

9-2018

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Recommended Citation

Shotsberger, Paul and Freytag, Cathy (2018) "Introduction," *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/icctej/vol13/iss2/1>

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The ICCTE Journal

A Journal of the International Christian Community for Teacher Education

Introduction

Paul Shotsberger and Cathy Freytag, September 2018

Why a special issue on care? It's a fair question. As one colleague said recently, if we have the gospels, do we really need something else to tell us how others should be treated? We maintain that because of its bidirectional nature, ethic of care, and particularly Christian ethic of care, are fundamentally reflective of God's nature. It is not just ethical but also theological: it helps us understand God's love and care for us, to see it as more than a one way street. The literature on ethic of care, especially that of Noddings, tells us that this bidirectional nature holds in the case of care for someone who is helpless, like a mother's care of an infant. Despite the helplessness, nonetheless the mother receives care from the baby, a fulfillment of a heart's desire, a relationship untainted by selfishness or blind ambition.

It seems that we can understand God's love for humans in somewhat the same way. His love and care for us precedes any thoughts of love we might have for Him. However, our love and "care" also matter to Him; in fact, it is something He was willing to send His Son to die for. We were created to worship Him, which is an expression of love but also a kind of care. How else can we understand how our free will intertwines with His sovereign will and desires? We are not simply giving in to His love and care, as a foster child might ("ok, whatever..."), but in a sense we complete the cycle, as an adopted son or daughter, by returning praise for blessing.

Thus, from the beginning we have the need to include an ontological consideration of the reality of God and the way in which God sees and values humans. Genesis 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning God..." That is, before there was anything or anyone to care for, there was God. Further, Scripture tells us that humans were created in God's image, that God is love, and that we love because He first loved us. By extension, therefore, we care for anything or anyone because God first cared for

us. Care is also a command reflective of God's heart. As David Anderson notes in this issue, a pre-fall role given by God to Adam was as caretaker of creation, that is, one who shows care. Thus, care-giving is part of God's perfect design for humans.

These ontological realities help us to avoid putting the ethic of care "cart" before the scriptural "horse," thereby ensuring that Christian principles are not merely add-ons to care theory, but rather are the foundation for a Christian ethic of care. Christian ethic of care thus serves to illuminate our relationship with God while also helping to flesh out what care looks like in various contexts.

In this special issue, each author (or team of authors) has made a unique contribution to the ongoing care dialogue. In *Exploring Care in Education*, Sean Schat illuminates key findings from his original research into student perceptions of care in the teacher-student relationship. He notes that, while teachers typically hold caring intentions, their attempts to communicate care are not always perceived as caring by students. Schat rearticulates what he has described as a "miscommunication of care," and offers practical considerations for how relational, pedagogical and interpersonal care can be established and nurtured within caring, responsive teacher-student relationships.

Any robust conversation of care will necessarily address the role of responsive empathy. In *Game-Based Teaching Methodology and Empathy in Ethics Education*, Angel Krause and colleagues describe the highly-impactful experience they had in a doctoral-level course as their professor utilized a game-based approach to foster empathic care for diverse students and their unique needs. By engaging in a role-playing game (RPG) approach, participants were more highly invested in the course, they were able to carry empathy-building RPG applications into their own contexts, and they reported that the RPG approach helped to foster an enhanced sense of empathy for students in their

care. While Krause et al. describe empathy development on a systems level, Danielle Bryant (*Empathy as Christian Calling*) discusses empathy on a more individual level. Taking a narrative inquiry approach, Bryant reflects on empathy research and her own experiences and proposes a model (ACTS: Actively Listen, Communicate Back, Think with Empathy, Speak a Response) for building and enacting empathic care in both K-12 and university classrooms.

While the call to care is universal, David Anderson (*The Ethic of Care and Inclusive Education*) and Alicia Watkin (*Inclusion and the Ethic of Care: Our Responsibility as Christian Special Educators*) look more specifically at what it means to care responsibly for students within the context of inclusive education. Anderson suggests that Christian ethic of care in inclusive classrooms should be characterized by compassion, presence, interdependence and hospitality, relationship, authenticity and service. Watkin maintains that Christian educators have a responsibility to care by listening, showing up, and advocating – not only for their students with special needs, but for parents, colleagues, and any other “neighbor” we encounter in the inclusive communities we seek to foster.

Those of us who are engaged in the work of preparing preservice teachers realize the profound responsibility we have to equip future educators with resources that will help to sustain them in their practice as caring, nurturing teachers beyond the brief time we have with them in the preparatory phase of their careers. Michelle Hughes continues her work conducting longitudinal research in the area of professional dispositions. In her current article, *Dispositions: Real-time Active Practice*, she explores the dispositional awareness and practice of program completers as they transition into the K-12 professional teaching context. Her research indicates that there is a dearth of proactive attention given to the ongoing development of dispositions in the professional setting and that it is largely the individual teacher’s responsibility to continue to cultivate dispositions that foster sustainable care in the classroom. She further suggests ways in which teacher education programs might partner with the profession to ensure that structures are in place to foster the ongoing development of dispositions in

beginning teachers. In *The Necessary Conversation: Faith to Sustain Teaching Practices*, Stephanie Talley poignantly describes the importance of modeling and nurturing faith-informed self-care for our teacher candidates and recent graduates and proposes creative mechanisms that teacher education programs might employ to foster and sustain these caring, life-giving practices. Similarly, Elaine Tinholt (*Caring for New Teacher Once They Leave Campus*) emphasizes the need to remain present to our graduates and provide caring, supportive structures for them as they navigate the new challenges they will encounter as beginning teachers.

It has been a privilege and a delight to serve as guest co-editors of this special care-themed issue of *The ICCTE Journal* and to work with these thoughtful, responsive, caring authors. We trust that you will find each article to be timely and informative wherever you might find yourself in this season of your caring vocation.

Paul Shotsberger and Cathy Freytag, September 2018