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Book Review: A Push for Educators to Employ Care as a Core Component of Socially Just Teaching

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Shotsberger, P., & Freytag, C. (Eds.). (2020). How shall we then care? A Christian educator's guide to caring for self, learners, colleagues, and community. Wipf and Stock. (ISBN: 1532682409, 194 pages, soft cover)

Owen Webb

A book on care seems incredibly timely. As the world experiences the emotions and losses associated with the pandemic, students, families, and educators are wondering how best to navigate the impact of the current circumstances. At the same time, society is seeking justice for the lack of care experienced by many populations across North America including black people, ethnic minorities, and Indigenous people. In the introduction, Paul Shotsberger emphasized the need for a Christian ethic of care that reflects God's nature: "It [A Christian ethic of care] is not just ethical but theological: it helps us understand God's love and care for us" (p. xiii).

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How Shall We Then Care?: A Christian Educator's Guide for Self, Learners, Colleagues, and Community, edited by Paul Shotsberger and Cathy

Freytag (2020), propels educators to examine the challenges of upholding an ethic of care, forcing educators to examine how many populations have not experienced care from Christians. These collected works on care remind educators that through God and his Word, they have the foundation for creating caring learning communities where both students and educators can thrive.

When defining care, Sean Schat (Chapter 2) employed the work of Noddings (2013) and names that "care is only communicated successfully if the cared-for recognizes and responds to care communicated by the one-caring" (p. 18). In his research, Schat examined the successful communication of care, identifying the difficult reality that while teachers intend to care for students, students are too often not experiencing that care. In this vein, Schat stated, "Offering care is complex and challenging. But it is essential" (p. 30). The book challenges educators to reflect on how they initiate care and to examine whether their practices are being fulfilled in how others respond to the intended care.

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Many of the authors take the step of naming groups who have not been cared for but have rather been marginalized and oppressed by society, Christians, and Christian educators. Schat and Freytag (Chapter 1) identify the negative impact of Christians on specific dominant groups in society: women, slaves, Indigenous people, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Anna Berardi and Barabara Morton (Chapter 3) speak into social-cultural trauma and how marginalized students can bring this pain into the classroom; they warn educators that they can add to this pain and suffering. The examples they provide, of enslaved African Americans and Indigenous people driven from their homeland, brings this trauma to life. David Anderson (Chapter 6) and Alicia Watkin (Chapter 7) share their passion for inclusion and the need to care for students with exceptionalities and disabilities. Anderson articulated that Christian teachers need to establish caring classrooms and schools, for “such a community can lead to the transformation of unjust societies in which historically marginalized people, such as those who are disabled, ‘have an equal place at the table’” (p. 118). Elaine Tinholt (Chapter 10) expressed the need for experienced educators to care for new teachers as they start their careers, revealing that when new teachers experience care, they are much more likely to stay in the profession. These authors strengthen the case that care is central to upholding the dignity and worth of every individual that educators work with and teach about, creating schools and classrooms that are socially just.

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(p. 30).*

Stephanie Talley (Chapter 9) spoke to *Self and Soul Care*. She wrote on the need for “participating in restorative self-care rituals that contribute to our own health and well-being” (p. 162). She pushed Christian educators to care for the soul, to give time to faith practices that nurture self. Talley reminded educators that to serve students well, they must serve themselves well. I initially wondered if self-care should have been an early

chapter in the book, but upon reflection, I noted the importance of reading about the tremendous task educators have in caring for all students. The early chapters reinforced the need to invest in our own care, so we are prepared for the task before us.

Care is a huge mission. And yet, Watkin (Chapter 7) reminded us that followers of God are called to care for others. Berardi and Morton (Chapter 3) articulated, “We do have a vision, grounded in social science research and our Christian faith, for how to create communities of care that can make a difference in the lives of all children and their families” (p. 37). Anderson (Chapter 6) added that faith brings a unique perspective that positions us for caring for others.

How Shall We Then Care?: A Christian Educator’s Guide for Self, Learners, Colleagues, and Community is a beautiful array of research, narratives, and personal experiences that allow educators to learn about and reflect on how to better care for the students entrusted to teachers each day. It challenges educators to consider the intentionality required to navigate the complexities that our students bring with them into classrooms, while providing strategies for responding to those complexities.

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is to “examine closely what it means to provide a safe space, a space that says, ‘I am so glad you are here. . .welcome!’” (p. 49).

This book allows educators to examine care as it relates to students, classroom communities, schools, and themselves in order to create a culture of care that creates a welcoming and safe space to provide a foundation for learning in which students and educators can flourish.

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References

Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. University of California Press.