Caring and Peace Education

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Care theory and peace education go well together. Care theory displaces the lonely, principled moral agent at the heart of traditional ethics with a dyadic relation—'carer' and 'cared-for.' As human beings, we are inevitably in relation, and our very individuality arises in relation. In every facet of life, we encounter the living other. As Martin Buber put it, "All actual life is encounter" (1958/1970, p. 62). Care theory describes caring encounters and caring relations, and gives us some guidance on how to establish, maintain, and enhance such relations. To teach for caring relations is to teach for peace in communities, in individual lives, and in the world.

ELEMENTS OF CARE THEORY

Care theory begins with a description of the caring relation, one to which both carer and cared-for contribute (Noddings, 1984/2003). The carer (or one-caring) is first of all attentive; she or he listens to the cared-for and is especially attentive to the needs expressed. Simone Weil (1977) said of this form of attention, "the soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at" (p. 51). This receptive attention is accompanied by *motivational displacement*, that is, the carer's motivating energy flows toward the expressed needs and projects of the cared-for. Then the carer must do something and respond in some way. In the simplest caring encounters, the need of the cared-for may be met quickly and easily. In other cases, there may be multiple encounters, requiring commitment over time. A relationship over time may be characterized as *caring*, if most of the encounters that make it up are *caring encounters*.

To complete a caring encounter or relation, the cared-for must respond in some way that acknowledges the effort of the carer. This response might be an explicit expression of gratitude, but it could be as simple as an infant's smile, a patient's sigh of relief, or a student's energetic pursuit of an approved project. Without such a response from the cared-for, there is no caring relation despite the best efforts of the carer. Care theory may be unique among moral theories in its recognition of the cared-for's contribution to moral life. We need not give moral credit to the infant for his smile, or to the patient for his sigh, or to the student for his display of energy. Moral credit is not the point. The point is to identify and encourage modes of response that make it possible to establish and encourage modes of response that make it possible to establish, maintain, or enhance caring relations.

In mature relationships, we expect that caring relations will be marked by equality or mutuality; that is, we expect that the two members of the relation will regularly exchange places, that is, each takes turns acting as carer and cared-for. When this does not happen, relationships tend to deteriorate.

But many relationships are unequal by their very nature. Relations such as mother-infant, nurse-patient, and teacher-students are necessarily unequal. The infant cannot take a turn as carer, and a patient cannot do for the nurse what the nurse does for the patient. Similarly, the teacher-student relationship is unequal. If the inequality is removed, the relationship may be converted to friendship.

Even under unequal conditions, however, the caring relation is characterized by reciprocity. Both carer and cared-for contribute distinctively to the relation. Clearly, this reciprocity is not contractual; the carer contributes *as* carer, the cared-for *as* cared-for. Those who regularly act as

carer in unequal relations are keenly aware of how dependent they are on the response of the cared-for—on the child, the patient, the student, the client. Without that response of acknowledgement, there is a real danger of burnout in the work of caring.

A basic requirement in caring relations is dialogue. It is through dialogue that we come to know one another, and it is in dialogue that needs are expressed. Without dialogue, those who want to care—those who have the best interests of the cared-for at heart—must work with inferred needs (Noddings, 2002). Sometimes, the use of inferred needs is a choice. A parent may decide, without talking with her child, that she knows what the child needs. Similarly, a teacher may infer needs for all fifth graders or all math students (Noddings, 2007). In such cases, conscientious parents and teachers may fail repeatedly to establish caring relations because they have not received what-is-there in the other. The identification of expressed needs through dialogue is crucial at every level of human interaction, and the use of dialogue is central in peace education as well.

EDUCATING FOR PEACE

Peace educators often put considerable emphasis on learning through textbooks, lectures, films, and stories (Noddings, 2005). Such acquisition of cultural knowledge is essential, but it can also be misleading. Students of all ages sometimes suppose that, as a result of such learning, they know all about another culture. They are ready to act upon inferred needs, and they neglect to engage the living other in dialogue, thus missing expressed needs and perhaps creating misunderstandings.

When would-be carers on the global level neglect dialogue and expressed needs, they often come across as insensitive, even arrogant. They may also make grave errors in the allocation of resources. The economist, Joseph Stiglitz (2002) charges that well-meaning representatives of developed nations often make mistakes of this sort. From their own framework of values and interests, they infer the needs of others and generously, but mistakenly, set out to meet them. They may infer that a developing nation needs a large dam for electricity, fast food chains, factories for clothing manufacture, or even democracy, when if asked, the nation's citizens might express entirely different needs and perhaps strongly reject those inferred. Stiglitz comments:

> Those whose lives will be affected by the decisions about how globalization is managed have a right to participate in that debate, and they have a right to know how such decisions have been made in the past. (2002, p. xvi)

We must engage in dialogue to identify the needs, motives, and interests of others. We might be astonished to learn that some people prefer an economic system different from capitalism and a social system other than democracy. Through continuous dialogue, we might change their minds, but they might well cause us to modify our own views. We may enter relationships of mutual caring.

For effective peace education, it is not enough to understand others; we must also understand ourselves (Noddings, 2006). This is hard, and peace educators sometimes make the mistake of adopting lovely principles that stand little chance of translation into practice. We often ignore basic realities about human nature. Evolutionary science has produced considerable evidence on the sources and practice of altruism, for example. The more closely related we are to others by blood or family, the more likely we are to respond altruistically. In discussing caring, I have pointed out that caring starts in the inner circle and may or may not spread to outer circles. When it does spread, it is usually through chains of some sort of common interest.

It is also true of almost all of us that, if our inner circle is attacked, we will fight to defend it, even if we believe on principle that the other side is more 'right'. These features of human relations are not to be celebrated, but they cannot be denied. We have to face these things about ourselves.

It is imperative, then, for caring peace educators to do all we can to prevent the conditions under which groups will be incited to take sides along blood or national lines. Once the lines are drawn, tragedy will inevitably follow at the individual, group, national, or global level. For too many years, we have put emphasis on fighting fairly, on just war, and on humane rules for the treatment of enemies. However, when situations become dire, these rules are put aside. In light of what we know about human allegiances, this emphasis is hopeless. When things get tough for our own people, we will too often do terrible things.

Care theory, then, concentrates on the prevention of physical conflict and the preservation of life (Brock-Utne, 1985; Reardon, 1985; Ruddick, 1989). We must teach our children what it means to establish caring relations and then work patiently to expand the circles of care through chains of common interests. To establish these chains, we must engage in continuous, unconditional dialogue. We can encourage dialogue among engineers, teachers, musicians, carpenters, students, artists, and any other groups whose occupational or social interests suggest a connection. It is essential to establish such dialogue groups between nations that are at risk of becoming enemies (Saunders, 1991). Through such dialogues, the main points of contention are deliberately avoided. Only when, through the appreciation achieved in dialogue and common projects, it has become unthinkable to do physical harm to these living others—only then can the points of conflict be safely addressed. Through continuous dialogue, common projects, and chains of connection, we expand the circles of caring.

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