



Physical Education Teacher Candidates' Development of Caring Relationships

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Introduction

Noddings (2005) defined “the ethic of care as a morality based on the recognition of needs, relations, and responses” (p.21) and argued that, “caring relationships” are essential to teaching. Research has supported that teacher-student caring relationships provide the foundation and at the heart of class management and academic success (Noddings, 2005). In addition, the benefit of developing caring relationships extends to a sense of connectedness, belonging, and the local community with schools which leads to academic success (Newcomer, 2018). Yet, research studies indicated the exclusion of human relationships for teacher candidates’ understanding of effective teaching (Cummings, 2001; Newcomer, 2018). Teachers need to develop such caring relationships in respect to addressing diversity issues and cultural responsiveness (Newcomer, 2018) and the content of physical education (Tannehill, van der Mars, & MacPhail, 2015).

Research Question

How do teacher candidates develop caring relationships?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher candidates’ implementation of caring relationships with K-12 students.

Participants

Two physical education teacher candidates (one male and one female; both in final student teaching experience).

Data Sources

Four face-to face semi-structured interviews
40 hours observational field notes
Two teaching videotapes
Informal conversational interviews
Stimulated recall interview
Documents (e.g. lesson plans, work samples)

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998).
Trustworthiness: a) triangulation, b) member checks, c) researcher stance, d) expert/peer review, and e) researcher journal.

Four Themes Reflected the Teacher Candidates' Development of Caring Relationships

Showing interest in students

Showing interest in students meant the teacher attempted to understand his/her students as individuals

Jessica: “Learn students’ names and favorite things, just little things. It is silly, but they can learn your own favorite things and you build a connection. ‘I like the color pink’, ‘oh, so do I’; there is more of a connection” (Interview).

Pablo: “I think that the whole finding common interests is a great way to establish relationship because the students are more likely to open up to you if teachers or students can find something that is agreed upon. I had a little girl that wouldn’t talk to me at all until I wore a green shirt and her favorite color was green...” (Interview).

Interacting with students

Interacting with students meant not only conversing and interacting with them during class but also outside of school.

Jessica: “I ask students before class. ‘How was your snow day? Did you have fun? Did you do anything fun?’ Students would talk and then they would ask me. So it definitely built that relationship where they can ask questions, I can ask questions and you just find out a little bit more” (Interview).

Pablo: “If students are in the gym, and a lot of times they will be in the gym, if I walk through to get to my office, I will just start playing with students. I don’t get fully involved in the game, but if they are playing tag, I will kind of act like I am going to chase them or tell them ‘chase me and tag me” (Interview).

Being empathetic to students

Being empathetic to students implied that a teacher was concerned about students’ emotional changes in the whole school setting

Jessica: “When I saw a girl who was made fun by other students, I told her that I had been made fun of before. It is hard thing because you can’t change your race, but you have to be strong for yourself and not let those people get to you. Just be who you are, the funny person you are and just regardless these people. If you cannot say anything nice, do not say anything at all. But ignore those words” (Interview).

Pablo: “A boy lost something that was really expensive over the weekend. I told him that same thing happened to me. I used an example of when I lost my iPad. I was like, I lost it, but you know what I did? I saved up money and when I had enough money, I got a new one. This boy was like, oh that is a great idea. Just putting yourself in their shoes and letting them know that you know how student feel and positivity might come out” (Interview).

Empowering students in teaching

Empowering students in teaching suggested that a teacher provided choices for students to make content and equipment selection decisions.

Jessica: “Jessica sometimes encouraged students to choose the equipment with different colors. For instance, in a rope-jumping unit, Jessica requested students walk to the ropes and chose the rope with a different color based upon students’ own preferences. In addition, she also encouraged some students with high level of skill in the jump rope unit to create different jumping styles” (Field Notes).

Pablo: “Giving students choices in what they do; you don’t always have to follow one track. I think that it falls into caring because that is showing as a teacher you are caring about their emotions. Students can advance their own knowledge by being able to make choices” (Interview).

Conclusions and Future Research

Current findings suggested these teacher candidates had a strong focus on caring relationships for students’ emotional connectivity (Wrench & Garrett, 2015). It implies that these teacher candidates cared for students as people. Specifically, teacher candidates fostered a positive learning environment through providing emotional and social resources for their students (Newcomer, 2018). In other words, these teacher candidates were “good” persons for their students; however, the establishment of caring relationships for students’ academic success was uncertain (Newcomer, 2018). As Nodding (2005) says, caring teaching does not take place until student learning occurs. These results suggest that teacher candidates need assistance to shift their attention from caring for students as people to caring for students as learners.

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