Exploring Perceptions of Care in Christian Teacher Education Communities: Toward a Faith-Informed Framework of Care

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Abstract

During a recent sabbatical (spring 2013), the author investigated perceptions of care in a variety of teacher education programs at Christian colleges and universities across the United States and Canada. My purpose for engaging in this study was to ascertain whether there might be elements of care unique to teacher education programs at Christian institutions that reach beyond prevailing conceptions of care found in the feminist philosophical literature. In this article, I discuss prevalent views of care across sacred and secular lines, detail the research methodology employed in the current study, elaborate upon emergent themes and trends, propose a model of relational care upon which Christian teacher education programs might shape their communities, and identify care-related topics warranting further exploration.

With an ever-increasing sense of urgency, the educational landscape in the West has been dominated by a seemingly insatiable quest to attain academic supremacy on an international scale. While academic excellence is unarguably an exceedingly important goal, the unintended consequence of pursuing intellectual achievement at any cost has been an unbalanced shift in which the curriculum has become the focal point and the needs of the learner have taken a back seat (Freytag, 2008; Kohn, 1999). Framing education as a commodity rather than a process by which human beings can enlarge and expand their knowledge of the world and enrich their responsive interactions with others has significantly dehumanized the teaching and learning relationship (Spears & Loomis, 2009). Success has been reduced to quantifiable results on a handful of high-stakes assessments, and the centrality of caring relationships between and among teachers and learners in both the education of children and the preparation of responsive, effective teachers has gotten lost in the fray (Rabin, 2013). While a few stalwart educational theorists and advocates have been unwavering in their mission to keep care at the center of a responsive, high-quality educational experience for all students (e.g. Anderson, 2012; Goldstein, 1997, 2002; Noddings, 1992, 2005, 2012a, 2012b; Palmer, 1993; 2007; Rosebrough & Leverett, 2011), their voices are often overpowered by those who would elevate success over the development of whole persons through caring, responsive educational relationships. In an era that is necessarily characterized by high standards and accountability, how might teacher educators effectively prepare future instructors to care responsively for both their students and the curriculum?

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With an ever-increasing sense of urgency, the educational landscape in the West has been dominated by a seemingly insatiable quest to attain academic supremacy on an international scale. While academic excellence is unarguably an exceedingly important goal, the unintended consequence of pursuing intellectual achievement at any cost has been an unbalanced shift in which the curriculum has become the focal point and the needs of the learner have taken a back seat (Freytag, 2008; Kohn, 1999). Framing education as a commodity rather than a process by which human beings can enlarge and expand their knowledge of the world and enrich their responsive interactions with others has significantly dehumanized the teaching and learning relationship (Spears & Loomis, 2009). Success has been reduced to quantifiable results on a handful of high-stakes assessments, and the centrality of caring relationships between and among teachers and learners in both the education of children and the preparation of responsive, effective teachers has gotten lost in the fray (Rabin, 2013). While a few stalwart educational theorists and advocates have been unwavering in their mission to keep care at the center of a responsive, high-quality educational experience for all students (e.g. Anderson, 2012; Goldstein, 1997, 2002; Noddings, 1992, 2005, 2012a, 2012b; Palmer, 1993; 2007; Rosebrough & Leverett, 2011), their voices are often overpowered by those who would elevate success over the development of whole persons through caring, responsive educational relationships. In an era that is necessarily characterized by high standards and accountability, how might teacher educators effectively prepare future instructors to care responsively for both their students and the curriculum?

Impetus for the Current Study

For more than a decade, I have been intrigued by the role that care plays in the preparation of teachers, particularly for those enrolled in teacher education programs at Christian colleges and universities. Having twice walked through the accreditation process at my institution, I was fully aware of the mandate to prepare teachers who are moral and ethical in their dealings with students, but I was convinced that there must be something unique or distinct about the way care is understood and enacted in Christian teacher preparation programs. I found it easy to describe and quantify the ways in which we prepare our graduates to be competent scholars and reflective teachers, but how might we better articulate our commitment to developing caring teachers? Additionally, how might care that is rooted in Christian faith inform one's scholarship and pedagogy? These are the persistent, underlying questions that initially spurred my investigation into the nature and role of care in teacher education programs at Christian colleges and universities.

Theoretical Conceptualizations of Care
Postmodern Feminist Perspectives

While the preponderance of discourse on care theory is grounded in postmodern feminist thought (seen most notably in the work of Nel Noddings, 1984, 1992), Milton Mayeroff is recognized as an early contributor to the dialogue on care. Speaking from an instinctive and theoretical stance, Mayeroff (1971) asserted that "to care for another person…is to help him grow and actualize himself" (p. 1), suggesting that care has a desired end. He further proposed eight ingredients essential to care, which include: knowing, patience, honesty, trust, humility, courage, hope, and alternating rhythms (i.e. reflecting on past experiences to inform future actions). While Mayeroff's feminist-leaning components are frequently present in caring interactions, Noddings (1984) criticized his essentialist approach and suggested, alternatively, that care is more appropriately characterized by relationships that occur amidst a "constellation of conditions" (p. 13). That is, one cannot presume to apply a prescribed ingredient to any situation in which care might be required; rather an appropriate caring response is both particular and contextualized. Or, as Wilde (2013) explains, "Acting with care depends on the situation and how it is understood…We cannot decide how to be caring before entering the situation, because caring depends on the situation itself" (pp. 36-37).

In her seminal treatise, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Noddings (1984) asserted that care is first and foremost about the dynamic relationship between the "one-caring" and the "cared-for". This relational approach to care is characterized by engrossment (attentiveness) and motivational displacement, or a commitment by the one-caring to keenly observe and appropriately respond to the needs of the cared-for while setting her own needs or concerns aside. While the contributions of the one-caring and the cared-for will often be asymmetrical, as seen in parent-child or teacher-student relationships, the cared-for is also an active contributor in the caring relation and must receive/respond to the care that has been extended by the one-caring in order for the caring cycle to be complete (see also Noddings 2005, 2012a). Thus, contemporary feminist theory affirms the caring relationship as being of greater importance than any caring act that might be extended.

While the responsive relationship between the one-caring and the cared-for is indispensable if a caring exchange is to occur, Noddings acknowledges that there are multiple facets to care that also warrant thoughtful consideration, including the importance of caring for ideas (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Drawing from Noddings' work, Sugashita (2000) posits that caring teachers should embody intellectual care, natural care, and ethical care. When describing intellectual care, Noddings (1992) notes that teachers should encourage their students to explore, probe, and even challenge ideas; she decries the mere amassing of a prescribed body of knowledge and asserts that caring teachers will cultivate learning environments that promote "reflective criticism, revision, creation and renewal" (p.165). Noddings (1984) defines natural care as the "relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination" (pp. 4-5), and describes ethical care as a teacher's professional responsibility to extend respect, equality and acceptance to every student whether natural care is present or not. Sugashita (2000) interpreted Noddings' natural care as "the 'I want' of caring, whereas ethical caring was the moral sentiment that whispered 'I ought' to care" (p. 60). For Noddings, care emanates from one's own goodness and is not borne of any kind of religious mandate or compulsion:

> [Care] is not a form of agapism. There is no command to love nor, indeed, any God to make the commandment…While much of what will be developed in the ethic of caring may be found, also, in Christian ethics, there will be major and irreconcilable differences. Human love, human caring will be quite enough on which to found an ethic. (1984, pp. 28-29)

More recently, Noddings (2012b) has intimated that natural care which flows out of human love or inclination is superior to ethical care that requires mustering and which is often undergirded by perceived moral obligations so often associated with one's religious beliefs or convictions.

Lisa Goldstein (1997, 2002) also asserts that care in education must be characterized by love. At times, "teacherly love" (1997, p. 121) is extended because of ethical obligation, but – at its best – it flows from the teacher's natural care for her students, just a mother's care (most often) flows naturally to her child. Drawing from Sternberg's theory, Goldstein (1997, 2002) maintains that intimacy, commitment,

and passion – properly defined and construed in an educational context – are critical elements to appropriate, loving relationships in the classroom. Like Noddings, Goldstein holds that this altruistic love for students emanates from one's human goodness and not from any spiritual source.

Similarly, Sandra Wilde (2013) proposes that contemplative discipline emerging from non-dual Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism can lead to caring relationships characterized by wholeness and compassion. By inference, she suggests that Christian faith, which has so often been construed as paternalistic, hierarchical, and characterized by legalism, does not readily allow for a holistic, nurturing, restorative approach to care. There is clearly a need for Christian scholars to take a more active role in the dialogue on care in order that misconceptions or partial understandings surrounding Christian views of care might be elucidated (Crouch, 2008).

Christian Perspectives
Notwithstanding a few notable exceptions (e.g. Palmer 1993, 2007), there is a paucity of scholarship in the Christian literature that explicitly addresses the topic of care as it might apply in educational contexts. However, numerous Christian scholars and theologians have written on the subjects of love and care (e.g. Lewis, 1960; Nouwen, 1974, 1996; Wolterstorff, 2011), and their perspectives have much to contribute to a faith-informed view of care in the classroom. In examining the Christian literature, one can observe that Biblically-enlightened perspectives on care are not necessarily antithetical to what has been posited by secular theorists. While many of the practical expressions of care demonstrated by the secularist and the Christian may look quite similar, the ontological and epistemological bases of those expressions will differ significantly.

In his comprehensive text detailing the origins of agapism, Outka (1972) described agapé-love (also known as neighbor-love or Christian-love) as, "an active concern for the neighbor's well-being which is somehow independent of particular actions of the other" (p. 260). Agapism, grounded in selfless Christ-like love, denounces any form of utilitarianism; it is focused first and foremost on the needs of the other regardless of any benefit that the carer might receive, as illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). While

Noddings (1984) interprets the Biblical mandate to love one's neighbor as a moral imperative or obligation in which care becomes compulsory rather than natural, Wolterstorff (2011) explains that agapic love, or benevolence, is spontaneous and not dictated by what justice might demand:

> To say that someone acted benevolently toward someone is to imply that he did not act as he did because justice required it. And all the modern day agapists agree that if one loves someone agapically, one does not treat him as one does because justice requires it, and conversely, if one treats someone as one does because justice requires it, one is not loving him agapically. Loving someone agapically and treating him as one does because justice requires it are conceptually incompatible. Agapic love casts out all thought of justice and injustice. Agapic love is blind and deaf to justice and injustice. Justice and injustice do not enter into its purview. Agapic love is gratuitous generosity. (p. 42)

When agapic love is demonstrated in the teacher-student relationship, the teacher gives selflessly on behalf of the student, and quite often the teacher's intrinsic need to serve or equip is also met through the caring exchange, although any potential advantage the teacher might realize is never the motivating factor for extending care to the student (Astley, 2004). Noddings (1984, 2012b) describes this as the completion of the caring cycle, whereas Lewis (1960) would assert that the teacher's need to give on behalf of others ("need love") is met when she extends "gift love" toward her student, thus the carer (in this instance the teacher) may receive unanticipated benefit in the caring exchange, but there is no utilitarian motive behind the expression of care.

Yet, this giving on the part of the teacher ought not to be a mere transmission of knowledge. Palmer (1993, 2007) describes the relationship between the teacher and the student in their mutual quest for truth as being necessarily intertwined. He asserts that responsive teachers are effective "mediator[s] between the knower and the known" (1993, p. 29). Palmer goes on to explain:

> To know in truth is to allow one's self to be known as well, to be vulnerable to the

challenges and changes any true relationship brings. To know in truth is to enter into the life of that which we know and to allow it to enter into ours… [T]ruth involves entering a relationship with someone or something genuinely other than us, but with whom we are intimately bound… If we devote ourselves to truth, the facts will not necessarily change. What will change is our relation to the facts…Truth requires the knower to become interdependent with the known. (1993, pp. 31-32)

Thus, Palmer suggests that thoughtful care for ideas is necessarily co-mingled with caring relationships with others as we seek to know and understand ourselves, each other and the world around us through what he describes as "prayerful relatedness" to one another (1993, p. 11). He purports that this kind of learning and knowing is best accomplished in environments characterized by openness, boundaries, and hospitality. For students to be free to truly learn, they must know that it is safe to probe and explore new, unfamiliar or difficult topics, but with appropriate limits in place so as to avoid unproductive rambling or the avoidance of challenging mental work. For such learning to occur, the affective environment must be welcoming to each member of the learning community wherever they might happen to be on their journey.

In the learning community that Palmer (1993) describes, the teacher resists the urge to control, fix, or prescribe. By allowing students safe space to wrestle with ideas in their quest for truth, he allows them to own their journey and their learning. Nouwen (1974) similarly noted that rescuing others from difficult or uncomfortable circumstances is inherently uncaring:

> The word care finds its roots in the Gothic 'kara', which means lament. The basic meaning of care is: to grieve, to experience sorrow, to cry out with… [Instead,] we tend to look at caring as an attitude of the strong toward the weak, of the powerful toward the powerless, of the have's toward the have-nots. And, in fact, we feel quite uncomfortable with an invitation to enter into someone's pain before doing something about it…To care means first to be present to each other…our tendency is to run away

from the painful realities or to try to change them as soon as possible. But cure without care makes us preoccupied with quick changes, impatient and unwilling to share each other's burden. And so cure can often become offending instead of liberating. (p. 33)

By presumptuously rescuing someone from a challenging circumstance, we rob them of the opportunity to learn, heal, and grow (Givens, 2007; Nouwen, 1996).

While both secular and Christian theorists assert that effective care is rooted in responsive relationships, the philosophical foundations undergirding these assertions are vastly different. For the secularist, natural human care is sufficient; no other source or motivation is needed. For the Christian, "to know and be known" (Palmer, 1993; I Corinthians 13:12) in community with one another is central to the care of people, ideas and creation:

> To search for truth is to reach out with our whole persons for relationships which can re-form us and the world in the original image of love. To know the truth is to enter with our whole persons into relations of mutuality with the entire creation – relations in which we not only know, but allow ourselves to be known. (Palmer, 1993, p. 54)

Research Questions
To better understand how care is understood and conceptualized in the Christian academy, I investigated perceptions of care in a variety of teacher education programs at Christian colleges and universities across the United States and Canada. To frame the current investigation of care in Christian teacher education programs, I began with the following overarching research questions:

1) How do administrators, faculty, and students in Christian institutions define and demonstrate care within their own teacher education programs?

2) How do faculty at Christian institutions prepare their teacher candidates to demonstrate care in PK-12 classrooms?

3) How do teacher candidates at Christian institutions perceive that their teacher education programs are explicitly preparing them to demonstrate care in PK-12 classrooms?

Research Design
Preparing for the Study

For this research project, I elected to employ both interviews and focus groups for the purpose of identifying participants' self-reported perceptions of care in their teacher education programs (Hopkins, 2007; Morgan, 1997; Seidman, 2006). While I initially revisited key authors who have addressed the role of care in teacher education (e.g. Noddings, 1992; Palmer, 1993, 2007), I also very deliberately waited to delve more deeply into the literature until after the data collection phase of the study, not wanting my own reading to unintentionally influence the direction of the focus group conversations (Morgan, 1997).

Participants

After securing appropriate human subjects permissions, I contacted administrators at several institutions associated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) and/or the International Christian Community for Teacher Education (ICCTE) to see which programs might be interested in participating in the study. Due to time and scheduling restraints, I utilized a convenience sample; however, I sought to include Christian colleges and universities that represented diverse geographies, sizes, and demographics.

Administrators, faculty, and students at six Christian institutions across the United States and Canada consented to participate in the study. To elicit respondents' perceptions with regard to the three overarching research questions, I conducted 30-minute individual interviews with the head of the teacher education program at each institution (i.e. the Dean of Education or the Chair of the Education Department). By conducting individual interviews with program administrators, I was able to gain a general awareness of the culture of the teacher education program, as well as an initial sense of the administrator's perception of care within her program (n.b. in all six instances, program administrators were women).

I then conducted two separate focus group sessions at each participating institution. In one focus group session, teacher education faculty members shared their perceptions of care within their teacher education program, and in a separate focus group session, students (teacher candidates) shared their views of care within their program. Ninety minutes were allotted for each focus group session;

however, most sessions averaged about 75 minutes in length. All interviews and focus groups were audio tape recorded with the consent of each participant.

Structure

Each interview and focus group was semi-structured. After presenting the three overarching research questions to each participant, I posed a series of scaffolding questions (see Appendix 1: Scaffolded Interview and Focus Group Questions) that were designed to prompt discussion on the topic of care. Participants were also invited to share their own stories, experiences and perspectives.

As suggested by Morgan (1997), I invited participants to begin each session by sharing personal stories or experiences. In the present study, I welcomed focus group members to share an example of how they felt cared for as a member of their particular teacher education community. Nearly every faculty and student participant volunteered positive examples of care and evidences of affirmation that she or he felt as a member of the teacher education community; however, at two of the six institutions I visited, one or more faculty members kindly pointed out that this question presumes that members of a given community do, in fact, feel cared for (I noted this as a limitation of the research design and will reframe this type of prompt in future stages of my research).

Data Analysis

To mine the wealth of information generated from the study, I approached data analysis in three phases: transcription, a preliminary exploration of institution-specific themes, and a more comprehensive analysis of themes emerging from the entire body of data in which I utilized NVivo9 software, generated analytic memos, and explored developing themes (Saldaña, 2009; Seidman, 2006) while employing a flexibly-implemented grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Grounded theory).

Transcription

To reflect deeply on the information generated from this study, I elected to transcribe all the audio recordings from each of the interviews and focus groups myself. This process yielded over 200 single-spaced pages of data. By engaging in the transcription process myself, I was able to re-live each interaction and visualize each contributor as I

typed. At this early phase of data analysis, I jotted a few initial memos to capture "a-ha" moments and to keep my potential biases in check (Seidman, 2006).

Identification of Institution-specific Themes

After replaying audio tapes and rereading transcripts multiple times, I generated institution-specific summary reports for each of the six colleges and universities that participated in the study. As I compiled these reports, I identified institution-specific themes that were consistent among the administrator, faculty, and students in each program by closely examining the tapes and transcripts for common words and ideas expressed by participants at a single institution (Seidman, 2006). Additionally, I also noted any interesting comments that might have emerged from any one of the three groups within a given program.

Comprehensive Analysis of Themes

Recognizing that the institution-specific analysis of the data was only a preliminary step in the process, I revisited the entire data set using NVivo9 software to further explore potential themes. Over a period of two months, I reviewed all of the audio tapes and transcripts while coding participants' responses into nodes, which represented points where respondents expressed a common thought or idea. As I coded the nodes, I kept analytic memos (Saldaña, 2009; Seidman, 2006) in which I captured my own reflections, thoughts on possible converging nodes, and other observations that could assist in the development of a grounded theory of care while also monitoring my own potential biases (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Seidman, 2006).

Limitations

In pursuing this inquiry into perceptions of care within teacher education programs at Christian colleges and universities, I admittedly "cast a wide net". While this initial, open-ended investigation yielded helpful insights about care, both the researcher and the reader should exercise appropriate caution when interpreting the results of the study. First, participants in this initial phase of the study represented only Christian institutions. While some attributes of care that emerged from this study could certainly be associated with the Christian culture of each program, particular elements of care might just as easily be present at small secular institutions (i.e. some features of care could be attributed to program size rather than Christian culture). This warrants further

investigation at comparably-sized secular institutions. Second, as noted above, although I worked diligently to keep personal biases in check as I commenced this research, certain assumptions unintentionally crept into my research design. For example, I approached each campus visit with the assumption that all members of a given community did, in fact, feel cared for emotionally. When such oversights were kindly brought to my attention, I made note of these so that I might adjust my questions accordingly in future stages of my research. Despite the limitations inherent with a study of this type, the themes that emerged from the present investigation have the potential to inform and enhance the ways in which care is fostered and enacted in teacher education programs in Christian colleges and universities, as well as the broader academy.

Findings

As early as the transcription phase, I made noteworthy observations about what the data might be revealing. For example, while I remained consistent in posing the same set of research questions to all participants across each of the interview and focus group sessions, during the transcription process I observed that the emphasis of each conversation centered primarily around the climate or culture of care within each teacher education program, and that the equipping of teacher candidates to care in PK-12 settings was largely a by-product of the care that candidates, themselves, received within their teacher education programs. While specific examples of how care was enacted and received by members of each teacher education community were present, the ethos of care at each institution was paramount throughout the participants' discussion.

Institution-specific Findings

At each of the six Christian colleges and universities that I visited, there was an un-coerced and unmistakable triangulation among administrator, faculty, and student responses with regard to the role of care within the institution's teacher education program. While some of the initial themes relative to care were present across multiple institutions, in every instance hallmarks of care within each institution were consistent among the constituents interviewed.

At the institution-level phase of the data analysis process I had not yet employed the NVivo9

software; nevertheless, I was careful to observe each of the checks and balances suggested by Seidman (2006) as I conducted my own inquiry into the data. Table 1 represents the initial, institution-specific themes that emerged for each of the programs that participated in the study. Since subsequent stages of the data analysis process yielded more robust themes, discussion is reserved for themes that emerged from later iterations of data analysis.

Table 1

Initial institution-specific themes of care

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F
Themes	Christian worldview Intentionality/ investment "Above and beyond" Open door Understanding, grace, mercy Prayer; personal connections	Shared ownership of Conceptual Framework: Sensitivity, Reflection, Faith Relationships Availability	Advisor-student relationships Availability; flexibility Personalized, individualized attention/care Food Service/ volunteerism	Ethical mandate to care Availability Accountability and feedback characterized by grace and respect	Relationships Knowing and responding to learner needs Commitment to social justice Selflessness Food	Student-centered approach to care Personalization Social justice

Robust Themes Emerging from a Comprehensive Analysis of the Data

During the third stage of analysis, I examined the data on a much deeper level utilizing NVivo9 software in order that I might discern with greater robustness and trustworthiness the emergent themes that a closer inspection might reveal. As I reviewed and coded the entire data set, the nodes that emerged confirmed, illuminated, and expanded the initial institution-specific themes that I identified in earlier stages of analysis. This process yielded a total of 120 nodes. While many nodes proved to be outliers, 42 of the nodes contained at least 20 references, 22 nodes contained at least 30 references, and 12 nodes contained at least 40 references. While multiple nodes will warrant continued analysis and further investigation, the 12 nodes that contained at least 40 references from 11 or more sources (see Table 2) converged into related themes that can begin to inform a flexible, adaptable framework around which models of Christian care might be developed.

Table 2

Nodes with ≥ 40 references

Node	References	Sources
Modeling	77	17
Relational	73	14
Nourishment – physical	70	17
Faith/Christian worldview	65	16
Nourishment – personal	59	16
Being known	52	15
Individual attention	47	15
High expectations/standards	46	15
Prayer	46	15
Accommodating	46	12
Availability	46	12
Time	40	11

(Note: For all nods listed in Table 2, sources included administrator, faculty, and student responses.)

Envisioning care in Christian teacher education communities. Findings emerging from the data in the current study indicate that care in Christian teacher education communities is: 1) relational, 2) dedicated to pedagogical excellence, and 3) rooted in an enduring commitment to Christian faith and prayer. To visualize the interrelationship among these themes, I developed a model that represents my own conceptualization of how these themes interact to support and perpetuate thriving communities of care in Christian teacher education programs (see Appendix 2: Relational Care in Christian Teacher Education Communities). It is my hope that this visual representation will complement the discussion that follows in helpful and constructive ways.

Relational care. The most pervasive theme to emerge from this study was relational care. Respondents from all six institutions described ways in which care is demonstrated through highly-intentional, personal interactions. The node labeled "relational" – defined in this study as "connecting on a personal level" – emerged as parent node around which numerous other nodes converged including: nourishment-physical, nourishment-personal, time, availability, individual attention, and being known. Personal connections were central for participants in this study. One administrator noted:

> You have to establish relationships before you can have a climate of trust between student and teacher, teacher and colleague, colleague and principal. You have to be able to be involved and let yourself be known. It's sort of Parker Palmer-ish, but learning to dance with your students is a really good metaphor that way because you have to get physically involved and not just mentally aware.

Students (teacher candidates) felt especially cared for by faculty in their teacher education programs because they were intentional about building relationships with them, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> I think I feel cared for most through my advisor because I feel like she has personal investment in me, not just as a student, but as a person. She asked me about my volunteer activities and how they're going, and she always gives me advice if I ask for

it, and I can talk to her about personal things and school-related things, which is nice.

Other students commented on how the relationships they experienced with faculty members influenced their commitment to build caring relationships with the PK-12 students in their field placements, as illustrated by these remarks from two teacher candidates:

> I want to be in their [PK-12 students'] lives and pursue that relationship because, I mean – that's with my faith – but also because it was modeled for me and I know how much that means to me, and to kind of have that with my students…like, they're just starting to respect me more and actually want to come to my classroom, and want to talk to me, and want to do well because we're building that relationship.

> I tend to model my teacher-student relationships after the relationships that I have been able to develop with my professors, and I think that the Christian faith comes into that in the sense that I have always felt respected and dignified as a human, which I think is a very large aspect of care.

Nourishment – physical. Another relational manifestation of care in Christian teacher education communities is providing for physical needs. Most instances of physical nourishment were focused around the sharing of food. One administrator quipped: "We feed our students regularly…I mean, the Bible does say 'Feed and tend my sheep', so I take that literally." A student from the same institution remarked that the care she felt when her professors fed her carried over into her own practice:

> It's funny because the first thing I mentioned tonight was food and how they [faculty] bring us food and how that shows that they care, and I mean the other day it was my [field placement] teacher's birthday and I brought cupcakes to the class and those kids thought they had died and gone to heaven! …and I thought, 'Why is this that big of a deal?', but what do I do when she [my professor] does that [feeds me]? I mean – I'm shocked. I'm floored that someone would care that much to bring me food.

…So, I think it's interesting, because we do what we see as an example – even subconsciously.

Examples of physical nourishment were not limited to food. Frequently, faculty members would "go the extra mile" to provide for the physical or material needs of their students, as one administrator observed: "One of our faculty members took one of the students here to have her teeth pulled because she did not have the money, she was away from home, and to me that's the epitome [of care]."

Nourishment – personal. In addition to providing for physical needs, relational care was shown across each of the institutions in this study in a variety of personal ways. One faculty member referred to this as "nurturing":

> The term "nurture" comes to mind, too, when we think about care. Because, I mean – as I mentioned earlier – they do all come to us at different levels, and some college students just need a little more nurturing than others. And I think that nurturing is a part of it, and I think we invest in them knowing that at some point in time they're going to remember that and reciprocate that in their classroom.

One vulnerable student from another institution shared the deep, grace-filled personal nourishment she felt from faculty during a particularly difficult season in her journey. Her insights also reflect the rich ways that Christian-faith undergirded the personal nourishment that she received:

> I, specifically this year, had what I would describe as one of the most awful years of my life, it was really challenging in so many ways that I cannot describe. So, those "hallmarks of care", I wrote "grace". I feel like I was given grace so many times for things I needed to hand in and just patience with the level of sincerity that I could even give, or authenticity or devotedness. I felt like I was given grace this year and certainly that's a Christian value and practice that we all honor, and the second one was "co-suffering". I felt like people suffered with me this year, and I've really been drawn to crucifixes this year because I feel like it demonstrates our co-suffering with Christ and that there's an internal sense of Him

suffering with us. And the last thing I think that – a hallmark of care – was that our faculty kind of advocate for peace on our behalf. This year could be incredibly crazy, and like I said, it was even crazier for myself, but when I couldn't have peace other people were carrying that fruit of the spirit for me, and that demonstrated the kind of community that [my peer] was talking about where we journeyed together and we kind of – I felt like I was carried by a lot of people – like a little backpack. And there's so much of that that you can't put words to, even, I think that's what's strange about care is that we can use so much language for it, but it's kind of like stillness and silence and solitude – it's all so internal and mysterious, that those hallmarks of care end up leaving us just with a resounding feeling of love and grace and co-suffering – all the words that I've used.

Time, availability and individual attention. Participants in this study valued the teacher-student relationship by placing high priority on time, availability and individual attention. The following student remarks were representative of comments shared by students across each of the six institutions:

> Our faculty and staff are always available; always willing to help no matter what time it is… They always want to be available to you, and, I mean, I feel loved. Just knowing that they want that relationship, so I feel like that's what I think of when I think of our faculty – it just goes hand in hand with care, I think.

> Not only are they [faculty] accessible, but they're always available. And so I think that piece is really important. I also think they demonstrate it [care] through that relationship. People can be available all the time, but then there's a level of engagement that's required to build on that availability or accessibility.

One faculty member offered this comment on the importance of being available to students:

> My door is usually always open and the students will always come by and say, "Are you busy?" and I say, "I'm always busy, but

my job is you. If you see any faculty members out there, you tell them they can wait, but you can always come in," and so – even as a chair of a department – that's my priority. I don't mind when my students come in. They're never an interruption. So, I try to let them know that. I'm always busy – it's just the nature of the job – but just even voicing that so there's never any doubt that they can come by.

While several students indicated that having "24/7" access to their professors was something they really appreciated (and some faculty members invited students to contact them at any time), many faculty expressed concern that millennial generation students have come to expect instant access and faculty are not necessarily doing the most caring thing by being immediately available. Thus, responsible availability should be accompanied by healthy boundaries, as several participants noted.

Responsive accommodations. Respondents communicated a wide range of views with respect to accommodations; however, the provision of responsive accommodations emanated from both an awareness of individual needs and a commitment to upholding excellence. One student commented:

> The faculty show grace to their students – a wise grace. When a student is struggling they seek to help this student graciously and wisely – doing all they can to help the student grow. Sometimes this means keeping a strict deadline for the student because he/she needs the push and needs to discontinue procrastinating. Sometimes this means providing leniency in the deadline for a student who struggles with anxiety and tends to overachieve and worry about due dates more than necessary.

Similarly, one faculty member noted how the provision of responsive accommodations is a means of caring in that it ensures that the teacher candidate has truly mastered the material:

> In assessment class I tell them if I only let them do an assignment one time they would all fail. I care enough that you get this right that you can re-do any of the major assignments and not be penalized, grade-wise, because I care enough that I want you

to get assessment right. It's not because I enjoy grading these things two times.

Pedagogical excellence. A second theme that emerged from the findings was pedagogical excellence. Participants from across each of the institutions indicated that care is not merely relational, but it also involves a dedication to upholding high standards. To care well, a teacher must know his/her craft well and implement it with quality. Many faculty members conveyed the importance of excellent pedagogical preparation as a manifestation of care, as illustrated in the following remarks:

> I think we demonstrate care by trying to see that they are prepared to be successful in the field. Because, if they leave us and they go into a school situation and they cannot do – they cannot perform – at the level that's expected of them in the field, then we haven't really cared for them. We may have ministered to their immediate needs, but we really haven't prepared them to be successful. It's so important, and I think by us modeling that we, in turn, help them understand how important it is for them to help their students to learn and grow. It's not just going and doing what I think should be done, but it's meeting the learning needs of those children so that they can progress and be successful.

> I don't know if any of the students would say this, but I say that I also care because my classes are hard. I assign a lot of hard course work; I'm rigorous, you know, in the grading and what is good work, and they complain often, but I see them rise to the challenge all of the time. And I'm very honest; Yeah, it's a lot you have to do. It's not an easy job. I don't know whoever told you that education was easy. It's a lot of work, and I care enough about you to [challenge you]. …I don't know if they always see it, but…a faculty member that cares is one who assigns hard work that requires them to do a lot of work and preparation… I think it's hard to say that you care when your assignments don't take much thought from your students and they don't take much time for you to prepare.

Students (teacher candidates) observed their faculty demonstrating care by upholding high standards of pedagogical excellence; this – in turn – equipped them to demonstrate care for their PK-12 students as they enacted responsive pedagogy in their field placements.

> They [faculty] keep pushing you to care about what you really think. They want you to really reflect and know what you really believe, so they make us do our philosophy of education over and over again so we know what we know, and we know what we believe in – so we can care.

> They [faculty] are also looking out for the student – like our [PK-12] students. Because they're trying to make us better in order to reach our students, and that goes with the criticism, not bad criticism, but you have to realize that it's gonna make you better and they [faculty] want that because they want these [PK-12] students to have this bright future – and we're able to give them that.

Faith foundation. Given the context of the current study, the role of Christian faith and prayer in caring teacher education communities was a pivotal theme. Each of the participating institutions, though they represented varied denominational perspectives within the Protestant tradition, maintained that the ethos of their program was dramatically influenced by a Christian worldview, or Christian faith-based perspective. While it is possible that the final follow-up question (How does Christian faith inform care?) may have been leading, the impact of Christian faith was evident in participants' responses throughout the interviews and focus group sessions, as illustrated by the range of comments below. Thus, the follow-up question posed at the end of each session afforded participants the opportunity to further qualify the ways in which Christian faith influences the enactment of care within their program.

> I think we are small enough in number to know each other personally. When one of us hurts, we all hurt. When one of us has joys that happen in life, we all rejoice in those. And I think that part of the reason for that is because of our Christian faith and wanting to – valuing, valuing people as God's creation and wanting to do all that we can to build them up, to help them when times are tough, and as I said, rejoice when times are good. So, I think that that is, you know, part of the caring part of our faculty here – and staff, too. (Faculty member)

> I think care, especially in a Christian faith-based university, is being – someone once said – being "Jesus with skin on". Being "Jesus with skin on", that's what care looks like. I think about a student that I have in my class right now… She has experienced a very traumatic semester. She has had a lot of absences. And I think, what would this look like at a university without care? It would look like: "Well, she's gonna fail because she hasn't been in class quite a bit. She's missed a lot." Now, care does not mean we lower the standards. Now, she still has to meet those high standards, but let's look for a different way within her very traumatic situation that she's been through, and pull in all the supports to help her. So care looks like being – I'll go back to "being Jesus with skin on". It being – it's meeting the need wherever the need is, within the context of your high standards. (Faculty member)

> I think love has a lot to do with the relationship with faith –understanding God's love for us and how that should impact our love for others, and seeing that modeled for us. But just kind of making sure that we are filled with the love of God – that we have love to share with others. (Student)

> We frequently point out that the commandment was to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, so being well-prepared intellectually and thinking things through clearly is a way to demonstrate your Christianity just as much as living with heart and soul. But, mind is an important part of being Christian, and being mindful of the way in which care comes across from a Christian kind of perspective. (Administrator)

> I think the hallmark [of care] is selflessness. I mean, the Christian identity is to deny oneself. So love is an expression of caring for others before ourselves. …I think that the idea is to put ourselves aside…this idea

of modeling selflessness – putting the needs of others before your own. (Faculty member)

We're deliberate and conscious of spiritual formation, and part of being spiritually formed is to receive care, but also to give care, to exhibit care. So I think that's one of the outcomes – not a learning outcome, perhaps – but an outcome of education [at this institution] – that our students are caring people. But they see that modeled in us – the way we care for them. But they have a responsibility [to care] once they go from here. (Faculty member)

[In a faculty discussion], the question was [posed], "What sort of teacher was Christ?" and how should we be Christ-like teachers? And several faculty shared what they thought being a Christ-like teacher was. And I think one of the themes that came out was that Christ cared for the people that He spoke to, whether it was the woman at the well, whether it was the Pharisees, whether it was the crowd. He cared for them, provided for them – food, in the instance of the miracle with the loaves and the fishes – but He cared enough for them to speak to them where they were at, and I think that's one of the objectives of being a teacher at [this institution], as well. The reason why we sometimes hound our students when they miss class, or when we might be a little tough on them is because we care for them. And I think it's true, in general, it's a Christian virtue, but it's a Christian pedagogical virtue as well. (Faculty member)

I feel like I know that our faculty prayed for us this year… I guess the consistency of that prayer suspended us throughout the year, and that was really important. (Student)

I also heard faculty speak about the need for being vulnerable in the classroom so that you are not just the "caregiver" caring for your students, but you're also the recipient of their care. And I don't know if maybe prayer in the classroom is part of that – that there's a collective, corporate recognition that we're all in need of care and that we're

asking God to bless us with His grace and His Spirit and His Truth in that class context because we all need that care. (Faculty member)

While the manifestations of Christian faith embodied at each institution reflect the particular culture of the teacher education community, the shared commitment to Christian faith and prayer was evident in each of the programs. Appropriately, the nuances of Christian care will look slightly different from program to program, but the underlying recognition that Christian faith is foundational to care in Christian teacher education programs is unmistakable.

Being known. While the idea of "being known" was highly intertwined with the broader theme of relational care, it also emerged as an outcome of responsive, relational care in Christian teacher education programs. Numerous students (teacher candidates) indicated that they felt cared for because they felt known, not merely as students, but as human beings that were uniquely important to their faculty.

> Something that's been said time and time again is how personal they [faculty] are with us. They not only want to know what's going on with us currently, but where we came from, what our backgrounds are, what our interests are…what our plans are for the future, as well.

> People that have cared for me, specifically. So, I have felt known in this program.

> I've just felt so known. They [faculty] are so attentive to me.

> [A]s I've been thinking about this subject [care] over the past few days, one thing that has come to mind consistently is a book I read by Parker Palmer called, To Know as We Are Known. And I feel known. I think that's what makes me feel cared for. I feel like [my advisor] especially knows me and wants the best for me and that transparency of communication has made me feel extremely cared for, probably to a degree that sometimes I don't even know what I need and she's able to provide care for me in a way that I wouldn't have even known that I needed.

Being known in this way empowered teacher candidates to carry the same faith-informed relational care and commitment to pedagogical excellence into their field placements, thus perpetuating a climate of care in PK-12 settings, as shown in the following example:

> What I found myself doing a lot was championing my students and speaking for them in situations where they didn't necessarily know how to speak for themselves. I had the opportunity in my student teaching to have an entire class in an adapted classroom, and so they all had specific learning needs that had been identified in some way, and following up not just with them and their parents, but the behavior people in the school, and their counselors, and other teachers and realizing that they are a person that needs care more than just in my classroom, but within the school community and obviously outside of that as well, but my ability within the school community to follow-up with other teachers to see, okay, is mine the only class where this behavior is demonstrated? Or, is mine the only class where they're not handing things in? Or things like that, so try to be the voice of the student when they don't know that they need it. I think that goes back to knowing your students, which is the beauty of being in your own class and having the time to get to know your students, right?

Discussion

The current investigation of care in Christian teacher education programs provided a wealth of information about the views, perceptions, and perspectives of administrators, faculty and students at Christian faith-based institutions. Dominant themes emerging from this study included: relational care, pedagogical excellence, and a deep commitment to Christian faith and prayer. While aspects of care related to Christian faith may be unique to programs that espouse such a worldview, relational care and pedagogical excellence were themes that aligned with key characteristics of care found in both the secular and sacred literature (e.g. Goldstein, 1997, 2002; Noddings, 1984, 1992; Palmer, 1993, 2007).

Relational care must be present for meaningful learning and growth to occur (Rosebrough &

Leverett, 2011; Trout, 2012). To a person, the students (teacher candidates) who participated in this study felt personally cared-for by their professors, and many of these pre-service teachers articulated ways in which they are already extending similar relational care to students in their field placements. Because faculty demonstrated care for their students by giving of their time, making themselves available and treating each one as a valued individual, teacher candidates felt known and affirmed, and they expressed a commitment to enact relational care in their future classrooms (Palmer, 1993, 2007).

Findings from this study also indicate that a commitment to pedagogical excellence is a critical component of educational care. In an era of increased accountability, teacher education programs are compelled to demonstrate that they are preparing teachers who are not only moral, ethical and caring, but who are masterful scholars and reflective educators (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013). To be truly caring, teacher educators must uphold high standards of excellence while demonstrating wise grace as they respond to the unique needs of the developing teachers in their programs. Student respondents in this study indicated that their professors modeled pedagogical excellence and unapologetically held teacher candidates to the same high expectations.

Respondents from each of the teacher education programs that participated in this study valued and expressed a deep commitment to Christian faith and prayer. Administrators, faculty, and students all communicated a deep and abiding sense that Christian faith was at the core of the relational care that was demonstrated and encouraged in their teacher education programs. In his text, *Walking with God in the Classroom*, Van Brummelen (1998) likened teaching to a journey of "responsive discipleship" (p. 233). The responsive teacher that Van Brummelen describes guides her/his students discerningly, making note of the particular needs and interests of individual students as well as the community of learners, all the while becoming, "a wiser, more insightful, more loving travel guide and companion" (p. 234). This is precisely the kind of Christian care that emanated from administrators, faculty, and students in each of the programs that participated in this study.

Conclusion

While many of the practical out-workings of care might look similar in teacher education programs at secular academies, Christian faith was endogenous to the culture of care at each of the teacher education programs in this study. Findings from this study suggest that relational care in Christian teacher education communities is enveloped by physical and personal nourishment; characterized by time, availability, and individual attention; committed to high standards and expectations enacted through effective modeling and evidenced by responsive accommodations; and rooted in a deep commitment to Christian faith and prayer, resulting in a sense of being known and perpetuating care in PK-12 learning environments (see Appendix 2). While representations of care will be unique to individual programs, the prevalent themes that emerged from the current study have the potential to strengthen the ways in which Christian teacher education programs conceptualize, enact and perpetuate care. It is my hope that this study will also invite further dialogue among scholars in both the secular and the Christian academy that will continue to shape and inform the development of a robust and flexible theory of Christian care in teacher education.

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Appendix 1: Scaffolded Interview and Focus Group Questions

Questions for Administrators	Questions for Faculty	Questions for Students (Teacher Candidates)
1. From your point of view, how would you describe what "care" looks like in your teacher education program? 2. From your point of view, how do faculty members demonstrate (or model) care? 1. From your point of view, how do you perceive that your faculty members are equipping their students to be caring teachers? 1. In what ways do your students (teacher candidates) demonstrate care? (Probe: in the college classroom, in field placements….other) 1. What do you perceive to be the hallmark(s) of care in your program? Follow up: How does the Christian faith inform this care?	1. From your point of view, how would you describe what "care" looks like in your teacher education program? 2. As faculty members, how do you demonstrate (or model) care? (Probe… in your classes, with your students, with peers, with P-12 partners, etc…) 3. What kinds of things do you do to equip your students (teacher candidates) to be caring teachers? 4. In what ways are your students (teacher candidates) demonstrating care? (Probe: in the college classroom, in field placements, etc…) 1. What do you perceive to be the hallmark(s) of care in your program? Follow up: How does the Christian faith inform this care?	1. From your point of view, how would you describe what "care" looks like in your teacher education program? 2. How do faculty members demonstrate (or model) care? (Probe… in your classes, in interactions with students, with peers, with P-12 partners, etc…) 3. What kinds of things do your faculty members do to equip you to be caring teachers? 4. In what ways are you demonstrating care? (Probe: in the college classroom, in field placements, etc…) 1. What do you perceive to be the hallmark(s) of care in your program? Follow up: How does the Christian faith inform this care?

Appendix 2

Relational Care in Christian Teacher Education Communities is…

Enveloped by physical and personal nourishment

ating care in PK–12 learning communities

Characterized by

Time

Availabili

Individual Attention

Responsive Accommodations

Committed to pedagogical excellence:

High

Enacted through

Effective

Rooted in a deep commitment to **Christian faith** and **prayer**

Resulting

Being Known