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Theoretical Analysis on Caring School Leadership

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the reflections of caring leadership on the school organization were examined in the context of teacher, student, and school leader relations. Empirical research both on the private and public sectors shows that caring leadership can support organizational learning. However, despite the growing interest in the importance of caring in education, research on caring leadership in schools focuses on narrow dyadic relationships between people. That said, caring is a very powerful concept in addressing the most urgent needs of teachers and families, and collective learning is a feature that has the power to positively affect belonging, commitment, personal well-being, and academic achievement. Recent scholarship has increasingly sought to move understanding of caring from an empty buzzword to a meaningfully defined and bounded idea. In this study, the concepts of caring and caring leadership were examined based on the literature in the context of school organization, and it was concluded that creating an effective learning environment requires establishing positive relationships, and this requires creating a caring school culture.

Keywords: Caring, caring leadership, caring school leadership

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Introduction

Caring leadership and its effects on the school environment have been the focus of recent research in the field of educational administration (Cohen, 2012; Louis, Murphy & Smylie, 2016). It is argued that caring school leadership (CSL) can support educators' sense of collective responsibility and create bonds of trust that improve organizational learning capacity (Louis & Murphy, 2017). Caring acts as an emotional motivation that both gives meaning to school and keeps schools together in different ways (Louis, et al. 2016). School leadership that supports a caring environment contributes to the development of a supportive and empowering environment (Green, 2014). This encourages teacher development and contributes to more effective teaching and learning processes and student progress. Caring for people fulfills their basic need for belonging and connection with others and is an important factor in creating motivation (Reeve, 2006).

Caring relationships in schools are an organizational phenomenon that goes beyond the relationship between a teacher and student or between students and their peers. A caring culture in schools is a collective trait that requires balancing cognitive learning and social-emotional development for both students and adults. Students need teachers who show they care, and teachers need school principals who display caring leadership behaviors (Davis & Wilson, 2000). Therefore, it can be said that it is important to understand the actions of school leaders who are committed to creating an emotionally healthy and academically productive caring culture in schools (Sergiovanni, 1992).

CSL refers to a leadership style that prioritizes the well-being and growth of students, teachers, and staff. It involves creating a positive and supportive school culture where everyone feels valued, respected, and supported (Louis & Murphy, 2017). CSL is essential for creating a safe and nurturing learning environment where students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. By modeling kindness and compassion, caring school leaders can create a positive ripple effect that impacts the entire school community. Through their leadership, caring school leaders can inspire and empower others to develop their own leadership skills and become agents of positive change in their schools and communities (Louis, et al. 2016; Murphy & Torres 2014).

This study focused on the importance of caring in schools and school leadership. The concept of caring and how it functions were examined, and all components associated with caring leadership that situate leadership within this broader exposition were introduced. Results of the literature review showed that students as beneficiaries of caring, but teachers and others also stand to benefit. Finally, study explores ways that leadership might extend the interpersonal to the organization and shape the organization to support the interpersonal.

Theoretical Foundations of Caring

When the literature on the concept of caring in education is examined, it is seen that this is a very powerful concept in addressing the needs of students, teachers, and families, and it is a source of belonging, commitment, personal well-being and academic success. However, the meaning of the concept of caring for schools is questionable, and ambiguous and requires the study of many unexplained aspects (Thompson, 1998). As can be understood from the definitions, the literature reveals that the beliefs and actions of school principals and teachers have a significant impact on how students will respond to caring efforts.

It is seen that there are various opinions about what caring is and how it emerges in human life. For example, Glenn, Chang & Forcey (1994) define caring as knowing, feeling, and

acting in the interests of others. Noddings (2003) defines it as any thoughtful human reaction (or lack of response) that enables others to thrive. Mayeroff (1971) conceptualizes caring for someone else as helping him grow and realize himself. All these definitions cause an emotional response that makes it easier, complicated, or questioning us to understand the word caring. This leads us to think about our sense of values and how they relate to caring.

Tronto (1994) defined caring as a social practice that can be seen as an activity of the human species that includes everything we do to maintain, protect, and repair our world so that we can live in it. Tronto states that there are four stages of the caring relationship. These are (1) attention – awareness of the other's needs; (2) responsibility – willingness to respond to and deal with these needs; (3) competence – the ability to care well and successfully; (4) responsiveness – the ability to take into account the situation of others and respond to the need to care as others see it (Tronto, 1994).

Although the concepts of caring and supporting are frequently included in the educational literature that addresses the important social relationships between students, teachers, and leadership (Murphy & Torres 2014), systematic conceptualization of these concepts is very rare. (Noddings, 2013) defined caring as "a way of relating to people, not a set of behaviors." Caring is also defined for broad purposes, such as supporting overall development, the well-being and well-being of others, the special needs of others, and increasing the capacity to care for oneself and others. In other words, the ability to care increases as one cares for and is cared for by someone (Roofey, 2006). These authors have dealt with caring from a general point of view, expressed through behavior and interaction, as the nature of the bilateral relationship. In other words, it can be said that caring is a concept expressed by the aims of those who care and are cared for.

What is common to all the definitions mentioned is the perception of caring as a relationship, and what characterizes it is interconnectedness and interdependency. This includes helping the other and allowing him/her to grow and develop. This perception is based on the ability of the individual to respond diligently to the needs of others, which includes a long-term commitment and actions based on responsibility and commitment to the well-being and empowerment of the other. Therefore, it can be said that caring theories develop primarily in charitable professions, especially in educational organizations.

Caring Leadership and Teacher-Student Relationship

Caring leadership is important in schools and contributes both to the development of more effective adult cultures and the learning of students. In educational research, the focus is mostly on teacher-student relationships and the importance of building caring communities based on specific communicative conditions (Newmann, 1992; Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The nature of teacher-student relationships provides the necessary environment for the establishment of high standards and academic commitment within the classroom, both in terms of caring and academically. Because many students learn more from teachers who emphasize healthy personal relationships. Therefore, it can be said that the power of a positive teacher-student relationship is very important for learning to occur (Goodenow, 1993; Hattie, 2009). Positive relationships, on the other hand, constitute the social capital or supportive network of relationships needed for effective academic work to occur in classrooms (Ancess, 2003).

Such caring relationships affect the course of children's school experience, especially in schools where children with difficult conditions in out-of-school life are concentrated. The lack of positive social relationships and connections deprives students of the resources to develop and as a result, student outcomes are adversely affected (Croninger & Lee, 2001). So, students are more successful socially, emotionally, and academically when they perceive that they are in a safe environment and are seen as important members of their learning communities. In achieving this, the caring leadership of the school leader has an important role.

Organizational Characteristics That Support Caring

It is known that students and families involved in all processes in school are more likely to be actively involved in the learning process because familiarity and stability make them more comfortable in the classroom and therefore more willing to participate actively in the learning process (Noddings, 1992). Educators who know and accept students' home environment and cultural background are more likely to respond and build caring relationships with a higher level of involvement in students' learning process. Creating a warm, personal learning environment where students are well-known and accepted by all school staff can make a difference in students' achievements. Therefore, it can be said that the importance, understanding, and sensitivity shown by educators to students in a supportive school environment is the most important effect on student learning (Perez, 2000).

Key elements and enabling conditions for creating a caring learning environment depend not only on communicativeness but also on group background. Although deep communicative caring in schools is limited, organizational experiences that bring people together in collaborative work can lead to the development of a shared understanding of a common purpose, value, and short-term, and larger task focused on meeting students' needs. To some extent, these can be thought of as the results of adults caring for one another in the school community (Murphy & Torres, 2014). For example, a particularly important support that schools and teachers can provide is a safe learning environment.

The need to be safe is very important to young people and meeting these needs is essential for their academic, social and emotional development (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Efforts to create safe and enjoyable spaces for students to continue their school life and develop as individuals allow schools to become shelters for some students (Ancess, 2003; Christle, Jolivette & Nelson, 2005; Joselowsky, 2007; Robinson, 2007).

Caring School Leadership

With the emergence of effective research on transformational leadership in schools, it is seen that the thought of caring leadership has gradually gained its place (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). Although transformational leadership neglects emotions, it has rekindled interest in understanding how leaders influence the development of the school climate and culture that fosters satisfaction, engagement, and success for both adults and children (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

The principal's ability to create a caring environment fosters strong professional relationships, staff engagement, and organizational learning (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Louis & Murphy, 2017). Caring leadership is both contextual and relational and is influenced by the context of the person's close social relationship, organizational setting, and policy (Smylie et al., 2016). Thus, how caring leadership serves to promote organizational learning among teachers

may vary depending on the context of the school and the relationships educators form inside and outside the school.

Looking at the main elements of caring, it is seen that three conditions must be met for leadership actions, interactions and practices to be caring. These are (Boyatzis et al. 2006):

- It is based on an understanding of what matters and the needs of those who care, based on authentic knowledge of what leaders do and adequate relevance and involvement in what matters.
- The caring actions of school leaders motivate the success and individual well-being of those who are cared for.
- Whenever possible, school leaders' caring should be recognized and acknowledged by those who are cared for.

Expressions of such knowledge, understanding and motivations can be situational, unique to different groups and individuals, and variable and dynamic as understanding and needs develop. Because much of the leadership work in schools is invisible to others, it can be difficult to achieve practical reciprocity with recommendations in the literature. In particular, students' communication with school leaders may be limited compared to their communication with teachers, and a principal's actions of caring may be relatively less noticeable to students. Teachers experience more sustained attention and interaction with school leaders in general.

Over the past quarter century, many scholars have suggested that school leaders should restructure schools as caring communities (Beck, 1992). Since it is useless to wait for caring to occur without some principles, leaders can implement some general caring tendencies or practices implied by these actions as follows (Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016):

- Engaging the school community in its vision and effort to be a caring school
- Involving the school community in caring self-assessment by assessing the abilities, background, manifestations, and experiences of caring that can or should occur.
- To shape the organizational culture of the school by supporting the norms and values that make up the supporting structures, social relations, policies and the organization of the school.
- Establishing larger systems of caring relationships to which school members belong, such as partnerships or projects with school-parents associations or community organizations.

In light of these principles, leaders see teachers as colleagues, partners and simultaneous learners and friends. They also work with these groups to "build a community of learners," an ensure that all individuals to be cared for and developed. Caring relationships in schools appear to be an organizational element that goes beyond the relationship between a teacher and a student or between students and their peers. It is possible to define caring culture in schools as a collective feature that requires balancing cognitive learning and social-emotional development for both students and adults. Therefore, it can be said that; It is important to understand the actions of school leaders who are committed to creating an emotionally healthy and academically productive culture of caring in their schools (Ancess, 2003; Goodenow, 199; Hattie, 2009).

Essence for Caring School Leadership

CSL is essential for creating a positive school culture and promoting student success. Some studeis (e.g., Bartlett & García, 2011; Curry, 2016) argue that when school leaders prioritize the well-being of their students and staff, they create an environment where everyone feels supported, valued, and motivated to learn and grow. Essence for CSL can be summarized in a few key points (Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Tronto, 2010; Louis, K. S., Murphy, J., & Smylie, M, 2016):

- *Visionary leadership:* A caring school leader should have a clear vision for the school, which includes a focus on student learning and well-being. The leader should be able to communicate this vision effectively to staff, students, and parents.
- *Strong communication skills*: Effective communication is critical for building trust, fostering relationships, and creating a positive school culture. Caring school leaders should be able to listen actively and communicate clearly and respectfully.
- *Empathy and compassion:* A caring school leader should be able to understand and relate to the needs of students, staff, and parents. Empathy and compassion help create a supportive and inclusive school environment where everyone feels valued.
- *Collaboration and teamwork:* Caring school leaders should work collaboratively with staff, students, and parents to create a shared sense of purpose and to achieve common goals. They should foster a culture of teamwork and encourage everyone to work together to support student success.
- *Continuous learning:* Caring school leaders should be committed to their own professional development and the ongoing learning of their staff. They should encourage a culture of continuous learning, seeking out opportunities for growth and improvement.
- *Positive role modeling:* A caring school leader should model the behavior and attitudes they expect from others. They should demonstrate integrity, kindness, respect, and a strong work ethic, setting a positive example for everyone in the school community.

By embodying these traits, a caring school leader can help create a positive school culture that fosters academic achievement, personal growth, and overall well-being.

Conclusion

In this study, CSL has been examined with all its components based on the literature and it has been understood that it has significant impact on various outcomes related to the school, students, teachers, and the wider community. The study reveals that caring leadership in schools that provide a supportive environment is a collective and organizational feature that requires balancing cognitive learning with social-emotional development for both students and adults. The findings regarding the reflections of caring leadership on education in line with the literature-based analyzes are discussed below under some important headings.

Firstly, it can be argued that CSL can be a foundation for holistic approaches to developing schools as learning organizations that consistently mobilize and increase professional capital. In this study, caring leadership was not only focused on the achievement aspect but also incorporated into the emotional and social interactions of teachers and students. Therefore, it was concluded that caring leadership can affect school culture in ways based on the ability of teachers to realize their professional development through academic as well as non-academic support. These non-academic support channels appeared to be based on the contextual

characteristics of the school, not on a one-size-fits-all concept of effective teaching (Ancess, 2003; Goodenow, 199; Hattie, 2009).

Secondly, as a result of the review, it was concluded that creating a successful school learning environment requires establishing positive relationships. As some authors have stated on this regard, teachers' performance and success is weaker in schools where caring is not evident, and there are negative organizational relationships that contribute to a negative climate (Beck, 1992; Kahn, 1993). Such positive relationships underpin school success, creating a set of values based on "caring." When positive relationships develop within the school community, students feel a sense of "caring", which positively affects their desire to learn. Caring leadership based on a caring ethic is a type of leadership that is widely recognized and accepted as a way to create a caring school environment that delivers strong learning outcomes (Ellerbrock and Kiefer, 2010; Kroth and Keeler, 2009). In this regard, caring leadership can help build a caring school community that supports the academic, social and emotional needs of students, particularly those living in poverty and trauma survivors. Students are more successful socially, emotionally, and academically when they perceive that they are in a safe environment and are seen as important members of their learning community. The caring leadership of the school leader has an important place in ensuring this.

Thirdly, caring leadership achieves results in establishing a safe environment at school. CSL is often characterized by a focus on building relationships and creating a supportive environment. As stated by Pellicer (2003) and De Bruyn (2007) school management, which assumes a caring role, means the development of a supportive and empowering environment in which teachers can develop. A caring-based leader contributes to safe supportive environments for students, parents, and teachers; It embraces learning by caring for teachers, students and their families personally and viewing everyone with a positive outlook, honoring emotions and empowering teachers to change and grow. In this way, caring enhances learning when schools become communities where everyone comes to learn. As caring school leaders embrace the idea that every individual deserves the opportunity to live and learn in a supportive, nurturing environment, aspects of human relations that go beyond just the fulfillment of tasks should be emphasized (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Boyatzis et al. 2006):

Finally, it was concluded that caring relationships in schools are an organizational element that goes beyond the relationship between a teacher and a student or between students and their peers. Here, caring culture is defined as a collective trait that requires balancing cognitive learning with social-emotional development for both students and adults (Demerath, 2018). Therefore, it can be said that it is important to understand the actions of school leaders who are committed to creating an emotionally healthy and academically productive caring culture in their schools (Day & Leitch, 2001; Hargreaves, 2002)

In order to successfully implement CSL, it is important for leaders to receive training and support in how to cultivate a positive school culture. It may also require a shift in organizational values and a willingness to prioritize the well-being of students and staff alongside academic performance. As a concluding remark, the main focus emphasized by the authors in this study is that CSL can have a profound impact on the entire school community, creating a positive and supportive environment that promotes student success and well-being. However, it requires a significant investment of time and resources and may be challenging to implement in practice. Nevertheless, it is an important leadership style that can promote a positive school culture and foster a sense of belonging, inclusivity, and respect for diversity.

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