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Paul Shotsberger
Southern Wesleyan University

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Abstract

A natural outcome of a Christian ethic of care is the adoption of structures and organizations that facilitate or enhance this kind of caring. This article investigates these kinds of structures as they relate to schools of education. Discussion and recommendations focus on moving away from a hierarchical model toward a more organic structure where authority and decision-making are more distributed, communication is emphasized, and collaboration is the norm.

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A natural outcome of a Christian ethic of care is the adoption of structures and organizations that facilitate or enhance this kind of caring. This article investigates these kinds of structures as they relate to schools of education. Discussion and recommendations focus on moving away from a hierarchical model toward a more organic structure where authority and decision-making are more distributed, communication is emphasized, and collaboration is the norm.

Introduction
At my institution, the foundational dispositions taught to teacher candidates center around demonstrating a Christian ethic of care – toward self, students, colleagues, and community. This is derived from the literature on ethic of care (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010; Noddings, 1984, 2002, 2007), with the addition of Christian principles from the Greatest Commandment and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Shotsberger, 2011). Though the dispositions have been in place for a number of years, we are only now considering the implications of them for the way in which the school of education, and potentially the university and other educational entities we work with, is organized.

Hirsch (2009) suggested some focal areas wherein a commitment to biblical structures might impact an organization: power structures, organizational structures, control systems, rituals and routines, and symbols. This article will investigate these areas as they relate to schools of education and make recommendations that can potentially impact individuals in the role of cared-for, thereby enhancing their ability to become care-givers. The focus of the article will be on the adoption of organic structures that reflect a biblical understanding of the kingdom of heaven and which better enable Christian teacher educators and future teachers to be salt and light in the world of education.

Ethic of Care vs. Christian Ethic of Care
Noddings (2002) observed, "In contrast to other forms of ethics, a care theory credits the cared-for with a special contribution, one different from a reciprocal response as carer. Infants contribute significantly to the mother-child relation, students to the teacher-student relation…" (p. 2). Astin et al. (2010) make the distinction between "caring for," which has more to do with charitable involvement, and "caring about," which emphasizes relationship. This difference in emphasis – relation-centered as opposed to agent-centered – produces differences in views of ethics, morals, and values. Noddings (2002, 2007) contends that typically in the study of ethics, we are presented with moral dilemmas to be solved, or we hear about heroic people or inspirational stories as a way of motivating us to act ethically. However, with an ethic of care, discussions tend more to identify problems and help the listener understand and empathize, rather than simply solve a problem. In this way of looking at things, ethical virtues are derived from relationships, not the other way around. Ethic of care has less to do with justice and obligation, and more to do with being involved in another's life.

As identified by Bradshaw (1996), a fundamental flaw in Noddings' (1984) seminal work on ethic of care is that all relationships are considered except that of man and God. A *raison d'être* of Noddings' care theory is that, "There is no command to love nor, indeed, any God to make the commandment. Further, I shall reject the notion of universal love, finding it unattainable in any but the most abstract sense and thus a source of distraction" (Noddings, 1984, pp. 28-29). Bradshaw (1996) contended, "In rejecting moral principles as the right or wrong of care Noddings should be left without a clear basis for the nature of care itself" (p. 10), and that it is only the presence of God that can ensure a true ethic of caring.

Hirsch (2009) echoed this idea, saying that in a relationship based on caring Christian leadership, "…both leaders and followers raise each other to higher levels of motivation and morality by engaging each other on the basis of shared values, calling, and identity in Christ" (p. 160). In other words, influence runs in both directions and there is a mutually transformative effect, as the ethic of care literature suggests, but this transformation is fundamentally based on living out the Greatest Commandment. In this view, followers are persuaded to take action without being threatened or offered material incentives, but rather through an appeal to shared values and mutual calling. Though this same claim is made about an ethic of care, the mechanism for this motivation is somewhat vague. A Christian ethic of care makes this outcome a more reasonable expectation.

Organic Structures

If a Christian ethic of care can produce these kinds of desirable outcomes for individuals and organizations, the primary question then becomes: What is the optimal environment within which a Christian ethic of care can be lived out by its participants? Consider the organic nature of the imagery we are given in Scripture for the kingdom of heaven: sheep, fields, seeds, vines, and so forth. These things are the essence of how God views the life we live and the work we do for Him on earth (Hirsch, 2009). To the extent that our organizations and responsibilities reflect this vital nature, we are closer to what God has already blessed. Today, there is a mechanical feel to many leadership models, and our roles can often become very managerial and product-oriented. As a result, our work has less to do with caring and gifting, and more to do with job description and title. It is at this point that we start focusing more on program than on function, and more on sustaining hierarchy than on reproducing healthy individuals and organizations.

One of my goals as a dean is to move away from a hierarchical model toward a more organic structure where authority and decision-making are more distributed, communication is ubiquitous, and resources can get to where they are needed as quickly as possible. Joseph Myers (2007) wrote an excellent book on the transformational effect organic community can have on organizations and individuals. A crucial aspect of this transformation

is the idea that "the project holds the power…. A project is always inviting a person to step forward and steward the power" (Myers, 2007, pp. 102-103). A project-centered approach is dynamic and inherently more flexible than an individual- or committee-centered method. It can allow a school of education to move away from static organization charts and committee structures toward something more adaptable and useful for today's continuously changing environment of regulations and requirements. It also affords the opportunity to reproduce healthy educational structures, such as school and district partnerships, advisory councils and committees, and potentially to influence other divisions and schools on our campuses to go about their own tasks differently.

The transition to a naturalistic, more caring model would entail more than faculty having the knowledge necessary to make the transition. It would require a change of culture as well. Anthony Muhammad (2011) stated that for any educational transformation to take place, we must be concerned not only with the skill needed to make that transition, but also the will. For instance, in a flatter, caring organization, there is an increased need for communication, not just one way, but multiple ways. Information is not something to be kept for oneself, but something to be shared; it is not a means of control, but a means of communicating purpose and principle. This aspect of organization in particular has to change in university life, because for far too long information has been used as a way of gaining control and manipulating others. Ironically, though, being handed control over a project can be intimidating and, therefore, demotivating for some individuals. Faculty and others need to be convinced of the importance of this shift, as well as receiving professional development that can enhance their efficacy in taking on more significant responsibilities.

Thinking in terms of a Christian ethic of care, communicating with others and sharing information is actually one way of caring for colleagues. Our question for others in our organizations, whether those we are responsible for or those we are responsible to, should be "Do you have what you need to be successful?" This question goes beyond simple organizational survival to an expressed concern for growth, of both the individual and the organization. It also opens the door for a Christian

ethic of care to be expressed by those in the organization to those outside the organization, the wider community. Those who have a history of being cared for are much more likely to enter into a caring relationship with others. This is how the gospel is spread and the work of the kingdom is reproduced.

In modern terminology, we might call this a networked structure. However, this is not a star network where all the connections meet in the middle at some hub (say, a dean or president). Rather, it is an all-channel network where the connections crisscross and there are multiple hubs (Hirsch, 2009). There is no obvious direction of information flow, because information flows everywhere. There is also not a hierarchy, but rather shared authority and responsibility that is project based. This kind of structure accomplishes two goals at the same time: 1) it maximizes potential for collaboration, while 2) doing away with the need for centralized organization.

Jesus tells us in Mark 4 that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed (one of the many organic metaphors given to us by Jesus), and that when the mustard seed sprouts and grows up, it becomes a large tree capable of supporting life in its branches. We see this view of the kingdom being lived out in the story of the first church in the Book of Acts: the church was actually a network of house churches, one which expanded internationally and exponentially in just a few short years. When a need was identified, such as feeding widows, authority was granted to those (the deacons) who could most directly meet the need. When the gospel came to the Gentiles for the first time, the church in Jerusalem developed a strategy whereby the new believers would be encouraged to reproduce faith in their own cultural context. To the extent that we adopt more organic structures, I believe Christian universities and schools of education better reflect this view of the kingdom.

Finally, organic structures have the capacity to deal effectively with and even value the vitalism inherent in living out the kingdom of heaven here on earth. The title of Rick McKinley's (2006) book on the kingdom, "This Beautiful Mess," is meant to convey the already-but-not-yet aspect of a kingdom that is to come but that is, mysteriously, already among us. The author urged readers to think about the kingdom as "…real and apparent complexity, as

absolute resistance against the tidy, easy, or manageable. Think of mysterious new life growing inexplicably out of loss and decay. Think of richness in what the world casts off" (McKinley, 2006, p. 20). My school of education expects teacher candidates to demonstrate a Christian ethic of care in a very messy place: the public school classroom. To accomplish this, faculty fully vest candidates with the knowledge and authority needed for novice teachers to engage in caring from the beginning of their program. They are to care about: themselves, exhibiting a biblical approach to life as demonstrated by a passion for learning; their students, displaying an enthusiasm about teaching as well as compassionate and respectful interactions with learners; their colleagues, engaging in collaborative work practices and demonstrating compassionate and respectful interactions with colleagues; and their community, recognizing the community as an integral part of the learning process and valuing its pluralist nature. This is a tall order, very much in line with the call for believers to live out the kingdom of heaven in the "mess" of our daily lives, even as new converts. All instruction and modeling teacher candidates receive from faculty is geared toward empowering them to teach professionally and care deeply. Distribution of authority in order to bring about change, which is inherent in organic conceptions, offers a natural framework within which a Christian ethic of care can thrive and the kingdom of heaven can be lived out in the classroom.

Some Implications

J.R. Woodward is a church planter who has much to say about leadership in Christian organizations. In discussing the leadership gifts of Ephesians 4, which the author refers to as equipping gifts, Woodward (2008) contrasted the world's view of the different leadership roles with the intent of the gifts as laid out in Ephesians. The world, Woodward believes, produces a system that makes us slaves of production, pure consumers, a false community, and people of counterfeit character. On the other hand, the biblical outworking of leadership gifts should produce Spirit-formed people who are faithful to their calling, who bless their neighbors, and who form an authentic community that can act as "signposts of a new creation" (Woodward, 2008, p. 35). I believe this distinction should apply as much to Christian schools of education as it does to churches. Accountability is good, but responsibility

is better; "doing no harm" is good, but blessing is better; providing a moral compass is good, but sanctifying the environment is better. We cannot escape this higher calling, because to deny the call is to deny our faith.

Myers (2007) pointed out, "It would do us well to remember that our job is to help people with their lives rather than build infrastructures that help institutions stay alive" (p. 27). The author contrasted the environments created by a top-down hierarchy or master plan approach with a more networked structure or organic order approach (see Table 1).

Table 1
Contrasting a Master Plan Approach with an Organic Order Approach

Organizational Tool	Master Plan	Organic Order
Patterns	**Prescriptive** – there is a "best way" for people to belong, and this plan will tell them what it is	**Descriptive** – people can belong in a variety of ways, and they are free to belong in one or many ways
Participation	**Representative** – people must participate in the way the plan tells them to	**Individual** – people can participate in ways that fit them as individuals
Measurement	**Bottom Line** – There is only one way to measure effectiveness	**Story** – effectiveness can be measured in multiple ways
Growth	**Bankrupt** – resources will only be available at the beginning of the project, and we must maximize their use from the outset	**Sustainable** – resources will be available through the life of the project, and more resources will become available for the project in the future
Power	**Positional** – power is limited to a few	**Revolving** – power is shared by several
Coordination	**Cooperation** – control is built into the plan to avoid disorganization and chaos	**Collaboration** – everyone's solutions and creativity are invited
Partners	**Accountability** – the path to wholeness is a set of laws; our actions are limited to fulfilling those laws	**Edit-ability** – the path to wholeness is grace, which can be shared in a multitude of ways
Language	**Noun-centric** – our experience has limits and can only be expressed in prescribed ways	**Verb-centric** – words cannot fully express what we are experiencing
Resources	**Scarcity** – it is dangerous to presume that we will have enough to meet our needs	**Abundancy** – there will be many opportunities to find resources

(Myers, 2007, p. 167)

I contend that the attributes listed in the third column of Table 1 are precisely what we say we want to accomplish through our education programs, but it is those of the second column that we actually do. Why? Because we have co-opted a production approach to the educational endeavor, informed by the outcomes-oriented pressures of legislation, accreditation and public opinion. But at some point we have to ask ourselves, if the goal is control, how can we expect creativity to emerge? If power is to be amassed, how and why would it ever be shared?

Some of the terminology of the master plan approach is so ingrained in us that we have a hard time even recognizing the inherent flaws in the thinking. Take the term "cooperation," which is a method of coordination in the master plan conception of organization. Isn't cooperation a good thing? Isn't it the same thing as collaboration? Not according to Myers (2007), who contended that we *cooperate* with someone on *their* plan, but that we *collaborate* together to implement a *shared* vision. The author said, "…the spirit of cooperation is a rigid spirit, one that stifles creativity and discovery. It is more concerned with sequence than with rhythm. It squashes the human spirit. The master plan becomes the master" (Myers, 2007, p. 116). Christian schools of education need to think deeply about the language we use and whether that language and the values it represents is reflective of the kingdom of heaven.

Of course, it is natural that schools of education would choose the path of the master plan, since our teacher preparation programs are merely reflections of the world our teacher candidates enter when they graduate. Is there any more institutionalized, scrutinized master plan than that of modern public school education? Yet, when we take time to consider the difference between the way education is organized (master plan) and the outcomes we hope will take place when we send our children to school (organic order), we understand that there is a fundamental disconnect. Often, however, we fail to take the actions needed to move toward a more organic organization. We default to cooperation out of the pragmatic belief that this is how things get done most efficiently. There is no opportunity for true collaboration, we think, because we have neither the time nor the flexibility for such pursuits.

I believe that adopting more organic approaches as a way of demonstrating a Christian ethic of care is integral to our mission as Christian teacher educators. This is not a question of "What if?" but rather, "What if not?" What if Christian schools of education do not decide to do the things included in the third column of Table 1? Aren't we supposed to be salt and light? Aren't we supposed to be different? Shouldn't we have a different view of resources from that of other schools of education and universities (abundancy, as opposed to scarcity)? Shouldn't our imprint on the teachers we mold have a different kind of pattern than that of other schools of education (descriptive, rather than prescriptive)? Shouldn't our teacher candidates experience power in a different way than other candidates (revolving, instead of strictly positional)?

The natural response to such a call for action is to say that it is impossible, or at the very least impractical. Consider, though, that when Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God, He did so within the context of the Roman Empire's rule over Israel and that Jesus was likely within sight of Roman soldiers when He did so. "So the last will be first, and the first will be last," Jesus said. One can imagine the response. "Really? That seems kind of impractical, Jesus. You must mean 'might makes right,' because that's what we see all around us." The people were looking forward to a time in the future when the kingdom of Israel would be restored, but Jesus told them that "the kingdom of God is in your midst." That fundamental tension has not changed in over 2,000 years. Either the kingdom of God and kingdom values make a difference right now, in the culture we live in with all of its rules and regulations, or it does not. And if it does not, as the Apostle Paul said, "We are of all people most to be pitied."

Where to begin? We need to start with the aspects of organization and culture that we are responsible for, and then work our way outward. A reorganization of a school of education into a flatter, more organic order can influence the working culture of an entire university. Work on Specialized Professional Association (SPA) assessments and reports coordinated by a school of

education, if project-based rather than individual-based (especially where allied faculty are involved in the project) can inspire more collaborative approaches to accomplishing other university-wide tasks. Our school of education conducts an annual Data Day, when data collected from the previous year's assessments is poured over by faculty in order to discern progress being made and changes that are needed. Arts and sciences faculty are invited to this gathering and we are told that this kind of collaboration is an inspiration for them, one that can influence the workings of their divisions and committees. Likewise, shared responsibility and authority between a school of education and a school district in the context of a grant can suggest more collaborative approaches for that district in working with schools, principals, and teachers. Most fundamentally, a Christian ethic of care which is lived out rather than simply talked about provides an immersion experience for our teacher candidates during their time at the university, which our graduates and their employers tell us influences their professional life in deep and enduring ways.

Astin et al. (2010) conducted a study of five spiritual qualities developed by students during their college years. Ethic of caring was one of those qualities, which they defined as a sense of caring and compassion for others. The study identified three factors that accelerated the development of this ethic of caring: study abroad, interdisciplinary courses, and engaging in community service as part of students' coursework. All of these emphases include some aspect of relationship, a vital consideration in ethic of care, as well as the commonalities of immersion and active involvement. The problem in teacher preparation programs is that there tend to be so many course and other requirements that need to be met that there is little flexibility in the curriculum for the inclusion of such activities. Further, if faculty are not committed to a more organic structure with its need for shared authority and communication, it is unlikely cooperative programs such as these will emerge. As Astin et al. (2010) noted,

> [A] potentially powerful influence on students' sense of caring and connectedness is the faculty, especially faculty who encourage and involve students in conversations about matters of meaning and purpose in life; who value diversity; and

who employ various forms of student-centered pedagogy. (p. 82)

This is a major challenge for Christian schools of education, yet one that cannot be ignored.

At my school of education, we include community service as an integral component of the introductory education course taken by every candidate, as well as the adapted physical education course for physical education and special education majors. A more difficult test for us is teacher candidate involvement in the university honors program. It is interdisciplinary and therefore highly desirable from the perspective of developing a Christian ethic of care, but so far the program has been attainable only for the most gifted and ambitious of our students who are willing to take on additional coursework and a major research project. However, I am convinced that if honors components are properly integrated into the course and fieldwork requirements of the teacher preparation programs, in a more descriptive (rather than prescriptive) and individualized way, involvement will become more widespread. For instance, a teacher candidate of ours who is interested in researching effective methods for teaching English to foreign students is being intentionally placed in school districts that have a diversity of nationalities in their student populations. This has made being an honors student more realistic for the teacher candidate.

Spoken in these terms, allowing a Christian ethic of care to inform the organization and culture of a school of education has less to do with starting over from scratch than it does with intentionally thinking through implications of a caring model and consciously implementing them. It may not always work, but it will always be worth the effort. As Smith (2004) stated cogently and organically, "Recognizing that we cannot guarantee the outcome, we can still strive to create the conditions under which seeds will grow into healthy and bountiful plants" (p. 91).

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