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Reviewing *How Shall We Then Care? A Christian Educator's Guide to Caring for Self, Learners, Colleagues, and Community*

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REVIEWS

How Shall We Then Care? A Christian Educator's Guide to Caring for Self, Learners, Colleagues, and Community. By Paul Shotsberger and Cathy Freytag, eds. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020. 212 pp. ISBN 13: 978-1-5326-8240-7 (HARDCOVER) \$46

How Shall We Then Care? presents a Christian perspective of Nel Noddings' (2002) care theory—the need to care and to be cared for by others—by expanding the theory to include mutual recognition and assent by both parties for love to be recognized and experienced (p. 2). In this enlightening book of essays—edited by Paul Shotsberger and Cathy Freytag—authors address varying themes and points of view supported by research, scripture, and a robust explanation of Christ's mandate to love within the Church and the world (Matthew 22:34–40).

In the first chapter, “What Can Christians Learn from Care Theory?,” Sean Schat and Cathy Freytag introduce some surprising elements. General statements of the Church's failing could be tempered and supported with relevant data for both sides of the argument. Perhaps a perspective that includes the auspices of the biblical care model and an understanding of scriptures (2 Corinthians 3:6) could be addressed in a future edition. In the discussion of care theory, a fair argument is presented that the recipient must perceive the care as it is intended, like the Golden Rule: “Treat others as you want to be treated.” The role of the Holy Spirit in this model of care could be a helpful addition. Part IV of this chapter is certainly an ideal, but the section requires more coverage of relevant information, especially to support generalizations. It seems that anyone could learn from the care theory inclusive of an absolute truth and biblical framework.

In “The Successful Communication of Educational Care” (chapter 2), Sean Schat discusses findings of a study of adolescent students'

perceptions and experiences of care offered by teachers. Of the significant findings from the care theory, educational care literature, and the research study, this review focuses only on the research findings. Three theories emerged: (1) teacher-caring behaviors as touchstones for resources, (2) the successful communication of care, and (3) a six-stage process of communication of care resulting in a transformed relationship. Implications include “no-fault failure,” a term implying the acceptance of failure to care (p. 27). One wonders about the model’s applicability to all students because some students have complex and varied needs to be supported by profound interventions. A section on training requirements and time commitment to fulfill this “complex, complicated and messy process” (p. 28) would be helpful.

In chapter 3, Anna Berardi and Brenda Morton write about “Trauma-Informed School Practices [TISP] in Response to the Impact of Social-Cultural Trauma.” The TISP triphasic recovery model acknowledges Noddings’ work, adapting it through a trauma-informed lens. TISP provides a “welcome and inclusive environment [and] ... relational safety and well-being” (p. 45) and is informed by attachment theory. They state that “attuned mentoring is essential for psycho-social growth and development ...” (p. 45), especially between caretaker and dependent child. The chapter briefly discusses the neurobiology of unmitigated stress and trauma. It makes a strong point that “a constant state of alarm ... [hampers the] brain’s capacity to self-regulate states of alarm and calm” (p. 47–48). The TISP model consists of three phases: safety and stabilization, remembrance and mourning, and reengagement or reentry. Essential TISP elements are (1) connecting—partnering with parents and guardians to speak into the growth and development of the child through (2) coaching—building the skill of social-emotional self-regulation, and (3) commencing—student engagement in academic activities and navigation of “socio-emotional relational challenges.” TISP implementation requires a commitment to becoming an expert in the inculcation of significant principles to aid in adoption. The model’s implementation is an educational system responsibility and not a rapid process. Practical insight is provided for K-12 education system levels in inclusive change management process elements. Since the strategies could be applicable in any setting, an indication of how this model is

distinctly for the Christian educator would be helpful.

Chapter 4, titled “Game-Based Teaching Methodology and Empathy,” presents a study of the influence of classroom climate and teaching methodology on ethics education. A student role-playing game-design team approach is adopted in a doctoral-level course, both online and face-to-face. Findings from structured interviews of students and the professor were categorized using preset codes: (1) student engagement, (2) applications of participants, (3) empathy development, (4) faith impact, and (5) reaction to professor modeling. Interviews evidenced commonalities, and additional categories emerged from the coding (see pp. 78–81). The discussion of the coding indicates an overall positive experience, but one wonders about the study’s outcomes on a larger scale with appropriate adaptations and more defined variables. Both the student and professor interview identified large class sizes as a barrier to implementing the course. A further question to consider is whether ethical dilemmas would occur in more complex scenarios. Discussion of support systems that may be needed in real-life ethical decision-making situations could provide additional insights. The chapter ends with reflections by the doctoral candidates on the course design’s impact on learning ethics.

Empathy is presented as a strategy for teaching and interacting with students in Danielle Bryant’s essay “Empathy as a Christian Calling,” which is chapter 5. Profound empathy is espoused as the preferred mode. The ACTS model—Actively listen, Communicate back, Think with empathy, and Speak a response—is introduced as a useful strategy for bridging understanding with students. This model compares with Noddings’ model encouraging students’ engagement in empathy one towards another, which was successfully introduced to students using role-play. Brain research and the fit of the ACTS models provide specific support for the steps of the ACTS model. For example, mirroring is found in the second ACTS step—communicate back—and the empathy gap is part of the think-with-empathy step. This simple model can be integrated into any classroom, but scenarios illustrating ACTS implementation in intensive classroom environments could be helpful.

Chapter 6 is David W. Anderson's essay "The Ethic of Care and Inclusive Education," which considers the "head, heart, and hands model" (p. 114), necessary for inclusive education, and adds "habits" to the model. The "heart," which is a teacher's convictions, guides "hands" and "head" to develop "habits" common among Christian teachers and reflected in teacher preparation programs. An argument for an ethic of care in the classroom is also provided, considering rationales by psychologists and ethicists Kohlberg and Gilligan on moral development and Noddings' moral education. The theology for caring is drawn from the book of Genesis. The application of caring to teaching is through definition—teaching is caring, a role that extends beyond teaching and is seen as spiritual, self-giving, love and care, and extends to ethics. Characteristics of such classrooms include compassion, presence, interdependence and hospitality, relationship, authenticity, and service. These are valid characteristics, but some require extensive or well-planned adaptations.

In chapter 7—"Inclusion and the Ethic of Care: Our Responsibility as Christian Special Educators"—author Alicia Watkin discusses students with individualized education programs (IEPs), legal requirements, and benefits, followed by a brief discussion on teacher-student relationships and communities based on the love commandment in Mark 12:30-31 and as pertinent to IEPs. She argues that the emphasis of special teacher education should be on interdependent relationships instead of being seemingly adversarial. Using Schat's application of interpersonal dimensions and Palmer's community of truth studies, she pushes for care for both special students and teachers. Practical ways to show care were provided, but could be strengthened by more research to validate them.

Michelle C. Hughes' essay "Dispositions: Real-Time Active Practice" (chapter 8) focuses on disposition development from pre-service programs to the first years of teaching. The findings of the study reveal that dispositions built self-awareness and are recognizable. Disposition development is a professional choice for reasons such as being grateful, teaching strengthening, and professional development. Also, dispositions are developed with purpose (e.g., to build relationships with colleagues) and could be practiced with self, students,

and other teachers. Reflection is deemed to be an essential. It would be helpful to describe how these dispositions are especially needful for Christian educators if the goal of developing dispositions is to provide care in K-12 education. Attention to the breadth of disposition definitions could perhaps also be beneficial.

In chapter 9, “Self and Soul Care: Spiritual Practices to Sustain Teaching,” Stephanie Talley emphasizes this must-have for all Christian educators. Conversations infused with faith sustain teaching practices with an end goal of restoration. Keeping Sabbath is offered as a disposition (i.e., God’s rest and the need for protective boundaries). Spiritual practices sustain teaching practices that teacher educators should model. In this very practical chapter, consideration could be given to the inclusion of an evaluation of these types of interventions for new teachers and how success can be measured.

The final essay is “Caring for New Teachers Once They Leave Campus” by Elaine Tinholt. Supportive relationships are an essential supportive element for entering the teaching profession. Such caring helps new teachers understand the impact of a demanding environment on their roles and understand the collaborations that can help them meet the demands. Pedagogy and methods coursework are two key fundamentals supported by the scholarly literature. New teachers benefit from reflective practice (for one’s own well-being and when seeking advice from mentors), constructive feedback, induction support services, and supportive communication with administrators and veteran teachers.

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