ideas of education toward a different end, one that subjugated the idea that each individual's class discipline has some sort of essential importance. It flies in the face of scholars like E.D. Hirsch (1988) who champion philosophical ideas of essentialism and a body of knowledge that every student must be responsible for. When asked what he would do if he were in charge of re-structuring the education system, placed in the hypothetical position of United States Secretary of Education, Josh said he "wouldn't even know where to begin," but that large scale reform would be needed:

> You don't have to have chemistry. I don't think that's something that you need to know. In fact, I'm positive I don't know any of it now, and it doesn't impact my life. And I feel like we just push these things that don't matter. That's really sad from a teacher's point of view. You can't admit that. I think there needs a whole re-structure. Because everyone feels that their class matters and their subject matters, but they don't.

When Josh was speaking of teachers who cared about their subject matter above all else, however, he wasn't speaking of the participants of this study, including himself. The participants couldn't pinpoint specific practices that led them to being reputationally caring and their colleagues as not; rather, it was more an adoption of a mindset of a willingness to try new ideas that fit the individual environment. In his newest book *You, Your Child, and School: Navigate Your Way to the Best Education,* Robinson and co-author Lou Aronica (2018) highlight four elements that great teachers possess the ability to do with students: enable, engage, empower, and expect (p. 164-170). Under the heading, "What Makes a Great Teacher", Robinson and Aronica go on to describe a kind of care for their classroom and students that has foundation in some simple tenets, principles that cut across each of these participants. Citing a Teach for America study, perhaps noteworthy in that two of the four participants of this study participated in the program, Robinson and Aronica cite the following as consistent in great teaching.

- They're constantly reinventing their classrooms and evaluating their own progress with the students.
- They work hard at keeping their classrooms inclusive and at engaging parents in what is going on in class.
- They keep a strong level of focus on outcomes.
- They are unusually well prepared both on a daily level and on a yearlong level by working backward from what they hope to accomplish (p. 176).

A finding from this study is that reputational care is contextual. What works in one environment to become a reputationally caring teacher may not work in another,

despite the above core principles being in place. Robinson and Aronica, however, also cite a fifth principle that is not contextual to reputational care.

- They are relentless, in spite of school and community conditions (p. 176).

That was true of the participants of this study, and it is the professional development that is needed for teachers, an infusion of grit and mindset that teachers will not give up in the face of adversity, fighting for the benefit of their students, no matter the challenge of the conditions in front of them. As Duckworth (2016) wrote in *Grit,* "'gritty' teachers were 31 percent more likely to generate considerable growth from their students. She also found that teachers who were satisfied with their lives were much more likely to help the kids they taught" (Robinson & Aronica, 2018, p. 176-177). That should come as no surprise in examining the lives of these four teachers, career educators who, despite a host of other endeavors they could have considered, have committed themselves and their careers to the lives of children. They are acting in the image of one of the most influential progressive education philosophers, John Dewey.

Significance of the Study: Educative Care

No two participants in this study had the same assessment strategies. As has been discussed, context matters, and for each individual teacher, the method of assessing and the values of those assessments depended largely on the environment, age, and goals of the students in the individual class at each school.

However, with respect to assessments, the aspirational care that each of the participants spoke to could, perhaps unsurprisingly, be found as the core foundational ideas from Tom Little and Katherine Ellison's book *Loving Learning: How Progressive Education Can Save America's Schools* (2015). While this is not a comprehensive list,

the "six core strategies, passed down from Dewey, Parker, and the other pioneers, and still in robust practice at progressive schools today," (p. 52) were described in some manner by each of the four participants. The core strategies cited by Little and Ellison (2015) are listed below.

1. Attention to children's emotions as well as their intellects;
2. Reliance on students' interests to guide their learning;
3. Curtailment or outright bans on testing, grading, and ranking;
4. Involvement of students in real-world endeavors, ranging from going on field trips to managing a farm;
5. The study of topics in an integrated way, from a variety of different disciplines; and, not least,
6. Support for children to develop a sense of social justice and become active participants in America's democracy (p. 52).

The broad strokes of these strategies were referenced by the participants in some manner, and it suggests that these tenets of progressive schools are foundational to reputational care, regardless of whether the environment is progressive.

A charter school, Caroline's school would be considered the most progressive of the four schools studied here; however, it is perhaps unsurprising that these tenets of progressivism shine through in reputational care in environments that are not part of what Little and Ellison (2015) describe as the Progressive Education Network (p. 195) or would have missions or philosophies not considered progressive by scholars. What does a reputationally caring teacher's approach to assessment look like at schools that posit themselves as progressive is worthy of future consideration, as is the conception of reputational care in other kinds of schools, such as low-performing, inner-city schools, as was suggested by Josh.

For now, however, an addition to the field of care in education comes in the form of the ideas of progressivism formulated by Dewey, among the most influential

progressive educators. Entitled "Educative Care", reputationally caring teachers in this study displayed the kind of core, defining care that melds personal attributes with professional understandings. This Educative Care is not teaching, and it's not parenting. It straddles the middle of these two roles as an empathic mentor. Caring for students is as core and central to these participants as breathing, eating, and sleeping. It's the only way these teachers know how to orient themselves to their work.

The term "educative care" has been used in other scholarship in other disciplines, including nursing (Girija & Kokilavani, 2014), medicine (Heidari & Mardani-Hamooleh, 2016), political science (Fraistat, 2016), and also in education (Cupit, 2004). In nursing and medicine, the term has been used to describe a practice of care that educates patients toward understanding their condition and helping them self-care.

In political science, Fraistat (2016) employed the term while exploring Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work *Emile* and argues that Rousseau's work provides insight into how society can move away from models of domination toward models of care through seeing education as not separate from the work of teachers:

> The ancients, [Rousseau] claims, associated education with rearing and caring for children and distinguished it from teaching and learning…But Rousseau insists they were wrong to draw these distinctions; to the contrary, all of these activities belong to one unified, educative caregiving practice, which ought to be provided over by a single person (p. 893-894).

As explained below, Fraistat's work moves toward my use of the term and the work of reputationally caring teachers, as he is trying to demonstrate that Rousseau's work demonstrates that society can benefit from models in which care is both provided and taught to individuals:

> To sum up, the domestic education Rousseau outlines in *Emile* strives to create an individual capable of experiencing the separateness of others without pain, one who can resist the temptation to dominate others, and one who will be less vulnerable to domination by them. Care is indispensable to the process: Receiving proper care has critical moral-pedagogical consequences, and learning to provide care to others in turn helps discipline our powerful desire to connect to others (p. 897)

The term educative care has also been used minimally in education scholarship. In exploring children's spiritual development in the United Kingdom, Cupit (2004) employs the term "educative care" as a more expansive alternative than "schooling" as it is defined to include "all extra-familial contexts where children are offered nurture and learning, such as preschools, day care, and after school care" (p. 294). While this term is employed in the scholarship of education in this manner here, I am employing the term differently.

For my use for this study, the term "Educative Care" is born out of the work of John Dewey and is a reference to the continuity and interaction as related to caring in schools. Dewey writes of educative experiences as those experiences that have a student wanting to study further and learn more. He writes in contrast to the educative experience is the miseducative experience: "Any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 25). In contrast, educative experiences promote further learning. It begets more educative experiences. As explained in the tenets below, like educative experiences, "Educative Care" inspires continued care and a deepened relationship among both parties.

To develop this addition to the field, I employed Simpson's (2001) exploration of Dewey's writings, including his poetry that came after his work on education. Through this investigation, I found that Simpson investigated Dewey's thoughts on a student's

nature, soul, and significance, three foundational understandings needed to care for a child. From this investigation, and the reading of some of Dewey's works on education (1897, 1916, 1934, 1938), I discovered three tenets of Educative Care emerged.

1) Teachers who enact Educative Care see their students in constant need of nurturing and treat their role as "in loco parentis" literally from Latin, in the place of parents. Like a parent, Educative Care means teachers are willing to take on any role and do anything in the support and advocacy of a student. They are not parents, but rather they have deep empathy and take on the emotions, weights, and even traumas of their students.
2) Teachers who exhibit Educative Care believe that the student-teacher relationship is immersive and continuous; it does not stop when a student leaves the classroom or is no longer part of the teacher's class. Care does not stop at the classroom door.
3) Educative Care demonstrates care for the whole person, not just for the child's intellect.

Below, I elaborate on these ideas through an application of Dewey's ideas that elucidate the comments of the participants.

Teacher as Empathic Mentor

In Simpson's (2001) investigation of Dewey's writings, including his poetic works unrelated to education, he posits a belief of what Dewey's ideal teacher embodies:

> Dewey's ideal, the seasoned teacher, is a liberally educated, pedagogically competent, content-loving, student-sensitive, community-understanding, and scientifically thinking person. He envisioned a teacher who assumes a set of responsibilities, including those suggested by his analogies of a teacher as learner, intellectual leader, partner, guide, wise parent, navigator, social servant, prophet, physician, salesperson, engineer, pioneer, artist, researcher, orchestral conductor, gardener, farmer, watcher, helper, starter, director, organizer, mediator, and interpreter.

Being a teacher who practices Educative Care means being a teacher who knows no bounds of the role of a teacher and is willing to take on all the roles that come with supporting a child as an empathic mentor. As Dewey (1990) writes, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children.

Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy" (p. 7).

The way then to achieve such Educative Care is to hold up the ideal parent on a pedestal and ask our teachers to act in such a manner. As Simpson (2001) writes, "[Dewey] claimed that learning as it occurs in a good home should be the model for school learning, not vice versa."

Perhaps one reason that reputationally caring teachers earn their status is because parents, nervous about the future of their children, asked to entrust their children to people they have never met before, see something of themselves in the teachers that display such care. Noddings even goes as far as to suggest that parenting be a topic of study in American high schools (Stone, 2018, p. 106).

Participants echoed these sentiments of feeling like a parent to their children. Josh talked about students with his wife in the evenings and those conversations inform his parenting of his own child:

> I had a kid last year. I brought her up to [my wife]. And she said, 'Oh yeah, I remember you bringing up that girl'…now that I have a daughter, I'm just thinking like, this kid has so much going for her. I'm worried, like, what if [my daughter's] nervous system doesn't develop properly, what if she lacks this ability, what if she…any number of problems. And I look at these kids. They have a million things going right.

As discussed, Caroline has struggled to be the kind of parent she wants to be to her own child and to the kids that she teaches. It's even had Caroline question whether or not she can be a teacher, given the demands of having a young child at home: "So just thinking, what do I want to do. Maybe right now is not the right time to be a full-time teacher…I don't want to cut corners. I think that's what's weighing on me."

Practicing Educative Care, Caroline would rather not teach than teach in a manner that doesn't embody these kinds of qualities. As Simpson (2001) writes,

> [Dewey] wanted teachers – and students – who understood that knowledge was always developing, that open-mindedness was necessary to continue learning, that reflection upon current and emerging understandings was invaluable, that searching for new insights from the past and present was necessary, that seeing and explaining the relevance of knowledge was an essential part of teaching, and that thinking for oneself was the only sure way to remain intellectually alive.

All of that takes a commitment. Parents don't get days off from parenting. While there is a constant negotiation of boundaries, creating a challenge for the sustainability of care for reputationally caring teachers, my participants often saw their role along similar lines.

Secondly, a teacher's work is an exercise in delayed gratification, and Educative Carers do not believe that their relationship with their students ends when they walk out of their classroom door on the final day of the year. Work with emotional elementary school students, messy middle schoolers or angsty high schoolers often does not yield immediate tangible results of progress. Teachers who exhibit Educative Care understand this notion. Simpson (2001) writes about Dewey:

> From Dewey's standpoint, one of the most important responsibilities of an educator is to build and keep constructing educative environments for students, an ongoing process. In building school environments and utilizing external ones, the teachers seeks to control variables in such a manner that the student engages in and reflects upon experiences that are educative rather than noneducative, miseducative, or antieducative.

As mentioned, by educative experiences, Dewey is describing experiences that beget further learning, not those that shut down a desire to further one's growth. This concept inspired the development and use of the term, Educative Care.

Dewey does not downplay the relationship of teachers to their students and sees it as a guide and mentor, far from the ideas of the teacher as authoritarian. As he writes in *My Pedagogic Creed* (Dewey, 1897), "The teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences."

What Dewey is describing is an act of mentorship, not something that is confined to the world of a classroom. Educative care then extends beyond the title of teacher to that of mentorship. Importantly, however, Educative Care stops short of parental notions, as the teacher does not impose views upon the child or hold the sort of power that a guardian possesses. Participants viewed their role as living in the space between guide and parent. Empathic mentor is the term that has been used here.

Not all participants felt they had achieved this status of Educative Care, and certainly not all the time. Kyle was self-critical and doesn't believe he has achieved a level of Educative Care yet, acting in too direct a manner with his students; however, he envisions a more guided approach as he moves forward in his career.

> [I want to] give them the reins more. Being caring in allowing them to truly have their own unique experience, they're able to lead, able to learn in the way that they need to. Which I think pulling off the reins will allow them to do. Students learn in different ways. I think that's one thing I want to try to do the best that I can to pull myself back more.

Rose, too, described a desire to have a mentoring role, one that has her in touch with students in helping them long after they complete their final lab report for her class:

> What I hope in my heart of hearts is that they're learning the structure of what works for them, and they will use it in their other classes. I would love to be able to follow-up with my students in a few years and be able to ask them if they've integrated any of this into their study habits or whatever maybe.

Here again, Kyle and Rose are negotiating the boundaries of their care. They want to provide for their students, doing whatever is needed to help them be successful, but they know they must walk the line between care and enabling their students' current success and future failure.

Finally, Educative Care demonstrates a belief in caring for the whole child, not just the child's intellect. As Simpson (2001) writes, "[Dewey] argued that the child should be understood from the perspective of emotion and endeavor as well as knowledge and intellect."

Each of the participants too had an unbending belief in the holistic growth of students as paramount. Josh said:

> What the fuck matters…nothing that takes place in a school aside from the development of these kids [matters]. With my Seniors, we meditate sometimes, and last year, I got more hand-written thank yous, like one-page letters, saying this is the greatest thing we've ever done in school.

In *My Pedagogic Creed* (Dewey, 1897), Dewey advocates for a similar approach. In concluding one of his seminal texts, he does not downplay the importance of the role of the teacher, discussing the role in reverential, religious terms:

> I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth.
>
> I believe that in this way the teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God.

Dewey's language here explains why Educative Care is not easy to achieve. Indeed, it takes treating one's care for students in the way a zealot treats one's religion, with fervor, passion, and an unbending belief in the importance of the work. Not every teacher can or will achieve the status of Educative Care, for not every teacher is

uncompromising in their beliefs about kids or their approach to their craft. Robinson and Aronica (2018) ask:

> If I asked you for a synonym for teach, what would it be? A word that often comes up often is *instruct*. Another is *explain.* If you were to draw a picture of 'teaching,' what would it look like? Often, we picture teachers standing at the front of a classroom, addressing the whole class. Sometimes they do that, sometimes not (p. 164).

When asked for synonyms for the word teach, participants reported definitions in accordance with Dewey's views of teaching and care and quite similar to one another. As Rose wrote,

> The first word that comes to mind is 'guide' or 'guidance'. As teachers, I think we can support and lead students to learning opportunities, and, ultimately, learning is their choice. We can do our best to provide them with resources, lessons, skills, and tools, all of which guides them to learn new things.

Caroline had a similar sentiment to share: "A synonym for teacher would be mentor. I feel like the role of a teacher is to guide students to figure out their best ways to learn and to help them through their learning process."

Josh's reflection on a synonym was also quite similar:

> I would say 'mentor' or 'guide.' The reason I say 'mentor' is that it really feels as though the subject matter is not what our job really centers around. Really, we (or, at least, I) am here for the kids. It is not necessarily important that they learn the material, but rather, that they learn how to learn… I am more focused on the development of character than I am in the acquisition of content knowledge.

Finally, Kyle's synonym was that of protector, a different word to describe a similar phenomenon of guidance:

> I think that teachers sometimes protect their students and help them gain confidence in themselves and their abilities by knowing when to step in and help but, more importantly for this current point, when to allow that student to find their own solution… Protection can occur on the other end as well in terms of building students back up and fortifying their persistence and resolve with timely words. I think that one of the ways that a teacher can have a tremendous impact on a student is by understanding how to use their protective instinct or power to help a student thrive and grow given what that individual needs at that particular moment.

Given the current educational landscape, ideas like this may be rarer than one would hope. In one study, Samuel and Suh (2012) tried to reconcile the current landscape of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with Dewey's *The Child and the Curriculum* through exposing teacher candidates to Dewey's philosophical ideas. While initially resistant, "the teacher candidates, thus, begin to discern Dewey's words of wisdom and internalize them so that they can utilize his concepts in their own lesson plans and teaching situations" (p. 378).

Not every teacher, of course, has been exposed to and charged with integrating the ideas of Dewey. As Josh said, he alone is not responsible for influencing the development of his individual students:

> I realize, however, that I am just one teacher they have this year, for one hour a day [out of 6] in their 10th year of schooling. I am under no illusions that it is I who am shaping their character. Nonetheless, I think it is important that they have such environments that aim to foster their personal growth, not simply implant information about a given subject.

Many teachers, including the participants of this study, would agree with Josh. However, that attitude is not one that has been privileged in the school experience of children. What Samuel and Suh (2012) found is a thoughtful summation of the problem with current reform efforts around education and why teachers around the country cannot and have not naturally enacted holistic care for students:

> The problem with NCLB is not that it requires accountability, but that it fails to address the whole child. As Dewey maintained, education should focus on the whole child – a self-actualizing individual and a contributing citizen of a democratic society (p. 380).

Exposing teacher candidates and teachers to philosophical ideas, particularly those of progressive philosophers like Dewey and Noddings may help develop teachers toward caring practices.

Educative Care then has three central qualities and characteristics, a belief in the whole child, a lifelong relationship of mentorship with the child, and the teacher treating the child as an empathic mentor would shepherd and care. In the process of conducting the study, however, I came across a new important question: How do schools and the teaching profession care for the carers themselves? The participants of this study are caring teachers to their core, and that can be really hard to sustain.

The Sustainability of Care

At the beginning of this chapter and this study, I mentioned that the term caring assessment yielded many results related to the field of nursing and few related to education. As the abstract of one article begins, "Caring is a universal need that is an important component in the delivery of nursing care" (Cook & Cullen, 2003). Given the findings from this study, one could easily substitute the term education for nursing care; however, unlike nurses, teachers do not receive the same level of training on counseling and trauma as nurses. Recent reports demonstrate that trauma is widespread among students with a 2018 report from the National Survey on Children's Health finding that "nearly 47 percent of all children in the United States have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience, or ACE, such as abuse or neglect, the death of a parent, or witnessing community violence" (Price & Ellis, 2018). Moreover, statistics from the

Center for Disease Control indicate that ACEs are "common across households at all income and education levels and across all races" (Price & Ellis, 2018).

Given these challenging statistics, what would Dewey say about the role of the carer in today's modern context? Caring for students has benefits for students; it is integral to the work of making positive impacts on students, as has been demonstrated by the participants of this study. However, a topic worthy of future investigation in this study is the impact that such reputational care has on the carer. Is such care sustainable for teachers? What can be done to make it more sustainable?

The participants of this study, in enacting Educative Care, acted as empathic mentors to their students. While I do not have the expertise or training to diagnose my participants as empaths, many of them displayed some of the traits described by the American Empath Association (AEA) in defining what an empath is:

> Empaths understands the mental or emotional states of others in a way that defies conventional science and psychology. Empaths have the ability to sense the feelings, thoughts, and energies of people, plants, animals, places or objects. In addition to sensing, Empaths absorb the energy of those around them. Empaths often experience stress or illness if they are bombarded by too many negative emotions. Empaths can also use their abilities to help others by imagining themselves in someone else's situation and connecting with them on a deep level (American Empath Association, 2020).

Participants displayed some of these characteristics. Caroline spoke about how her students were always on her mind. Josh went down to part-time, helping have the time to be more effective in his care in the classroom. The participants of this study struggled with giving more than they get and often did so without consideration of the boundaries to their care. This can create problems for caring teachers, namely burnout. As the blog "Empath Teacher" writes:

> Many empath teachers work themselves to exhaustion in their first year or within their first five years…One reason that new teachers staying beyond five years has become an anomaly has nothing to do with teacher education…More and more empath teachers are entering the profession and leaving for their inability to control their empathy. They feel that staying in the profession will rob them of peace and joy and that their lives will be ruined (and shortened from stress) (Empath Teacher, 2019).

Empaths suck up negative energy and give back care, love, and light. How we make ensure reputationally caring teachers, empathic mentors, replenish themselves is a topic worthy of future investigation.

Further Research

In conducting this research, the themes of care aligning with context, teaching as an empathic mentor and, to use Palmer's (2007) term, as "the undivided self" in the understanding and practice of Educative Care shined through. These findings, in concert with the understanding that while caring has evolved, assessment has not, have brought about important ideas for further research.

As discussed, the implications of caring practices for the longevity of the carer is a study worthy of investigation, as are investigations into reputationally caring teachers in particular contexts, such as high-poverty schools that can see high levels of turnover among their staff: "Instability is especially worrisome in high-poverty schools, where – when last documented over a decade ago – the turnover rate has been roughly 50% higher than in wealthier schools" (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Both Caroline and Josh taught in high-poverty schools before coming to their current environments and suggested that this was worthy of investigation during the course of our conversations.

In addition, Caroline suggested that an investigation of caring communities would be worthy of study. As she said, "The star can have an impact, but not as much if the

community isn't behind it…I think it truly goes beyond individual teachers." In considering Caroline's comments, a study worthy of investigation perhaps then is what does having a community of caring teachers do for the rest of the school? How do they serve as influencing the community culture around care? What impact does it have on the school-community partnership? Examining such a study through the lens of Noddings, Dewey, and other progressive educators is worthy of investigation.

Finally, as my final research question suggested, and as a school reform advocate, I am interested in the growth of teachers. Yet, this study yielded that no specific professional development training that can create a classroom of care. Kyle spoke about the teachers that he had growing up as influencing his ability to be a caring teacher, and it is perhaps unsurprising then that Kyle's mother also works in schools. The apprenticeship of observation is a powerful tool in the recruitment of teachers; it certainly impacted Kyle. In thinking about the development of caring teachers, empathic mentors who practice Educative Care, professional development (PD) may not exist, and certainly not PD that begins in childhood. A topic worthy of investigation for future study is how teachers who were raised in the homes of educators approach their work. My own mother worked as an elementary school educator for two decades. I wonder how being around teachers my whole life has impacted the manner in which I approach my work.

Closing Comments

When I began my own professional career, like every other first year teacher, I was not considered reputationally caring. I didn't have a reputation at all. Over time, bumbling through lessons gone amok and assessments I would never again administer, I learned. My own professional development in this area has had me try on ideas around

contract grading, audio commentary on student feedback, even debating the merits of new assessment and grading concepts like the Mastery Transcript (Stringer, 2019) with my own students.

In conducting this study, I anticipated that my teachers would talk about concepts like the Mastery Transcript. Going into the study, I expected that teachers might have heard of the concept that has been adopted by more than 300 high schools as indicative of an approach that could work to demonstrate more care for kids around assessment. As D. Scott Looney, Head of School at the Hawken School in Ohio and one of the driving forces behind the Mastery Transcript said, "[The traditional ways of grading students] makes great shorthand for sorting kids, but it's not good for growing kids" (Stringer, 2019). That may very well be true, and time will tell if new evaluation metrics like the Mastery Transcript, and other evaluation metrics can demonstrate a stronger, more holistic representation of a student. That topic, however, exists aside from the findings of this study.

Each of the four participants of this study has attained status as reputationally caring in their community. Each has done so in their own way in their own respective discipline. All have established themselves in new communities, and there is no formula that can calculate the variables that one must consider to become considered reputationally caring. In some communities, the journey may take longer for variables outside of the teacher's control, race, class, the history of the school. For others, factors may coalesce into a reputation for care happening more quickly, as in the case of Caroline at her current school where she is in only her second year. For each of the

participants, however, reputational care had them presenting themselves to the community as their wholehearted selves. As Palmer (2007) writes,

> As I make the case that good teaching is always and essentially communal, I am not abandoning my claim that teaching cannot be reduced to technique. Community, or connectedness, is the principle behind good teaching, but different teachers with different gifts create community in surprisingly diverse ways, using widely divergent methods (p. 118).

Caring teaching rests in community as well, and the findings of this study demonstrate as such. Over time, I established myself as a reputationally caring teacher at my first school. I held a variety of different positions and tried to volunteer to help with whatever initiative might be next. Like Kyle, I held alumni status at my school, perhaps helping me move toward the status of reputational care more easily or quickly.

Nearly two years ago, I changed schools for the first time in my professional career, taking on a new administrative position. As a teacher and coach by trade, I worried about maintaining connections to kids in my new administrative role and immediately jumped at the opportunity to coach the boys' soccer team in my first months in my new home. Reflection in conducting this study over the past two years has re-affirmed a central point of this study: Care rests on a foundation of trust, a status that can only be earned through lived experience and proven record.

In my first weeks at the school, I coached soccer and found myself connecting with students, establishing myself with the team through energetic, encouraging engagement with the kids. One morning, a parent stopped me as I walked across campus. She had been nervous about her son's transition into 6th grade, a leap that had gone much more smoothly over the opening weeks of school than she had ever expected. Except for

one piece. As she bluntly told me, “Everything is going well except for soccer. And my son says, it’s because of you.”

The candor momentarily left me surprised. I had just come off 10 years of successful coaching; I had even mistakenly eavesdropped on conversations hearing parents singing my praises about my work with their kids. What had I done that was so wrong? As I learned, nothing really. The student just needed time to warm up, to see that he could handle a different pace of soccer than he had ever played before. The same thing had probably happened at my previous school, but for whatever reason, I had never heard about it. My reputation had been one of care. Here, at my new school, I didn’t have a reputation at all. In some respects, I was starting over. A former colleague of mine recently told me that a mentor of hers told her it takes five years to build trust in a community. I am not sure that’s true. However, after conducting this study, I believe, in some places, for some people, it might be.

The participants of this study are considered reputationally caring educators and practiced Educative Care through their consistent, vigilant belief in their students, constantly nurturing their growth and development as an empathic mentor. Undertaking this work is not easy; the reputationally caring teachers of this study all take on heavy burdens in orienting themselves to their work in the manner they do; however, they know no other way. Being a teacher for them means trying to enact Educative Care. We need more teachers like the participants of this study. Equally important, we must care for them as they do for their students.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Describe the different kinds of assessments that are used in your classroom.
2) How do you view the role of assessment in your classroom?
3) What are you hoping your students will take away from an assessment that is given?
4) Why did you choose assessments given in your classroom?
5) What are your beliefs about the uniformity of assessment for all children?
6) What are your beliefs about standardized tests and their use in schools?
7) How would you describe your students' demeanor in class typically?
8) How do you know what students care about in an assessment that you give?
9) How does assessment influence the relationships that you have with your students?
10) Why do you believe it has such an influence?
11) What would you change about the nature of assessment if you had complete control over your classroom structure?
12) Describe the external influences on assessment within your school. How do they impact the way you assess, if they do?
13) Noddings describes a caring relationship as one that is reciprocal between two parties. The carer provides care, and cared-for must receive it. The words "reception, recognition, and response" are used to describe the relationship. Does this have any resonance or application to the way you assess your students?
14) What impact does assessment have on the overall intentions you have for your

students?

15) The structure of your class?

16) The curriculum that is covered?

17) The pedagogical approach you take?

18) You’re in charge of running a professional development seminar coaching teachers on how to be more caring. What would you tell them?

19) You’re the secretary of education and have an opportunity to reform the way that schools and students are assessed. How would you approach such an opportunity?

20) If you could design one assessment for all students to take, what would it be, if anything?

21) You can only ask one question to your students at the end of the year, what would you ask and what would you hope they answer?

22) If we could compare one of your assessments with one given by the state, what similarities and differences would we see? Why do those similarities and difference exist?

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE:	March 15, 2019
TO:	Gregory Chalfin
FROM:	University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1358870-2] Caring about more than grades and test scores: Applying Care Theory to assessment
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Revision
ACTION:	APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:	March 15, 2019
EXPIRATION DATE:	March 15, 2023

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or nicole.morse@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.