Caring high school teachers: promoting students' social and emotional development

Roberta Jean Geosling

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ABSTRACT

CARING HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS: PROMOTING STUDENTS’ SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Roberta Jean Geosling, Ed.D.
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Northern Illinois University, 2019
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High school students are experiencing increasing numbers of social and emotional stressors in their lives. While Illinois and other states have adopted state standards to address social and emotional development in the classroom, care theorists posit that the answer may lie in positive relationships between caring teachers and their students. This study explores the perspectives of six teachers from a Midwest high school who were nominated by their students as being caring teachers. After a series of three 45-minute interviews and two to three 45-minute observations, data were analyzed within the framework of Noddings’s theory of care and the construct of SEL development to reveal ways that these high school teachers described care in their classroom practice and promoted social and emotional development in their students. Findings include many qualities of a caring teacher such as meeting their academic needs, pushing students outside of their comfort zones, and showing personal interest in the students’ lives. Findings also revealed that the caring teachers promoted SEL development both inside and outside of their planned curriculum and instruction. This included being approachable and accessible while also utilizing teachable moments in the classroom in order to meet the various social and emotional needs of their students.

Furthermore, based on the findings, recommendations for the field of education and for future research are described. Recommendations for the field of education involve including
content regarding teacher care and SEL development in teacher preparation programs and professional development curricula while also pairing teachers with caring mentors as models. Additionally, recommendations include providing opportunities for teachers to spend extra time with students outside of traditional classes and also encouraging teachers to guide students through challenging content while promoting excellence as ways to show care.

Recommendations for future research include repeating the current study in various locations with focus in inner-city or more diverse settings and with attention to how other factors influence care (i.e., gender, experience levels, ages, educational backgrounds, etc.). Also, it is recommended to study teacher care and SEL development in high school students from the perspectives of the high school students themselves, parents, administrators, or other school personnel.
CARING HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS: PROMOTING STUDENTS’ SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BY

ROBERTA JEAN GEOSLING
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Doctoral Director:
Elizabeth A. Wilkins
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Finally, my dear husband, Ray; my heart overflows with gratitude for how sacrificially and compassionately you love me. You have come up with so many creative ways to keep me motivated through the long days, weeks, and months of writing. Thank you so much for all of the sandwiches when I needed them. I can honestly say that I could not have finished this without you by my side.
DEDICATION

To Kennedy.

May your care for others be motivated by your heavenly Father’s care for you.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The topic of student success has been a matter of debate for decades among parents, teachers, administrators, politicians, and researchers (Bracey, 2003; Ledwell & Oyler, 2016; Semel, 2010; Shepard, 2000). Many are asking questions such as, “What constitutes success in the classroom?” and “What is needed in the classroom in order to make students successful?” (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Davis, 2003; Ledwell & Oyler, 2016; Shumow & Schmidt, 2013; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Answers to the question of student success at the secondary level range from academic achievement (Ang, 2005; Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Davis, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Helm, 2007; Spilt, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012) to more whole-child outcomes such as social and emotional learning (SEL; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Noddings, 2005). For the last few decades, policy makers and other stakeholders who have defined student success as high test scores and soaring GPAs have implemented various forms of increased accountability and “back-to-basics” instruction as the solution (Kohn, 2000; Ravitch, 2011; Semel, 2010). In the wake of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which incited a sense of panic over the condition of our nation’s education system, reforms and initiatives such as *Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind* (2001), *Race to the Top* (2009), and *Common Core* (2009) emerged in response. In efforts to close achievement gaps and raise the bar in education, the educational landscape has become dense with high-stakes performance testing and standardized curriculum (Bengston & Connors,
2014; Kohn, 2000; Ravitch, 2011; Richmond, Bartell, & Dunn, 2016; Semel, 2010; Shirley & Lahann, 2008). One element that has been lost in this testing culture, however, is the importance of teacher-student relationships and the many positive outcomes related to teachers who operate under an ethic of care (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Noddings, 2005; Wilde, 2013).

Students have been reported to achieve greater academic success when their teachers are experts in their content and are able to engage students in that content (Bagley, 2010; Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Corso, Bundick, Quaglia, & Haywood, 2013; Frymier & Houser, 2000). In addition to this, when teachers hold positive, or caring, relationships with their students, they are more likely to be effective in the classroom (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Davis 2003; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Helm, 2007; Wentzel, 1998). In a review of the literature on this topic, Brophy (1986) also presented several teacher behaviors that lead to student motivation, including the following: guidance, modeling, enthusiasm, provision of choice, sincere praise, reinforcement, curiosity, dissonance, and interest induction (Brophy, 1986). Each of these actions share connections with care. Despite the many demands placed on teachers today, it is undeniable that they can make a difference in the lives of their students beyond merely helping them academically. Although many studies analyze pedagogical approaches to teaching specific content in attempts to define “best practices” for teaching methods, studies that define “best practices” for caring teacher dispositions or relationship development are harder to find (Hochstetler, 2014).

Furthermore, academic achievement is a narrow definition of student success. In addition to our current academic crisis, youth are facing many other stresses, including environmental challenges, mental health issues, and emotional crises (Baldwin, Keating, & Bachman, 2006; Girod, Pardales, Cavanaugh, & Wadsworth, 2005; Williamson, Modecki, & Guerra, 2015).
Educators, policy makers, administrators, and parents would agree that in addition to academic standards, schools should be promoting learning that entails social and emotional growth as well (Elias, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003; Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007). Schools should be places that prepare students for life beyond the walls of the classroom instead of just institutions that prepare students to pass paper-and-pencil tests (Noddings, 2015; Tyler, 1949; Wilde, 2013; Zins & Elias, 2007). When the primary focus of schooling is for students to pass high-stakes tests, the social and emotional development of the child can be forgotten. This happens to the detriment of the child, but also society as a whole. If we want our future society to flourish with caring individuals who are socially sensitive and critically thinking, we must recognize that education involves more than passing tests (Dewey, 1915; Hayes, Ryan, & Zseller, 1994; Richmond et al., 2016; Stedman, 2010).

Although policy makers have proposed that standardized curriculum which includes both academic and social/emotional learning (SEL) competencies is the key to addressing our nation’s concerns for our youth, some would suggest that standardized curriculum is not enough (Hoffman, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Noddings, 2015). Nel Noddings (1992, 2006, 2015), a philosopher and theorist who worked in secondary education as a teacher and administrator for almost 25 years, posits that the missing component in our education system today is an ethic of care. Teachers who genuinely care about their students seek to address not only their academic needs but also their social and emotional needs (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Noddings, 2005; Wilde, 2013). This is why the current study focused on how a group of teachers who were nominated by their students as being perceived as caring promoted social and emotional development in the classroom.
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in Nel Noddings’s theory of care (1984, 1992, 2002) and the construct of social and emotional learning (SEL).

Care

*Care*, as defined by Noddings (2002), is when the teacher is affectionately knowledgeable about each of her students and uses that knowledge to care for them in a way that meets their individual needs. In her most recent work, Noddings (2015) gives a succinct definition of what the cycle of care looks like:

…the carer attends to the expressed needs of the cared-for, is moved affectively by what he or she detects in the other’s situation, and is prepared to respond in some appropriate way; the cared-for completes the relation by recognizing—showing in some way—that the attempt to care has been received. (p. 121)

A caring teacher is sensitive to the academic, social, and emotional needs of her students and is compelled to meet those needs (Noddings, 2005). According to Noddings’s cycle of care, the students will not only have their academic, social, and emotional needs met, but in an effective caring relationship, students will become caring individuals (Noddings, 1984). Students will learn to care for ideas (evidence of academic outcomes) and also for other people (evidence of SEL outcomes). Ultimately, caring teachers have the best interests of the students in mind and pursue helping them become the best versions of themselves (Noddings, 2005).

There are many ways that caring teachers can do this. An example may be the teacher who notices relational conflict among her students and intentionally becomes involved in their social development. This could be done through role-play, private conversations, or other methods that would fit the situation according to the unique members involved. A caring teacher
would know the involved individuals well enough to make choices that will effectively bring about positive change. Because care is uniquely situated in the context of a relationship, there are numerous ways that teachers demonstrate care (Noddings, 1984).

Although caring teachers benefit students in a variety of ways, for the purpose of this study, I researched caring teachers who promoted social and emotional growth in their students. Therefore, a brief overview of SEL outcomes will continue to provide some insight into how this study was framed.

Social/Emotional Learning (SEL)

In addition to the current spotlight on the academic needs of youth, the social and emotional needs of youth are also beginning to gain recognition (Elias, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015; Hoffman, 2009; Noddings, 2005; Weissberg et al., 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007). Also known as holistic education, tending to the “whole child” has risen to the forefront of education with the recent development of Social Emotional Competence (SEC) standards, or better known in Illinois as social/emotional learning (SEL). The Illinois State Board of Education (n.d.) presents the following main goals for SEL standards:

- Develop social self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success
- Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships
- Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts (http://www.isbe.net/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm)

States across the nation are beginning to address the social and emotional needs of youth through a variety of programs and curricula. Promoting SEL growth in high school students is especially crucial as schools report increases in dropout rates, depression, and risky behavior (Girod et al., 2007).
In addition to the implementation of programs and curriculum, caring teachers can also make a difference in the SEL development of their students (Noddings, 2005). For example, a caring teacher might see a need for self-management skills in a particular student. He or she can choose to address these issues on a personal level without needing formal curriculum to offer the opportunity.

Once again, there are many ways that caring teachers can address the social and emotional needs of their high school students, and the purpose of this study was to examine how caring teachers describe this process. Further discussion about the theory of care (Noddings, 1984) as well as social and emotional learning will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Problem and Purpose Statements

In the midst of high-stakes testing and performance standards, Illinois has become the first state to adopt standards to address SEL in the classroom (ISBE, n.d.). One problem, however, is that research fails to show how these standards can be effectively addressed at the high-school level and have lasting results (Weissberg et al., 2015; Williamson et al., 2015). For example, many studies have found positive correlations between the implementation of SEL curriculum and SEL development for students at the elementary and middle-school levels (Durlak et al., 2011; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2016; Williford & Wolcott, 2015), but SEL curriculum has yet to prove effective at the high-school level (Durlak et al., 2011; Williamson et al., 2015). Content and delivery methods of SEL curriculum in lower grades are simply inappropriate for secondary students (Girod et al., 2005; Williamson et al., 2015).

Some researchers posit that instead of implementing SEL curriculum, social and emotional needs may be addressed within the context of caring teacher-student relationships
(Noddings, 1992, 2002, 2015; Williamson et al., 2015). However, while studies have examined teacher care at the elementary and middle-school levels (Goldstein, 1998; Hayes et al., 1994; Spilt et al., 2012), there is a dearth of research on teacher care at the high-school level. Also, in the few studies that do focus on teacher care at the high-school level, social and emotional development has been ignored in light of focusing on academic outcomes (Davis, 2003; Konishi et al., 2010; Wentzel, 2003). Therefore, a significant gap exists in the current body of literature pertaining to teacher care and SEL growth at the high-school level. In order to address this gap, the purpose of this study was to examine how high school teachers who were nominated as being perceived as caring describe their care and promote SEL development in students.

Research Questions

1. How do caring high school teachers describe care in their classroom practice?
2. How do caring high school teachers promote SEL development in their students through planned curriculum and instruction?
3. How do caring high school teachers promote SEL development in their students outside of regularly planned curriculum and instruction?
4. Which SEL standards do caring teachers promote most with their students? Which SEL standards do caring teachers promote least with their students? Why?

Definitions

Development: the act or process of growing or causing something to grow or become more advanced; the process of lessening the gap between current and desired levels of performance (Merrell, Ervin, & Peacock, 2012).
Caring high school teachers: teachers at the secondary level who teach students in Grades 9-12 and who were nominated by their students as being perceived as caring.

Planned curriculum and instruction: explicit curriculum choices that were premeditated by the teacher or prescribed by the district or school (Eisner, 2002).

Promote: to help something happen, develop, or increase.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, and most importantly, secondary students. First, the results of this study provide in-service and pre-service teachers with data on care and SEL outcomes that can serve as resources for their own practice. Teacher preparation programs in recent years have placed the focus primarily on content knowledge and assessments and have neglected addressing relational aspects of teaching (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Hochstetler, 2014; Noddings, 1992, 2006). The lack of emphasis on caring relationships in the classroom is a missing link that is vital to helping teachers meet the needs of their students (Noddings, 2005). Therefore, the second group that will benefit from the findings of this study is high school students. When adolescents enter into caring relationships with teachers who are dedicated to meeting their academic, social, and emotional needs, this can serve as a catalyst for their development (Noddings, 1984).

In this study, data were collected from caring teachers who were already accomplishing this in their classrooms. Although research shows that caring teachers are currently making a difference in the lives of their students in many positive ways (Davis, 2003; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011; Wentzel, 2003), research is lacking to show outcomes specific to social and
emotional learning. The findings from this research can serve as a tool for pre-service and in-service teachers who seek to promote SEL development in their students in ways beyond schoolwide programming and curriculum.

Finally, this study adds significance in the realm of scholarly research by contributing to the body of literature on caring high school teachers and how they promote social and emotional learning in their students. This study fills a significant gap in the research and provides several recommendations for future research in these areas.

Methodology

In studying the narratives, reflections, and actions of caring teachers who promote SEL development in their students, the research design for this study was a basic qualitative study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mertens, 2015). The participants were chosen using theory-based sampling (Mertens, 2015) involving student nominations based upon Noddings’s (1984) theory of care as a guide. Participants were from Melo High School (name has been changed), which is situated in the midst of farmland west of Chicago. The participants were two female teachers and four male teachers varied by age, ranging from their mid-twenties to mid-sixties. Methods for data collection included interviews and classroom observations in addition to student surveys used in the sampling strategy. Methods selection ensured that triangulation of data had been achieved (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Participants were interviewed three times over the course of a summer and fall semester and observed two or three times depending on the quality of data collected during the first two observations. Data were analyzed using a three-step coding system. Beginning with a provisional “start list” of codes based upon care and SEL, data were coded according to “teacher actions” and “SEL standards” (Miles &
Huberman, 1994). Next, the codes were revised to develop broad categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, the categories were analyzed until broad themes emerged and connections were made that addressed all four of the research questions (Seidman, 2013). A full description of this analysis is included in Chapter 3.

**Delimitations**

This study was limited to six high school teachers at one midwestern suburban high school. To allow for in-depth data collection, the sample size was kept small. In addition, the condensed length of time was a delimitation. Data were collected over the course of one semester.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides a foundation for the importance of the study. It included the problem and purpose of this study as well as an overview of the framework used to complete the study. The second chapter contains a review of the literature on information related to the problem and the conceptual framework for the study. The third chapter presents the methods that were used. The fourth chapter details the data that were collected. Finally, the fifth chapter includes a discussion of findings and provides conclusions and implications for future research.
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide a more in-depth description of the theoretical framework that guided this study. The sections to follow will include discussions on care and SEL development as well as previous research that has operationalized those constructs.

Theoretical Framework

To begin, I will discuss the two facets of the theoretical framework that guided this study. First, I will explain Noddings’s theory of care (1984, 1992, 2002) and then I will discuss the construct of social and emotional learning (SEL).

Care

Everyone wants to care and be cared for (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Although the classroom is seen first and foremost as a place for learning, Noddings (2015) argues that the classroom is also a place for caring. Caring is beneficial to students both academically and socially (Goldstein, Goldstein, & Lake, 2003). There is no doubt that our schools can reap many benefits from having an environment characterized by an “ethic of care” (Monchinski, 2010), but this begs the question, “What constitutes care?” Many have contributed to the task of defining care, including teachers, students, philosophers, psychologists, and researchers (Gomez, Allen, & Clinton, 2004; Monchinski, 2010; Sheppard, 2010; Teven & McCroskey, 1997; White, 2003).
The framework known as “ethic of care” has been written about for decades, but this concept did not formally enter the education literature until the 1980s with the writings of Nel Noddings. Noddings’s definitions and descriptions of care have been articulated in several of her works and applauded by educators throughout recent decades (Monchinski, 2010). In the following sections I will define the construct of care as articulated by Noddings and other care ethicists. However, care is a multifaceted construct that is not easily defined. As Monchinski (2010) notes, “Care theorists consider it a danger to take some abstract individual as the starting point for an ethical model because such an individual is supposed to be representative of all rational humanity but cannot conceivably be” (p. 47). Although there are differences in the ways that care has been defined in the literature, several common threads exist. These include the purpose of care, the context of care, the actions of care, and the recognition and/or reciprocation of care. These facets were used in observation protocols, interview protocols, and sampling techniques discussed in Chapter 3. (Also, see Appendices C, D, and E).

**Purpose of Care**

The construct of care cannot be defined without mentioning the purpose of care or the intended outcomes of care. In most contexts, this purpose is that care will bring about a greater sense of well-being for the one cared for (Mayeroff, 1971; Monchinski, 2010; Noddings, 1984). When a teacher acts with care, he or she intends to serve students, protect students, enhance the lives of students, and reduce suffering for students (Noddings, 1984; Wilde, 2013). This may result in several outcomes that are academic, social, emotional, and behavioral (Goldstein 1998; Noddings, 2015). Although academic outcomes are studied frequently (Ang, 2005; Bernstein-
Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Davis 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Helm, 2007), other outcomes related to the “whole child” are also seen as important:

…for the genuine educator does not merely consider individual functions of his pupil, as one intending to teach him only to know or be capable of certain definite things; but his concern is always the person as a whole, both in the actuality in which he lives before you now and in his possibilities, what he can become. (Bubor, 2003, p. 123)

Therefore, the purpose of care is to help students become the best versions of themselves in multiple areas of life, if possible (Noddings, 2015).

Furthermore, some would say that the goal of care is to cultivate within the cared-for a disposition to become caring and act with intelligence in ways that meet human needs (Falkenberg, 2009). According to Noddings (1992, 2005), the purpose of care in education is for the one cared-for to become a caring individual, caring about other individuals, caring about content in school, and caring about the environment. This type of care in schools, Noddings (2005) believes, is the answer to creating a society that is honorable, reflective, and caring.

Similarly, Goldstein (1998) agrees by stating that caring teachers will be teaching their students more than academic knowledge. These children will have the opportunity to learn how to care. This moves beyond the mere modeling of desired behaviors. It is a moral stance that has the potential to transform education. (p. 247)

Although not every care theorist goes as far as Noddings and Goldstein in saying that the end goal of care is to create a more caring society, most agree that the end goal of care is to benefit the well-being of the one being cared for (Buber, 2003; Garza, Alejandro, Blythe, & Fite, 2014; Noddings, 2015; Mayeroff, 1971; Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996). In order for this to happen, however, care must take place within the context of a relationship in which the one caring is well knowledgeable of the realities and needs of the individual being cared for (Noddings, 1984).
Context of Care

Although some would argue that the construct of care does not need to have an “other” to receive the care (Engster, 2007; Monchinski 2010), most care theorists agree that care must happen in the context of a relationship (Bubeck, 1995; Monchinski, 2010; Noddings, 1984). In his book chapter that outlines the similarities and differences of care ethics theorists, Monchinski (2010) states:

The individual as conceived by care ethics theorists is embedded in a host of relationships with others, relationships that allow for her individuality. An ethic of care starts with people as they are and where they are, taking account of their positionality and standpoints, the relationships between them and the responsibilities that are assigned and assumed within these relationships. (p. 48)

Care in education must happen within the context of a relationship (Noddings, 1984). It is also necessary to discuss the difference between caring for and caring about someone or something. Noddings (2005) explains this difference by stating that caring for is “attentive, receptive, empathic, and responsive, and it is in direct communication with the cared-for. Caring-about [sic] may be identified with concern” (p. 123). Furthermore, if one truly cares for someone else, he or she must know that other person well enough to see how to respond to his or her needs. Generally, this cannot happen authentically outside the context of a relationship.

Even in the context of a classroom, a relationship must be cultivated to the point that the teacher has the knowledge necessary to appropriately show care. The teacher must know the student and see things from the student’s side (Buber, 2003; Garza et al., 2014; Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 2015; Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996). It is here that it can be seen how “care and knowledge creation are in an interlocking dance. The more I know about someone, the more it opens up the potential for care” (Hamington, 2012, p. 32-33). Therefore, the next step in the
cycle of care is the move to action (Noddings, 1984).

Actions of Care

Although some would describe caring as simply having a willingness to act on one’s behalf (Jacono, 1993), true care must be characterized by a desire and inclination towards someone coupled with action (Noddings, 1984). As stated above, care is reactive, responsive, and receptive, meaning that it results in action (or abstaining from action) in order to bring about the best result for the one cared for (Noddings, 1984). That action springs out of what Noddings terms “engrossment” (Noddings, 1984, 2002). Engrossment entails stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference and stepping into the other’s reality (Noddings, 1984). Once the one caring has entered into the life of the cared-for, he or she embodies engrossment as an “open, nonselective receptivity to the cared-for” (Noddings, 1992, p. 15). This means for an interaction to truly be a caring encounter, one must momentarily suspend personal desires and agendas and give full attention to the needs or desires of the one being cared for. The term Noddings (1992) uses for this suspending of personal agendas is “motivational displacement.” In that moment, the one caring is “seized by the needs of another” (Noddings, 1992, p. 16). As mentioned previously, this must take place within the context of a relationship in which the cared-for is known by the one caring, to the point that the one caring is well acquainted with the nature, way of life, needs, and desires of the cared-for (Noddings, 1984).

This concept of care intersects beautifully with educational theorists who believe in a child-centered approach to education. When a teacher knows and cares for her students, she can structure learning activities and instruction that are differentiated to meet their various needs (Davis, 2003; Dewey, 1915). For instance, a teacher who knows that a group of high school
students struggle with interpersonal relationships can structure learning activities around role playing that will help them learn and grow in these areas. Even beyond curricular decision making, the teacher who cares for her students understands different ways to communicate and interact with learners based on their needs. In the end, the students must be able to receive the care; ideally, they will be able to recognize and reciprocate the care as well (Noddings, 1984).

Recognition and Reciprocation of Care

The topic of reciprocation is the most controversial facet of Noddings’s (1984) theory of care. This last piece of the care cycle is crucial for Noddings because it is the determining factor on whether or not a true caring encounter took place. Some would say that care is entirely determined by the response of the one cared for in order for it to be considered true care (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). Thus, the person receiving the communication is the arbiter of whether or not a given exchange is caring (Noddings, 2005). Tosolt (2008) considers communication a key aspect of care and asserts that if care is not perceived on both the parts of the one caring and the cared-for, then a miscommunication has occurred, and true care did not take place. Similarly, Noddings finishes her definition of caring by saying, “...the cared-for completes the relation by recognizing—showing in some way—that the attempt to care has been received” (Noddings, 2015, p. 121). Caring happens in the context of mutual interactions (Mayeroff, 1971). Examples of this could include an act of service from a senior in high school who recognizes the teacher’s service to him (reciprocation), or an example from the current study would be students nominating their teachers as being caring (recognition).

Although care cannot be easily defined or operationalized, the aforementioned facets of care that are agreed upon by care theorists include the purpose of care, the context of care, the
actions of care, and the recognition of care. These facets demonstrate that care is not simply a dispositional attribute, but rather care is a capacity that can be developed (Noddings, 1992). The teacher helps her students develop into moral, caring beings through a series of modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings, 1984). It is not effective for teachers to simply teach their students to be caring. The teacher must model this and bring students into caring relationships in which dialogue is genuine and practice and confirmation are continual. As a teacher affirms positive caring qualities, as well as gently confronting destructive qualities that she sees in her students, they are propelled towards a more caring self. This idea of a “more caring self” intersects with the realm of social and emotional learning (SEL), which is the second piece of my theoretical framework.

Social and Emotional Learning

A demand for increased attention on social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools has emerged in the last couple of decades (Elias, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015; Hoffman, 2009; Noddings, 2005; Weissberg et al., 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007). Children and teenagers alike are being affected by drugs, violence, and other threats to their social and emotional well-being (Shriver & Buffett, 2015). According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health conducted in 2014, an estimated 2.8 million adolescents aged 12-14 in the United States had at least one major depressive episode in the past year (SAMHSA, 2015). Furthermore, other research shows that teenagers are likely to engage in risky behaviors that are hazardous to their emotional and physical health (Girod et al., 2005), and they are also plagued by a host of other mental health issues, relational stresses, identity crises, and other environmental stresses (Baldwin et al., 2006; Girod et al., 2005; Williamson et al., 2015).
In response to the number of teenagers affected by social and emotional challenges, many states are adopting standards for addressing these issues in schools. Since the mid-1990s, an increasing awareness of social and emotional needs for youth has given rise to the implementation of SEL standards in schools (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015; Hoffman, 2009). In 2001, the National Conference of State Legislators passed a resolution supporting the teaching of SEL skills in schools. Social and emotional learning can be defined as “the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others” (Zins & Elias, 2007, p. 234). SEL also entails learning how to set and achieve positive goals, how to make responsible decisions, and how to acquire the social and emotional skills necessary to navigate through personal and interpersonal challenges or opportunities (Dusenbery et al., 2015).

In 2004, Illinois became the first state in the U.S. to mandate the teaching of SEL standards in the classroom (Durlak et al., 2011). The Illinois State Board of Education presents the following main goals for SEL standards: develop social self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success, use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships, and demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts (ISBE, n.d.). These main categories of SEL standards in Illinois are illustrated in Figure 1.
Furthermore, these standards are parsed out according to grade level and given more specific learning objectives under three main categories. Table 1 below displays the specific SEL standards for early and late high school students.
Table 1

SEL Standards for Early and Late High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 1: Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success</th>
<th>Early H.S.</th>
<th>Late H.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Standard</strong></td>
<td><strong>1A.4a. Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decision-making and responsible behavior.</strong></td>
<td><strong>1A.5a. Evaluate how expressing one’s emotions in different situations affects others.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.</td>
<td><strong>1A.4b. Generate ways to develop more positive attitudes.</strong></td>
<td><strong>1A.5b. Evaluate how expressing more positive attitudes influences others.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1B.4a. Set priorities in building on strengths and identifying areas for improvement.</strong></td>
<td><strong>1B.4b. Analyze how positive adult role models and support systems contribute to school and life success.</strong></td>
<td><strong>1B.5a. Implement a plan to build on a strength, meet a need, or address a challenge.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Recognize personal qualities and external supports.</td>
<td><strong>1B.5b. Evaluate how developing interests and filling useful roles support school and life success.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals</td>
<td><strong>1C.4a. Identify strategies to make use of resources and overcome obstacles to achieve goals.</strong></td>
<td><strong>1C.5a. Set a post-secondary goal with action steps, timeframes, and criteria for evaluating achievement.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1C.4b. Apply strategies to overcome obstacles to goal achievement.</strong></td>
<td><strong>1C.5b. Monitor progress toward achieving a goal, and evaluate one’s performance against criteria.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on follow page)
### Table 1. Continued.

**Goal 2: Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standard</th>
<th>Early H.S.</th>
<th>Late H.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A: Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.</strong></td>
<td>2A.4a. Analyze similarities and differences between one’s own and others’ perspectives.</td>
<td>2A.5a. Demonstrate how to express understanding of those who hold different opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2A.4b. Use conversation skills to understand others’ feelings and perspectives.</td>
<td>2A.5b. Demonstrate ways to express empathy for others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B: Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.</strong></td>
<td>2B.4a. Analyze the origins and negative effects of stereotyping and prejudice.</td>
<td>2B.5a. Evaluate strategies for being respectful of others and opposing stereotyping and prejudice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2B.4b. Demonstrate respect for individuals from different social and cultural groups.</td>
<td>2B.5b. Evaluate how advocacy for the rights of others contributes to the common good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.</strong></td>
<td>2C.4a. Evaluate the effects of requesting support from and providing support to others.</td>
<td>2C.5a. Evaluate the application of communication and social skills in daily interactions with peers, teachers, and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2C.4b. Evaluate one’s contribution in groups as a member and leader.</td>
<td>2C.5b. Plan, implement, and evaluate participation in a group project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standard</th>
<th>Early H.S.</th>
<th>Late H.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A: Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.</strong></td>
<td>3A.4a. Demonstrate personal responsibility in making ethical decisions.</td>
<td>3A.5a. Apply ethical reasoning to evaluate societal practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3A.4b. Evaluate how social norms and the expectations of authority influence personal decisions and actions.</td>
<td>3A.5b. Examine how the norms of different societies and cultures influence their members’ decisions and behaviors. (Continued on following page)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the standards listed in the Table 1 are specific to Illinois, currently all 50 states have SEL standards in place at the preschool level, and 15 states have SEL standards at the K-12 levels (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2016). To date, the most common form of implementation is school-wide programming, and most of the current literature reflects SEL implementation in elementary or early childhood settings (Durlak et al., 2011; Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015). As stated in Chapter 1, there is a dearth of literature pertaining to caring teachers and their relational impact on students in the area of SEL outcomes. However, the current body of literature does include research on what constitutes a caring teacher, the various outcomes related to caring teachers, and the ways that SEL programs are currently being implemented. These topics will be addressed in the following literature review.
Many studies support the claim that positive teacher-student relationships lead to positive student outcomes (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Davis, 2003; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Helm, 2007); however, the relational dynamics of this topic are numerous and complex. Researchers have looked at how teachers communicate (Wanzer & McCroskey, 1998), how teachers carry themselves emotionally (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), how teachers make personal connections with their students (Frymier & Houser, 2000), how teachers provide support (Wang & Holcombe, 2010), and how teachers connect with their students (Konishi et al., 2010), among many other qualities. In light of the theoretical framework guiding this study, this literature review will focus on the current body of literature on how teachers care, as well as the outcomes of care. Special emphasis will be placed on social and emotional outcomes of care in the classroom.

Care Operationalized

One significant challenge to operationalizing care is that often researchers give no working definition for the construct of care (Van Sickle & Spector, 1996; White, 2003). Since care is not easily operationalized, many researchers begin with grounded theory and analyze emerging themes from the voices of students and teachers who are participants in qualitative studies (Davis, Gabelman, & Wingfield, 2011; Garza et al., 2014; Van Sickle & Spector, 1996). Van Sickle and Spector (1996) explained the need to use grounded theory in their study of how students perceive care in the classroom:

The writing to date about caring…primarily uses care and caring without the benefit of a description. This makes it necessary to choose a research design that would allow for
category or pattern development, because an operational definition for caring or building an ethic of caring does not exist. (p. 435)

Not only does Noddings deny the existence of an operational definition for care, but she also refutes the notion that care can be principle-based (Noddings, 1984; White, 2003). According to Noddings (1984), since the stance of the one caring is characterized by the ability to "act with special regard for the particular person in a concrete situation" (p. 24), there are no absolute principles to guide one’s caring in interactions with others. Rooted in attentive, receptive engrossment with a specific human being in a specific context, caring encounters are, by their very nature, variable, situated, and unique (Noddings, 1984, 2002). Furthermore, in more recent writings, Wilde (2013) criticized efforts to operationalize the construct of care by arguing that a pedagogy based on care simply cannot be reduced to a technical formula that is easily tested and measured with certainty.

Regardless of the many nuances of care, researchers have studied characteristics of care in the classroom both quantitatively and qualitatively, yet the use of qualitative measures far outweigh quantitative ones. First, I will begin by describing the few ways that care has been studied quantitatively. Second, I will describe the various ways that care has been studied qualitatively.

Quantitative Studies on Care

Although an instrument based solely on Noddings (1984) theory of care does not exist, Teven and McCroskey (1997) developed the Perceived Caring bipolar scale based on what they “presumed would be a measure of perceived caring” (p. 5). This Likert scale was given to 235 college students who were asked to rate the care of their professors. Items in this ten-question self-report survey questioned participants on their attitudes using a seven-point scale. An
example of an item of the Perceived Caring scale is, “My teacher has my interests at heart/Doesn’t have my interests at heart.” Respondents could choose (1) to mean they did not feel their teacher had the student’s interests at heart or any number up to (7) to mean they felt their professor did have the student’s interests at heart. Answers to these questions revealed how caring the college students perceived their professors to be, and then the results were correlated with how the students evaluated their teacher and the course. Students were more likely to give positive course evaluations for professors whom they perceived as being caring (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). In another study, Tosolt (2008) developed an instrument to measure care based on definitions in the care literature to date. His study consisted of items relating to fairness caring, academic caring, and personal caring. Results showed that perceptions of teacher care varied according to race, ethnicity, and gender. Items in this instrument were not included in his publication, however.

Also, in a 1997 study by Perry and Quaglia, 4,863 secondary students were surveyed to determine how caring they perceived their teachers to be. For this study, researchers used a portion of the Aspirations Survey, developed by the National Center for Student Aspirations, as their instrument. The survey items asked students to use a Likert scale to answer how much they agreed with statements regarding the care of their teachers. Students could answer “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” or “Strongly Disagree” to seven different items. An example of an item on this survey is, “My teachers care about my problems and feelings.” The researchers in the study divided these items into categories of “professional care” and “personal care.” Results found that more students perceived teachers as demonstrating professional care rather than personal care; however, the percentage of students who perceived their teachers as being personally caring was still high (Perry & Quaglia, 1997).
Of course, many other quantitative studies exist that measure teacher-student relationships (Ang, 2005; Den Brok, Brekelmans, & Wubbels, 2006; Spilt et al., 2012). However, the quantitative studies that focus explicitly on teacher care are extremely rare when considering the definition that Noddings (1984) ascribes to care as being “varied rather than rule-bound, predictable in the global sense but unpredictable in detail” (p. 24). This is most likely the reason why researchers who choose an ethic of care as their theoretical framework choose qualitative measures for operationalizing care.

Qualitative Studies of Care

Operationalizing care using qualitative methodologies differs greatly from quantitative methodologies. Within qualitative methodologies, the researcher may begin with very open-ended research questions regarding care and then search for emerging themes in the data that support or refute the constructs of care as defined by the literature (Van Sickle & Spector, 1996).

Care has been operationalized qualitatively through a wide variety of methods: teacher interviews (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Garza et al., 2014; Gomez et al., 2004; Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996; Van Sickle & Spector, 1996), interviews with other teachers in reference to a “caring teacher” (Gomez et al., 2004), classroom observations (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Garza et al., 2014; Goldstein, 1998; Hackenberg, 2010; Van Sickle & Spector, 1996), teacher self-reflections (Garza et al., 2014; Heid, 2008), dialogue journals between researcher and teacher (Goldstein, 1998), researcher-as-participant narratives (Goldstein, 1998; Heid, 2008), collection of artifacts (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Van Sickle & Spector, 1996), student interviews (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001; Davis et al., 2011), combination of student and teacher interviews (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Thompson & Ongaga,
2011), student focus groups (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001; Suldo et al., 2009; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011), and open-ended written responses from students (Hayes et al., 1994).

Many of the interview and focus group protocols from the studies listed above follow a set of questions that asked teachers, students, and administrators for their definitions of caring dispositions and behaviors (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Garza et al., 2014; Gomez et al., 2004). Some studies were based on more formal interview protocols. For instance, Davis et al. (2011) used the Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale as a structure for interview questions. Although this scale does not explicitly measure care, it measures closeness and influence in relationships; caring themes often emerge. Many findings from these studies reveal how teachers and students describe care.

Descriptions of Care

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, one roadblock to studying care is that researchers, theorists, students and teachers may have different working definitions for what constitutes care, such as considering the aspects of care that really matter and the opinions of both students and teachers on the matter. Students are apt to give their own perspectives on what constitutes a “caring teacher” (Ferreira, & Bosworth, 2001). In one particular qualitative study, middle school students were interviewed in order to elicit their own opinions on the topic. Descriptions of a caring teacher included the following: helping with work, explaining work, checking for understanding, encouraging, maintaining an orderly classroom atmosphere, and providing fun activities. Another characteristic of a caring teacher was treating students as individuals—getting to know them, coming to their sporting events, and/or caring for them emotionally (Ferreira, & Bosworth, 2001). Suldo et al. (2009) conducted a mixed-methods study
in which middle school students participated in focus groups to discuss teacher behaviors they perceived as being supportive. The following behaviors of supportive teachers emerged: connecting with students on an emotional level, using diverse and best practices teaching strategies, acknowledging and boosting students’ academic success, demonstrating fairness during interactions with students, and fostering a classroom environment in which questions are encouraged (Suldo et al., 2009).

In another study that examined the student voice, but on the college level, students ranked various communication components they experienced with their teachers. Results showed that referential skill (teacher’s ability to explain content clearly) and ego support (teacher’s ability to show emotional care and motivate students to succeed) were the two areas that students valued the most. Referential skill and ego support in the teacher were then linked to student motivation and academic success (Frymier & Houser, 2000).

In addition to these studies that feature student voice, other studies report using the teacher’s voice on the topic. In one such study, qualitative measures were used to reveal what “caring teachers” believed to be true on this topic. Teachers who were hand chosen based on student and administrator recommendations offered insight through personal interviews, classroom observations, and self-reflection journals. The themes that emerged included the following: fostering a sense of belonging, getting to know students personally, supporting academic success, and attending to physiological needs (Garza et al., 2014).

As findings emerged from these studies, care has been operationalized from the definitions, narratives, interviews, journal entries, and observations from both teachers and students alike. These themes are relatively consistent with Noddings’s definition and depiction of care, and they vary in scope and sequence according to unique situations. This situated
contextual view of care is also consistent with Noddings’s (1984) theory of care. These findings, however, have not been explicitly linked to the promotion of social and emotional development in high school students. Past research does, however, link aspects of care with other outcomes among various groups of students.

**Outcomes of Care**

I have discussed different ways that care has been operationalized and the various findings of how research participants define and recognize care. Another area of focus in the current body of literature is that of the outcomes identified with care. In the sections to follow, I will discuss studies that have shown both academic and SEL-related outcomes.

**Academic Achievement**

Researchers have been studying variables that lead to student success for decades (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Davis, 2003; Shumow & Schmidt, 2013; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). One of the most straightforward ways researchers prefer to define student success is by using grade point averages or test scores because of the objective nature of these measures. Therefore, many studies define student success as good grades or high scores on state or national tests (Ang, 2005; Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Davis 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Helm, 2007; Spilt et el., 2012). Although many factors contribute to academic success (such as socioeconomic status, social support, cultural capital, as well as other environmental variables; Jones, Pang, & Rodriguez, 2001; Labaree, 2012; Pong, Dronkers, & Hampden-Thompson, 2003; Semel, 2010), one factor that is gaining attention is the caring relationship a teacher has with his or her students (Cornelius-White, 2007; Davis, 2003; Hattie, 2009).
Studies have shown that students who have caring teachers are more likely to experience high academic achievement (Davis, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Wentzel, 2003). This means, when students know that teachers care about them, the students are more likely to work hard in those classes or approach those teachers when they need additional help (Shumow & Schmidt, 2013). This has obvious implications for academic success. Furthermore, schools characterized by caring teachers have been found to foster environments that demonstrate a culture of academic and social engagement and achievement (Brackett et al., 2011; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011; Wentzel, 2003). This also seems like an obvious benefit. When an entire school is characterized as a caring environment, the entire school benefits from an atmosphere of good work ethic and high academic success.

Although studies exist that focus on teacher-student relationships (Ang, 2005; Cornelius-White, 2007; Davis, 2003; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Hattie, 2009), it is hard to find research that specifically zeros in on aspects of care in those relationships. For instance, in a longitudinal study that followed 167 students from kindergarten through eighth grade, the teachers were questioned on their perceptions of their relationships with the students. The study revealed that good teacher-student relationships were related to good scores on standardized tests, work habits, and graduating eighth grade (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). This test measured student success by analyzing students’ grades in language arts and math, their scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and also teachers’ input on the students’ work habits. The scores for student success were positively associated with how teachers self-reported the quality of their relationships with their students. Students who had positive relationships with their teachers in earlier grades were more likely to demonstrate academic success in their older grades as well as graduate from eighth grade as opposed to students who had negative relationships with their teachers early on (Hamre
“Good teacher-student relationships,” however, were measured from the perspective of the teacher without gaining the feedback of the youth. According to Noddings (1984), it is important to take into consideration the perspective of the one cared for.

In another longitudinal study (Ang, 2005) that identified caring relationships from the perspective of teachers, students were followed from Grade 4 through Grade 8, and similar results emerged. In this particular study, teacher-student relationships were measured using the Teacher-Student Relationship Inventory (TSRI; Ang, 2005). Taking place in Singapore with a large population of Chinese students and teachers, multiple linear regressions were used to predict student success. Results revealed that high scores of teacher satisfaction (with student relationship) and instrumental help (how they feel they help their students) predicted higher academic achievement. Inversely, high levels of conflict predicted lower academic achievement (Ang, 2005). The constructs of teacher satisfaction and instrumental help can certainly be pieces of Noddings’s (1984) theory of care. These constructs were then related to academic achievement. Academic achievement was measured using students’ end-of-year cumulative scores, based on an average of their scores in English, mathematics, and science. An average score of the three subjects was obtained as an index of academic achievement and this score is what was correlated with teacher-student relationships. One limitation Ang (2005) mentions, however, is that the STRS may be a reliable measure for teacher-student relationships in Grade 4 or lower but another reliable scale should be developed for older students.

Similarly, Spilt et al. (2012) used longitudinal data to analyze student success outcomes relating to academic achievement, but they used a more diverse sample of students and followed them from first through fifth grade. The results of this study were similar to the aforementioned cases: relational qualities between teachers and students in lower elementary impacted academic
achievement in upper elementary (Spilt et al., 2012). Moving into the junior high years, Wentzel (1998) found correlations between teacher-student relationships and academic success as well. In a study of 167 sixth-grade students, mostly White, middle class and suburban, students recorded higher GPAs when they felt supported by their teachers (Wentzel, 1998, p. 203). The Teacher Support Scale included prompts like, “My teacher really cares about me.” The School Motivation Scale asked questions like, “I really enjoy being at school.” In general, when students feel that their teachers care for them, they are more likely to be interested in the classroom (Davis, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Spilt et al., 2012; Wentzel, 1998).

Although few and far between, some studies on this topic reveal similar results at the secondary level. Fifteen-year-old students from 41 different countries were included in the data collected in 2003 that focused on math and reading achievement scores, as well as scores that indicate teacher connectedness (Konishi et al., 2010). Students answered questions regarding teacher connectedness by answering items such as the following: “Students get along well with most teachers,” “Most teachers are interested in students’ well-being,” “Most of my teachers really listen to what I have to say,” “If I need extra help, I will receive it from my teachers,” and “Most of my teachers treat me fairly.” Results showed that there was a positive relationship between teacher connectedness and math achievement (Konishi et al., 2010). Once again, although these studies do not explicitly cover care, several facets of Noddings’s (1984) theory of care have emerged and have been linked to academic achievement. In addition to the studies that focus on academic achievement as a positive outcome of care, others have studied more whole-child outcomes that relate to care, specifically SEL outcomes.
SEL Outcomes

Educators, policy makers, administrators, and parents would agree that in addition to academic standards, schools should be promoting learning that entails social and emotional development as well (Elias, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003; Weissberg et al., 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007). Schools should be places that prepare students for life beyond the walls of the classroom, instead of just institutions that prepare students to pass paper-and-pencil tests (Noddings, 2015; Tyler, 1949; Wilde, 2013; Zins & Elias, 2007). When the primary focus of schooling is for students to pass high-stakes tests, the social and emotional aspects of the child is neglected. This happens to the detriment of the child, but also society as a whole. If we want our future society to flourish with caring individuals who are socially sensitive and critically thinking, we must recognize that education is more than passing tests (Hayes et al., 1994; Stedman, 2010; Weissberg et al., 2015).

So far, this literature review has presented an aggregate of studies that measure student success as academic achievement and then make correlations to care. This next section will present studies that show interactions between caring teacher-student relationships and other outcomes that include the “whole child.” Researchers have studied “whole-child” outcomes such as subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002; Suldo et al., 2009) and happiness (Noddings, 2003; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), to name a couple. To stay within the framework of this study, however, I will present studies that focus on outcomes related to SEL.

As mentioned in the framework section, SEL outcomes and standards have gained increased attention in the past few decades (Durlak et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Noddings, 2015; Weissberg et al., 2015). Academic achievement marked by
grades and test scores is not always indicative of true learning or growth in areas that are important for life outside the classroom (Conner & Pope, 2013; Kohn, 2000; Ravitch, 2011; Zins & Elias, 2007). One study from a high-achieving school district revealed that although the sample of students scored extremely high on academic tests, they reported low levels of affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement in the classroom, as well as low levels of mental health (Conner & Pope, 2013). Noddings (2006) believes that academic achievement and school involvement are not the end-alls to education if the social and emotional well-being of the child is neglected. In fact, Noddings (2002, 2003, 2006, 2013) emphasizes helping students learn critical thinking skills, develop as moral beings, and become happy individuals who have meaningful relationships, love their jobs, and benefit society. Education that caters to the “whole child” in this regard demonstrates a concern for what students can become in the future (Noddings, 2015). This is characterized by the caring teacher who is concerned for helping her students become the best versions of themselves (Falkenberg, 2009; Tate, 2006). A caring teacher is concerned for the student’s academic, social, and emotional growth as an individual. Most of the literature to date, however, focuses on strategies relating to SEL programming as opposed to relational strategies for individual caring teachers. This next section will describe some of the current SEL strategies that are in place and their effectiveness.

**SEL Strategies**

Across America, programs and curriculum are being implemented in schools in order to address SEL needs in the classroom (Durlak et al., 2011). Most of the strategies involve explicit instruction in SEL domains instead of using more organic approaches (Williamson et al., 2015). Although current research does not provide many explicit intersections between teacher care and
SEL outcomes, several programs are being implemented that target positive teacher-student relationships (Williford & Wolcott, 2015). Some of programs include the following: My Teaching Partner (Hamre & Pianta, 2005), Teacher-Child Interaction Training (McIntosh et al., 2000), Child Development Project/Caring School Community (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000), Responsive Classroom Approach (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2007), First Things First (Connel & Klem, 2006), and Career Academies (Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Several of these strategies have been found to be effective in achieving SEL outcomes for students, specifically in relationship development. Table 2 lists several programs that emphasize teacher-student relationships and have been effective in at least three different school settings (Williford & Wolcott, 2015).

One thing to note, however, is how teacher-student relationships are studied in these program evaluations. These programs look at teacher-student relationships as an outcome as opposed to the vehicle to achieve other SEL outcomes. Those items in Table 2 indicate programs that had effective student-teacher relationship outcomes, not necessarily positive outcomes in other aspects of social and emotional learning as a result of those relationships. Furthermore, while an ethic of care is not clearly defined in these programs, several note that caring relationships between teachers and students are beneficial to the overall effectiveness of the programs (Williford & Wolcott, 2015). Program effectiveness continues to be a concern for those implementing SEL strategies, and research continues to develop in this area.
Table 2
SEL Strategies That Measure Student-Teacher Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Student-teacher outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incredible Years (IY)</td>
<td>PreK-Elementary</td>
<td>Improved positive teacher behaviors; reduced student disruptive behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago School Readiness Project</td>
<td>PreK</td>
<td>Increased teacher sensitivity; increased children’s self-regulation; reduced child behavior problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Teaching Partner</td>
<td>PreK-secondary</td>
<td>Increased teacher sensitivity; increased student regulation; improved student academic outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking Time</td>
<td>PreK</td>
<td>Increased teacher competence; increased teacher reported closeness with students; decreased student behavior problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship-Focused Reflection</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Increased teacher sensitivity; reduced conflict for high-efficacy teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Child Interaction Training</td>
<td>PreK</td>
<td>Improved teacher use of praise; decreased student disruptive behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Development Project/Caring School Community</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Increased student prosocial and interpersonal concerns; increased motivation and academic achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive Classroom Approach</td>
<td>PreK-middle</td>
<td>Increased student pro-social behavior; improved math and reading achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Things First</td>
<td>Secondary middle</td>
<td>Improved student test score; increased attendance and graduation rates; reduced dropout rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Academies</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Improved student engagement and academic performance; reduced drop-out rates; improved completion rates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SEL Program Effectiveness

Studies and meta-analyses have validated the effectiveness of SEL curriculum in schools (Durlak et al., 2011; Dusenbery et al., 2015; Williford & Wolcott, 2015). A meta-analysis conducted in 2011 posited that schools should utilize SEL curriculum and programs in order to achieve success with the standards (Durlak et al., 2011). This meta-analysis used data from 213 studies that analyzed formal SEL programs in schools and found that students in these programs reported higher SEL outcomes and academic outcomes than their peers nationwide (Durlak et al.,
2011). Also, a recent brief was released in 2015 from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), an organization largely responsible for SEL initiatives both on state and national levels. The brief cited the Durlak et al. (2011) meta-analysis promoting the implementation of SEL programming in schools and outlined four ways SEL standards can be taught: 1. teachers using free-standing lessons that teach SEL standards to students, 2. creation of classroom and schoolwide conditions that facilitate and support SEL standards, 3. integration of skill instruction or practices that support SEL within the context of academic curriculum, and 4. school leaders to enforce a schoolwide initiative to promote SEL (Dusenbury et al., 2015). These four ways give general guidelines for how SEL can be incorporated into curriculum but do not give any other indications on teacher care or teacher disposition. Furthermore, these goals do not take into account organic ways teachers can foster SEL development in their students apart from explicit curriculum choices.

**SEL in High School**

Although emerging studies are beginning to turn the focus to secondary settings and alternatives to explicit SEL instruction by looking at relational aspects, more research is needed (Durlak et al., 2011; Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Williamson et al., 2015). Most of the SEL programs that are featured in empirical studies are those implemented in elementary school or middle school; although a few are being implemented on the secondary level, there is a dearth of empirical data to establish their effectiveness (Williamson et al., 2015). Even the highly cited Durlak et al. (2011) meta-analysis concedes that programs on the high-school level are studied less often than other settings; only 13% of the studies included in the meta-analysis were on the high-school level. Often, as is the
case in Table 2, studies on the high-school level focus primarily on academic outcomes. Furthermore, Williamson et al. (2015) note that even when programs are studied and published in articles and meta-analyses, rarely are they replicated.

Some of the programs mentioned above have been effective on the elementary or middle-school level but have not been successfully duplicated on the high-school level. Research supports that SEL topics for children are irrelevant for older high school students, and in some cases are counterproductive (Williamson et al., 2015). When Durlak et al. (2011) ran additional analyses in their study, they found that students’ mean age and program duration were significantly and negatively related to skill outcomes. In other words, SEL programming had weaker effectiveness the older the students were and the longer they were in the SEL programs. Current SEL programs developed for elementary and middle-school students are ineffective on the high-school level because the content and delivery methods are not age appropriate (Williamson et al., 2015). For instance, in programs such as D.A.R.E., scare tactics may be used in order to encourage younger children to avoid drugs because of the risks involved. For older high school students who thrive on risk taking, these tactics are simply ineffective and potentially hazardous (Girod et al., 2005; Williamson et al., 2015). Therefore, current research suggests that additional avenues to promoting SEL development in adolescents must be possible outside of existing curriculum and programming (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Williamson et al., 2015). It is for this reason that the current study is significant in filling this noticeable gap in the literature.
Conclusion

In conclusion, I have discussed the theoretical framework of this study involving the theory of care (Noddings, 1984) and SEL development. I have discussed various ways that care has been studied as well as several working descriptions for care. I have also discussed SEL programs and strategies as well as a brief description of the limitations in SEL research at the secondary level. The next chapter will address the methodologies used in the current study in relationship to this literature review and the current holes in the literature to date.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to address the gap that exists in the current body of literature concerning the intersection of care and SEL outcomes at the high-school level. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how caring high school teachers describe care in their classroom practice and promote SEL development in students. In order to accomplish this purpose, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do caring high school teachers describe care in their classroom practice?

2. How do caring high school teachers promote SEL development in their students through planned curriculum and instruction?

3. How do caring high school teachers promote SEL development in their students outside of regularly planned curriculum and instruction?

4. Which SEL standards do caring teachers promote most with their students? Which SEL standards do caring teachers promote least with their students? Why?

This chapter will include a discussion on the research design used to answer these questions. Then I will describe the participants, the context of the study, the data collection methods and the analysis procedures. Finally, I will discuss the limitations and delimitations of the study.
My theoretical framework necessitates qualitative methodology. In qualitative research, the researcher uses an inductive approach in which she makes sense of data at times without the use of pre-existing expectations (Mertens, 2015). She analyzes the collective personal stories of individuals or groups by using words, pictures, or artifacts as opposed to numerical data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glesne, 1999; Mertens, 2015). Qualitative methodology is utilized when studying multifaceted, complex phenomena, especially in cases when an “acceptable, valid, reliable, appropriate quantitative measure” does not exist (Mertens, 2015, p. 240). It is for these reasons that the construct of care must be studied through qualitative methods.

Noddings’s (1984) theory of care posits that care is a multifaceted construct that is not easily defined or operationalized. Care occurs within the context of a relationship and each relationship tells its own story (Noddings, 2002). In this respect, no two acts of care are entirely alike. According to Noddings (1984), since the stance of the one caring is characterized by the ability to "act with special regard for the particular person in a concrete situation" (p. 24), there are no absolute principles to guide those caring in their interactions with others. Rooted in attentive, receptive engrossment with a specific human being in a specific context, caring encounters are, by their very nature, variable, situated, and unique (Noddings, 1984, 2002). Qualitative methodologies, which by nature allow the researcher to study participants in the situated context of their own worlds, facilitate the unique study of care (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007); therefore, I used a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to analyze the words and actions of caring high school teachers.
As a researcher, it is important for me to understand my position within the study and how my background, my relationships, and my role within the study impact my ability to interpret data. Prior to conducting the study, I spent seven years teaching high school English in a small private school in Wisconsin. In this regard, my experiences working with high school students gave me familiarity with best practices in teaching and also familiarity with social and emotional struggles that high school students in a small community may experience. Although this familiarity was a benefit in many ways as I conducted the study, it also could have been a limitation by creating researcher bias. Additional opportunities for researcher bias were eliminated, however, by ensuring that I did not personally know any of the students who completed surveys and I did not know any of the teachers who participated in the study prior to my first visit to Melo High School. In this respect, I had to initially navigate the setting as an “outsider,” working to build relationships and gain trust in order to collect rich, honest data. By the end of the study, I had developed genuine relationships with the teachers who each made a tremendous impact on me. Upon the conclusion of my data collection, I accepted a position teaching high school English again where I was able to immediately incorporate many of the strategies and caring actions of the teachers I had just finished following so closely the previous semester. In the end, my role as teacher/researcher came full circle as I personally benefitted from the significance of the study.

Context

The first time I entered Melo High School during a school day, the halls bustled with students passing in all directions, and just like the students, I found myself having to awkwardly
figure out how to merge within the various traffic patterns to find my way to the first stop. I felt like a freshman on the first day of school, nervously trying to figure out which hall would get me to my first classroom. Although I never really figured out how all the hallways interconnected, I was always able to find a kind student or teacher in the hallway to direct me to my next location. For the most part, I found the students kind and welcoming despite my being a complete stranger to them. The building itself was welcoming as well, with wide hallways and bright artwork on the walls displaying student work.

Melo High School is a Midwest rural high school west of Chicago situated on a busy highway surrounded by farmland. Enrollment at the time of the study was 1,342 students with a majority White population (79.3%) who predominately speak English as their primary language (99.2%). One of the teachers even commented that as a result of the lack of diversity, many of the students seemed “sheltered” and did not understand many of the challenges associated with students from poor communities. Of the total student population, 15.4% were from low-income families, meaning students received public aid, lived in substitute care, or qualified for free or reduced lunches. At the time of the study, students at Melo High School largely experienced academic success with a graduation rate of 96% overall and 67% of graduating seniors being “college ready” (receiving a 21 or higher on their ACT).

Participants

For this study, participants were chosen through a two-step process of theory-based sampling (Mertens, 2015). In order to adequately answer my research questions, participants needed to qualify as being caring high school teachers. Although a strict checklist of caring qualities does not exist according to Noddings’s (1984) theory of care, several facets of care can
be recognized. For review, these facets include the purpose of care, context of care, actions of care, and recognition/reciprocation of care. The two steps to securing a sample through theory-based sampling included sending a survey to students and then using simple analysis to choose participants. Noddings’s (1984) theory of care served as the guiding lens for this process.

Step one entailed gathering input from students. One attribute of a caring relationship is that the one being cared for recognizes the care that is being received. With this in mind, I gathered nominations from the students in Melo High School by electronically disseminating a Google form on which students identified teachers whom viewed as caring. On the Google form, they were able to remain anonymous, but they identified their gender and grade-level. The Google form also provided students with a brief description of care that reflected Noddings’s (1984) theory of care. See Appendix A for the survey and metrics involved. The students wrote in the names of teachers they believed espoused this theory of care (Noddings, 1984) and submitted the form electronically. I received nominations from 274 students.

The second step was to collect and run a simple analysis of the results to select participants. I electronically tabulated the results and ran descriptive statistics on the data to look for frequency of nominations. I also used descriptive statistics to ensure equal representation from various grade levels: 27.5% were from seniors, 19.8% were from juniors, 27.5% were from sophomores, and 25.3% were from freshmen. The teachers’ names were then ranked in order from those who received the most nominations to those who received the least nominations. I finalized the six names that received the highest number of nominations and sent letters of intent to each individual to inform him/her of the study and request participation (see Appendix B.) Letters of intent were delivered in person at a face-to-face meeting at the end of spring semester. It was at this time that all six of the top-nominated faculty members gave their written consent to
participate. The teachers were informed that the data would remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms and through the private storage of information on a locked computer. Participants also agreed to the use of audio recording during interviews and classroom observations. Once the teachers agreed to participate, I began the data collection process. Full descriptions of each participant are included in Chapter 4.

Data Collection

This section of the chapter will provide information about each of the data collection techniques used. The two subsections detail how the interviews and observations were conducted.

Interviews

In order to collect the stories of the teachers and allow space for the teachers to reflect on those experiences, a semi-structured interview approach was utilized (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Seidman, 2013). The interview protocol created for each interview contained open-ended questions that allowed each teacher to freely express his or her experiences and reflect on the meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). Follow-up questions could be asked according to the direction of each answer. See Appendix C for the full set of interview protocols.

Prior to conducting interviews with the teachers, the interview protocol was validated through field testing. I used the interview protocols with a colleague who had been identified by colleagues as a caring teacher. After conducting the interviews with her, she gave suggestions for improvement. We analyzed the quality of the questions, the clarity of the terminology, and the effectiveness of the sequencing. I reflected on the feedback, reflected on the experience overall,
and made necessary modifications before using the protocol with my participants at Melo High School. Changes were minor but included changing the wording of some of the interview questions in order to elicit richer responses. For instance, I added phrases like, “Tell me the story of…” at the beginning of a few of the interview prompts to garner more narrations stemming from specific examples.

Once the interview protocols were finalized, the six teachers were interviewed separately on three different occasions; two interviews were held prior to classroom observations and the third occurred after (Seidman, 2013). The purpose of each interview differed slightly. The first interview was to establish a relationship, gather background information, and begin examining their aspirations relating to care (Seidman, 2013). Examples of prompts from the initial interview included the following:

- “Tell me the story of your journey to become a teacher.”
- “Describe a typical day in your classroom. If a random passerby looked inside, what would he or she see?”
- “Tell me the story of a student whom you have seen grow throughout a semester or year in your class.”

As the teachers answered these questions, I asked additional follow-up questions for clarification or additional exploration (Seidman, 2013). For example, when Kevin discussed stories relating to his student with Turner’s Syndrome, I needed to ask more questions to gain a better understanding of that particular condition. I also asked follow-up questions regarding how the other students responded and how he worked with the students to help them become more inclusive. The follow-up questions and answers provided additional insight into each teacher’s overall narrative.
The second interview gave the teachers opportunities to discuss their strategies for promoting SEL growth in their students. They were encouraged to narrate stories from their classrooms and to construct meaning from those stories (Seidman, 2013). Sample prompts from these interview protocols included the following:

- “Describe for me some ways that you might incorporate social and emotional learning into daily lessons.”
- “Tell a story of a particular student that stands out in your mind as demonstrating noticeable growth in one or more of the SEL standards.”
- “What are some ways that you believe you contributed to that growth?”

A third interview was scheduled shortly after the classroom observations in order to give each teacher an opportunity to address things that happened during the observations. I used this time to listen to the details that were important to the teacher by utilizing a critical incidents approach to the interview process (Flanagan, 1954). The interview protocol for this was constructed around the field notes that were taken during the classroom observation. For instance, a question during a third interview included, “When I observed your classroom, I noticed that you reminded Mary of a discussion you had with her last week about her stress level. Can you tell me more about that conversation?” Since interview three focused more on the classroom observations, no formal interview protocol existed. However, below are some examples of questions that I asked during the third interviews:

- “I noticed you talking to the girl in the front row during individual work time. It sounded like you were talking about her stress levels. Would you feel comfortable telling me more about that situation?”
- “How did you feel Socratic Seminars went? I was so impressed with how the students did, but can you tell me your thoughts and also tell me all the things you did with them leading up to that project?”
- “Can you explain to me a little about the student who jokes around a lot and why he has tally marks on the board?”
In each of the aforementioned scenarios, I created those questions based on events that seemed noteworthy during my observations. I also asked at the end of each third interview if there was anything else the teachers wanted to explain about what I observed during their classes. See Table 3 below for the breakdown of the three interviews.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Protocol</th>
<th>RQ Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Interview</td>
<td>Establish relationship; gather background information; solicit responses on aspirations of care</td>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Interview</td>
<td>Allow participants to construct meaning from their efforts to promote SEL growth in her students</td>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Interview</td>
<td>Gather additional information after the classroom observation; reflect on the lesson observed</td>
<td>Customized Protocol based upon field notes and critical incidents approach</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews with each teacher were held separately in either his/her classroom or another quiet place at the school that the participant chose (Glesne, 1999). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio recorded. Three of the initial interviews were conducted over the summer and the rest occurred within the fall semester; the classroom observation occurred between interviews two and three. Interview three occurred within one day of the final classroom observation. This short timeline allowed information to stay fresh in the teachers’ minds (Seidman, 2013).
In addition to the interviews, I conducted classroom observations to add reliability to the findings from the interviews. To focus my observations on the research questions I had developed, I was selective in the observation process (Mertens, 2015). Therefore, I created an observation protocol that I used as a template for handwritten notes during the observations. In addition to providing space to write the time and place of the observation, this observation protocol provided two separate columns: one to write down actions of care and one to write down evidence of SEL promotion. See Appendix D for the observation protocol template. I had also created tables that I used for reference when taking notes in these columns as I continually made evaluations on what pieces to register into the log (Mertens, 2015). (See Tables 4 and 5.) Quick glances at these tables throughout my classroom observations helped me focus my field notes on aspects of care and SEL promotion as articulated by the theoretical framework. During the observations, I focused my handwritten notes on things that I observed in the classroom that would not show up on an audio recording. For example, I noted the facial expressions, mannerisms and gestures of the teachers, paying careful attention to how they interacted with their students. I also took note of significant teacher quotes that I wanted to revisit during the recording and wrote down the time stamps for each. During the transcription phase, I typed out narratives of each observation by weaving in the data from my handwritten notes with significant moments from the recording as I listened to each one played back.
Table 4
Theory of Care Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facet of Care</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Care</td>
<td>• Focused on the well-being of the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Looking to meet both the academic needs and other “whole child” needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aimed at creating more caring individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of Care</td>
<td>• Evidence of a relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge of the academic, social, and emotional needs of the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Direct communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Attentive, receptive, empathetic, responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Seeing things” from the student’s perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions of Care</td>
<td>• Acting on the student’s behalf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inaction in the best interest of the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Engrossment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Motivational Displacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meeting academic needs/differentiating instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Meeting SEL needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition and Reciprocation of Care</td>
<td>• Sign that student recognized care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student returns acts of care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 gives brief snapshots of the four different aspects of care as described by Noddings (1984); Table 5 gives the three general goals that Illinois has set forth for social and emotional learning with subgoals under each one.
Once the observation protocol, Care Guide, and SEL Guide were tested and after the first two rounds of interviews, I scheduled two or three classroom observations per participant. Observations lasted approximately 45 minutes each. I also arrived five minutes early and stayed five minutes late to observe any interpersonal interactions between the teacher and the students outside of class time. Initially, I planned to observe each teacher twice, but if I was not able to gather an adequate amount of data from just two visits, I scheduled a third visit with the teacher.
In the end, I observed Kevin and Nate a total of three times and the other teachers twice (see Appendix G).

Throughout the data collection process, I wrote my own personal narrative in the form of researcher memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). See Table 6 for the complete sampling and data collection timeline.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and occurred as data were being collected. The following sections will detail how the data were analyzed. I will discuss transcribing procedures and coding procedures. Finally, I will discuss how I ensured trustworthiness throughout the study.

Transcribing Procedures

After the data collection, I transcribed all interviews, observation field notes, and personal memos myself by using Google Voice and stored each transcription electronically on Google Drive with pseudonyms to protect participant identity. All data analysis and organization took place electronically by utilizing NVivo, a software designed for qualitative research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Field Testing</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
<th>Step 4</th>
<th>Step 5</th>
<th>Step 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Interviews/Classroom Observations</td>
<td>Give Student surveys</td>
<td>Select participants/gain consent</td>
<td>Interview One</td>
<td>Interview Two</td>
<td>Classroom Observations</td>
<td>Interview Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument/Procedure</td>
<td>Appendix C and D; Collaborative Analysis and revisions</td>
<td>Google form: Appendix A</td>
<td>Google form: Appendix A; Nominations were calculated, and faculty members were contacted starting with the one that received the most nominations. This procedure continued until six faculty members agreed to participate.</td>
<td>Interview Protocol: Aspirations of care/Appendix C; participants interviewed separately for approx. 45 minutes</td>
<td>Interview Protocol: SEL Actions/Appendix C; participants observed in 2-3 forty-five minute class periods.</td>
<td>Observation Protocol: Appendix D; participants observed in 2-3 forty-five minute class periods.</td>
<td>Interview Protocol: Post-Observation/Appendix C; participants interviewed separately for approx. 45 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding and Analysis Procedures

Each research question warranted three phases of coding and analysis. The general process included (1) using a provisional “start list” of codes to label chunks of data, (2) taking the chunks from phase one and re-coding using an open-coding system to create categories, and (3) analyzing the newly formed categories for broad emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interview transcripts, observation field notes, and personal memos were analyzed in each of the phases for each research question. In the sections to follow, I will describe those phases for each specific research question.

RQ1: Care

Research Question 1 was, “How do caring high school teachers describe care in their classroom practice?” In order to answer this question, the three phases for data analysis focused on the construct of care. Phase one for this research question entailed coding the data according to a provisional “start list” using the four facets inherent in Noddings’s (1984) theory of care. Chunks of data were assigned the following codes: (PC) purpose of care, (CC) context of care, (AC) actions of care, and (RR) recognition/reciprocation of care (refer again to Table 4 for the descriptive features of each of those codes). Table 4 functioned as a coding guide during this first phase. In phase two, I took each of the four preliminary codes and used an open coding system to create smaller categories within those facets. An example of a code that was given during this phase included, “Teacher gives positive reinforcement.” Finally, the final phase involved looking for broad emerging themes across categories and across participants.
RQ 2-3: Teacher Actions

Research Questions 2 and 3 concentrated on specific teacher actions that lead to SEL outcomes. These questions read: “How do caring high school teachers promote SEL development in their students through planned curriculum and instruction? In what ways do caring high school teachers promote SEL development in their students outside of regularly planned curriculum and instruction?” Phase one for the analysis of this question was to parse out chunks of data into two different groups: (IP) actions inside of planned curriculum and instruction and (OP) actions outside of planned curriculum and instruction. Phase two involved using an open-coding system to code chunks into more specific categories within these two groups. An example of a code that was assigned during this phase included, “Teacher greets students at door by name.” Finally, data were analyzed for broad themes across categories and across participants.

RQ4: SEL Standards

The final research question was, “Which SEL standards do caring teachers promote most with their students? Which SEL standards do caring teachers promote least with their students? Why?” To answer these questions, the first phase of coding began with a “start list” of codes that included each of the three broad goals of the Illinois SEL standards. Phase two included looking at each of the chunks of data under those three broad goals and assigning more specific subcategories according to the more detailed standards under those goals. Finally, I analyzed the results to determine which standards were used most frequently and which standards were used the least. I finished the process by looking for emerging themes that developed. See Table 7 below for the coding and analysis process.
Table 7

Coding and Analysis Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase One: Separate Data according to “start list” of codes.</th>
<th>RQ 1: Care</th>
<th>RQ 2-3: Teacher Actions</th>
<th>RQ 4: SEL Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Codes: (CC) Context of Care (PC) Purpose of Care (AC) Actions of Care (RR) Recognition/Reciprocation of Care</td>
<td>Codes: (IP) Inside Planned Activities (OP) Outside of Planned Activities</td>
<td>Codes: (G1) Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success (G2) Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships. (G3) Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Two: Use an open coding system to create categories within the codes from phase one.</td>
<td>Categories within codes of care</td>
<td>Categories for specific teacher actions</td>
<td>Divide into the subcategories for SEL standards. See Table 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Three: Look for emerging themes across the categories</td>
<td>Emerging themes for care</td>
<td>Emerging themes for teacher actions</td>
<td>Emerging themes for SEL standards addressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trustworthiness

One vital criterion for qualitative research to be of good quality is trustworthiness (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In this study, one method for ensuring trustworthiness was the process of field testing, which was described in the data collection section. In addition to field testing, trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of data and member checks (Mertens, 2015).
Triangulation involved “checking information that had been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data” (Mertens, 2015, p. 271). In this study, triangulation occurred through the collection and analysis of student surveys, teacher interviews, and classroom observations. Having three different sources from which I pulled data bolstered the trustworthiness of my findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Additionally, performing member checks was another way to ensure trustworthiness and guard against misinterpretation on the part of the researcher (Mertens, 2015). I performed these member checks informally at the end of each interview by summarizing the data that had just been collected and asking the participant for verification. This process included me reading through the notes, drawing any final conclusions from the summary, and asking the teacher for any clarification or additional information he or she would like to provide. Once we finished, the participant verbally verified that the information was complete and accurate. Furthermore, the third interview served as a member check for the data that I collected during the classroom observations.

Limitations

It should be noted that some limitations existed in this study that may create difficulties for large-scale transferability. First, the small sample is a limitation, yet the nature of qualitative research necessitates a smaller sample size than quantitative research. Furthermore, findings from this study may be used as a basis for larger scale studies in the future. A warning, however, is to be cautious when considering the generalizability of this study since the sample size was small. Second, the exact timing of the study may prove to be a limitation since data were only collected during one semester. A third limitation is the lack of pre-existing instruments analyzing
facets of care and SEL development. The instruments used in this study were created specifically for use in this study. Although they were field tested, they were not validated in any prior studies. Finally, another limitation is the possible researcher bias that may have existed while interpreting my data being that I myself had taught high school students for seven years prior to the study, which may have contributed to preconceived notions on the operationalization of care.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the methodology beginning with an overview of the research design, followed by an explanation of the theory-based sample and a description of the context for this study. Then, I discussed how data were collected through surveys, interviews, and observations. I included a discussion on how the data were analyzed. Finally, I discussed the limitations of the study. The chapter to follow will discuss the findings of my study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter contains descriptions of each of the six participants, explanations of major themes, and findings to answer the research questions. The findings in this chapter were gathered from a three-part interview series with each of the teachers as well as two or three classroom observations per teacher. I subsequently coded all of the interview and observational data and found emerging themes across all participants. To begin the chapter, each teacher will be introduced, including details about personalities, teaching styles, and use of instructional strategies.

Participants

The teachers were chosen based on nominations from students declaring who they perceived as being caring (see Appendix A). The six teachers from Melo High School with the highest quantity of votes were asked to participate in the study, and each consented. Captured in Table 8, I have used pseudonyms in place of their given names, along with their ages, years of teaching experience, and subject matter taught.
Table 8
Teacher Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Subject Matter Taught</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
<th>Grades Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9th-12th</td>
<td>11th-12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>56-60</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9th-12th</td>
<td>9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9th-12th</td>
<td>9th-12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10th-12th</td>
<td>10th-12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>Choir</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9th-12th</td>
<td>9th-12th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the exception of English and chemistry, the rest of the subjects taught by these teachers fell under the category of non-traditional or elective-type classes. Although speech class is required at Melo High School, it is a short class that only lasts one semester. The other five classes were year-long. It should be noted that only two of the participants in the study were female and four were male. Often, Noddings (1984) and other care theorists (Bubeck, 1995; Mayeroff, 1971; Monchinski, 2010) are criticized for having too feminine a view of care that does not transfer well to caring males. Data from a majority of male participants may give new insight to these criticisms. One last noteworthy demographical piece of data is that all but one of the teachers were veteran teachers with more than ten years of experience; perhaps this adds insight to any positive relationships between teacher experience level and teacher care. The next
section provides reflective snapshots of the individual teaching styles, philosophies, and personalities of the teachers in the study.

Brooke

A vibrant and energetic speech teacher in her late fifties, Brooke dressed in colors as bright as her personality. Each day she was interviewed or observed, she donned colorful sweaters, chunky jewelry, and a smile that could light up any room. At the time of the study, Brooke was primarily teaching speech and communications classes, but she also has had years of experience teaching English and coaching track. Although she no longer coaches, she keeps in contact with many of her former players and still runs with some of them as well. Another unique fact about Brooke is that she spent several years teaching at Melo Middle School prior to her secondary teaching career, so many of her current students are also former middle school students of hers.

Brooke’s interview transcripts are full of personal stories about her students but also stories of her home life and her experiences as a mother. She attributed much of her caring personality and expertise as a teacher to the crossover between her role as a mother and a teacher. The students were also well acquainted with stories about Brooke’s children and even stories from Brooke’s own adolescent experiences. She attributed her educational career to her mother and her grandmother, who were both teachers, and she said she models her teaching style after her favorite high school teacher, Mrs. C: “I still do model a lot of my teaching how she did; she told stories, she made us feel like she was a human being and not just a teacher” (Brooke, Interview 1).
The theme of “showing students the human side of a teacher” emerged quite a bit in Brooke’s data. This is one of the primary ways that she connected with her students in order to develop meaningful relationships with them and use teachable moments to help them grow socially and emotionally. Because of the nature of her subject matter, speech class allowed her the flexibility to give many personal examples. Also, the practicality of speech class allowed her to make many real-life connections for the students. She mentioned “throwing herself under the bus” eight times throughout her interviews in reference to times that she gave real-life examples of her struggles or failures. This was also observed during her speech class when she laughed about her inability to get the screen to work or her personal stories of her teenage foibles growing up.

Brooke’s classes felt relaxed, fun, yet still fast paced. There was a buzz of chatter in the room and a spark of energy as she taught and as she glided around desks checking students’ work. Brooke addressed the students by name, periodically talked about things relating to their personal lives, and she enjoyed friendly banter back and forth. It is not hard to imagine why the students voted for her: her personality was engaging, her disposition was approachable, and her teaching style was student centered. When asked to talk about some of her caring actions, Brooke struggled to find the words because it is so ingrained in who she is as a person that she could not pinpoint what it is that she does to communicate care: “I don't think, I don't purposely try to do any of that, it's not like in my plan... I mean I just really and sincerely care about them” (Brooke, Interview 3).
The other female participant in the study was also a veteran teacher. Tara was in her 27th year of teaching and was looking forward to retirement next year. She carried herself like a teacher who had weathered many years of classroom work. Her movements were a little slower and more calculated than the younger teachers. She struck me as a teacher who is a pillar of strength, passion, and resilience. Her clothing and jewelry choices were classy and simple. She had shoulder-length dark blonde hair and smile lines beautifully cascading across her face. At the time of the study, Tara taught freshman health and also a health elective for juniors and seniors. In the past, Tara had taught physical education and coached tennis. Over the course of her career, she experienced many hardships, including taking time off to endure cancer treatments. Tara explained, “My kids were like, ‘Mom, you've taken care of other people for 20 years; it's time to take care of yourself’” (Tara, Interview 1). It was not long before she was back in the classroom, however. Tara finished her treatments, took a semester off, and then was back in the classroom the following semester.

Tara’s grandmother was a teacher, and she remembered always playing “school” when she was a small child. It was if she was destined to become a teacher. Tara was a caring teacher with a self-proclaimed “my way or the highway” approach in the classroom (Tara, Interview 1). She believed she got this approach from both her grandmother and her father:

Grandma was very caring, very loving. Very firm discipline. Kind of the old school, and I am that way. My dad was a marine. So there comes my tough discipline...I am firm but fair, that is my motto. I, I don't put up with a lot of crap. (Tara, Interview 1)

I was able to witness this approach first hand in the classroom during my observations of her teaching. With a stoic face in a classroom so quiet one could hear a pin drop, Tara lectured on
the male anatomy to a group of wide-eyed freshmen. Occasionally Tara would insert a dry joke to lighten the mood, and her students seemed to appreciate the opportunity to let out some of their pent-up giggles. Impressively enough though, the students listened to every one of her words and were able to stand up and recite textbook definitions and anatomical terms relating to reproduction in a review game at the end of one of the classes. Although the tone of class felt slightly more formal and traditional than some of the other classrooms I observed, it was obvious that Tara cared about the social and emotional needs of her students, and her students recognized that and appreciated it.

Nate

Nate was the rookie teacher of the group, as he had only been teaching for a couple of years at the time of the study. Additionally, this was his first year teaching at Melo High School, which makes it quite impressive that he was nominated by the students for this study. Nate taught Enhanced Chemistry, in addition to being the assistant wrestling coach for the school. His classes contained a mixture of both lower- and upper-classmen, so Nate continually had opportunities to differentiate instruction and meet the varied needs of his students.

Funny, sarcastic, and laid back, Nate was a young teacher who got to know his students on a personal level by having small natural conversations with them every time he could. He spent time with many of them outside of school through sports or lifting, and he made it a point to get to know each of their names within the first few days of class. Nate was not afraid to call students out and confront laziness or selfishness, but he believed he had a platform to do that since he had already built trust with them:

I will call people out. I think that is important. I think a lot of times teachers won't call students out because they don't have a relationship with them or they will go right to the
parents and have the parents deal with it. But I am here right now, and I can make the difference. So, if I have a relationship with you I can call you out. Like, “Were you out late last night or what's going on?” Some teachers if they did that with kids they would be really offended. But for me it's sparked some conversation and we get to talking. (Nate, Interview 2)

Nate spent a lot of time in small conversations with individual students before and after classes, in the hallway, and during lunch periods in order to develop these relationships.

Nate was interesting because when I first met him, he gave off a smug, “tough guy” sort of vibe which contradicted my preconceived stereotype of a “caring teacher.” Once I got to know him, though, I found that he used his funny, smug personality in the class to be real with his students, to build rapport through humor, and to connect with students on a personal level. Nate mentioned using his personality as a tool to connect with students nine times during his interviews. One such representative comment included:

I don't try to be something that I'm not. I really let my personality shine. I think the kids enjoy that and they see that. Not everyone can teach the way I teach. Because not everybody's got the same personality. I think I'm very open with the kids in terms of letting them see that and letting them see my personality and see who I really am. (Nate, Interview 3)

Nate cared about his content and worked hard to help the students care and work hard as well. When I asked Nate what an observer might see if he or she walked past one of his classes, he responded with, “…that kids are actually enjoying themselves and engaged. And I think one of my best skills as a teacher is making things that might not be exciting in other classes exciting.” (Nate, Interview 1). From my observations, I noted that the students responded well to his humor, and there was a healthy exchange back and forth with his students in the form of funny, sarcastic banter. Small quips like “No-Ana” in response to someone asking if he’s seen Moana (Nate, Classroom Observation) and sarcastic responses such as “Will you sit down? I’m about to
take your pencil and burn it” (Nate, Classroom Observation) are commonplace in Nate’s classroom and usually invite a wave of giggles and laughter from his students. The students loved Nate, and they obviously felt comfortable with him.

Kevin

What impressed me most about Kevin was not necessarily what he was, but rather what he was not. Unlike Nate or Brooke, Kevin did not seem particularly warm, gregarious, energetic, or charismatic. He would greet students at the door rather matter-of-factly, and his communication was always straightforward and down to earth with an almost monotone quality in his voice. An English teacher in his late thirties with ten years of teaching experience under his belt, Kevin struck me as a typical “fly-under-the-radar” type of teacher who just worked hard and did his job well.

On my first day of observations, I could see his bright green apple socks barely peeking out under his navy dress pants. Other than that subtle pop of color, Kevin was usually wearing all neutral colors. He always looked professional and did not wear anything that drew attention to himself. In general, that seems to describe his personality quite aptly as well--he did not do or say anything flashy or attention seeking. In fact, it did not seem like he needed to make much of an effort to gain the attention of the class. He spoke. They listened. When I asked Kevin how he accomplished this, he paused for a very long time. Then he laughed, “I don’t entirely know” (Kevin, Interview 3). Kevin paused again and then replied:

I mean I don't have to work too hard to establish you know behavioral expectations and stuff like that beginning. I treat them like adults. I tried to, I don't confiscate their phones. You walk into a lot of classrooms and see a hanging cell phone pocket. I don't do that. I address that personally… if it becomes abusive behavior, then I do. So, I think they like feeling like adults, to try to talk to them like adults. (Kevin, Interview 3)
Treating his students like adults went a long way for Kevin in the classroom. I observed his interactions with them and noticed several times where it felt like he was just conversing with friends. Although many veteran teachers would warn against that out of fear for losing respect with the students, Kevin clearly did not have that problem. The respect the students had for him was evident and was perhaps directly related to how hard he worked for them.

Of all the participants, Kevin may have been one of the hardest working teachers when it came to lesson planning and giving detailed feedback to all of his students. Kevin commented, “So I think the level of trust just comes from their understanding of how hard I'm working, doing things like conferences...It's not just like me throwing grades out there thoughtlessly and carelessly. They see my commenting on everything” (Kevin, Interview 2). Even with two small children to care for with his wife, Kevin brought home hours of grading to ensure that each student understood how he or she could improve and had the resources to do so. Between his elaborate feedback and his peer-like relationships with his students, Kevin was a teacher who made a deep impact on his students.

Justin

The last two teachers in this study were unique because they were both music teachers, so they had similar experiences to one another in the way they interacted with students for large amounts of time outside of class. This was also comparable to the other teachers who had experience coaching sports in addition to teaching in the classroom. Justin, a middle-aged band director with a wiry frame and a skip in his step, worked with groups of 50-158 students from freshmen to seniors on a regular basis. Just like Brooke, it was hard for him to pinpoint exactly why his students perceived him as being caring; it was just who he was. The one theme that kept
emerging with Justin, however, was this concept of extra time. Because he was with these students for so many hours throughout the year during camps, regular classes, and extra rehearsals, he felt that enabled him to make a deeper impact on his students than regular classroom teachers. Justin recalled, “Part of it is because we spend so much time with all of the extra rehearsals, it becomes kind of away from home....it’s that sense of this is a safe place” (Justin, Interview 1). Like many of the other teachers, Justin offered his classroom as a place where students could come during lunch or after school. The band room became a place of comfort and refuge for many.

When I observed Justin during his classes, I was impressed with how much work a very large group of 9th-12th graders could accomplish in a short time. A slight gesture from Justin would prompt a specific group of instruments to begin running through measures without question. The whole group would start and stop perfectly on cue. They were a well-oiled machine. I did not always know what was going on, but the students did and that was all that mattered. Justin worked hard in the beginning of the year to ensure the students understood expectations, routines, and communication cues because there were few to no classroom management issues, and all the students were on board with what was going on. There was no time wasted.

Justin gave them challenging music to work through but also gave them the extra help and support that they needed in order to master it. This was an environment where the students knew it was fine to make mistakes because Justin would help them fix those mistakes and help them on their way to mastery. Whether they were working together in one large group or divided into smaller units to work on their own, the students followed Justin’s lead, or they followed their section leaders, in order to pursue success in their musical performance. It was obvious that
Justin cared about the quality of their music, but he also had genuine concern for the well-being of his students.

Steve

The other music teacher who participated in the study was Steve, a choir director in his early forties who drove his students harder than any teacher I have ever met. Steve was a taskmaster. A friendly taskmaster, but a taskmaster indeed. The students, however, had bought into what was happening, and they willingly complied with the rigorous demands of his class. I have never in all my years of working with teenagers witnessed a harder working group of students.

When I walked into the room for my first set of observations, Steve matched his students, all donning various hockey jerseys. This was the week before their madrigal concert, and they treated it as their own spirit week with fun themes that subsequently lead up to the concert and a Christmas party. Steve had friendly exchanges with his students until the bell rang, and then it was game time.

The attention that Steve gave to the warmups was the same kind of attention I would expect from someone directing a competition piece in the height of a performance. He listened and watched attentively, correcting and guiding each moment of the warmup. The sound filled the room, and although it was simply warmup scales, I thought it sounded like a choir of angels. As they moved into the actual rehearsal time, they worked on a total of about four measures. The rehearsal was tedious and every time I thought it sounded perfect, Steve stopped them, corrected several different things and then demanded that they sing it again. Steve kept a quick pace; everything felt brisk--from the pace of his voice to the transitions in between activities. His tone
was direct, but not harsh. The students never complained. They stayed on task. They admitted their mistakes and then worked so hard to correct them.

The most distinguishing feature about Steve’s teaching strategy was that he held them to a high standard of excellence and was relentless in pushing them to achieve these lofty goals. Steve was highly skilled in his content, and it was obvious that he desired that same level of expertise for his students. Steve explained his philosophy:

It is so important to set really lofty goals for students. I think far too often, in education, people see the limitations of students as opposed to the possibilities. I think for me, what the students appreciate, I think they sense the sincerity, even though I push them. I'm only doing it because I know what they're capable of and I want to help them get there. I am unrelenting in that pursuit. I think often, too often, we put invisible barriers up. So for me, I'm constantly trying to remove them. (Steve, Interview 3).

This quote encapsulates everything that I witnessed in his classroom. It also explains why the students were willing to work so hard for him: they knew he was pushing them for their own well-being. This was how he showed them that he cared. As a result, his students accomplished so much in his classroom and were better equipped for achieving excellence in the future as well.

Major Themes and Subthemes for Care

The findings of this study revealed that each teacher carried out actions of care in ways that were unique to the individual teacher and also that comported with the different facets of care as defined by Noddings (1984). Each teacher verbalized a desire to seek the well-being of his or her students (Purpose of Care) and then sought to meet those needs through various caring actions (Actions of Care). In order to meet these needs, however, they needed to be carried out within the context of a relationship with the students (Context of Care). Finally, the caring actions were indeed recognized by the students (Recognition and/or Reciprocation of Care). The fact that these teachers were nominated as being caring teachers demonstrated this final theme.
See Appendix E for descriptions of each facet of care.

In addition to the major themes associated with Noddings’s theory of care (1984), several subthemes emerged from the data to answer Research Question 1. Under the major theme of Actions of Care emerged subthemes of meeting academic needs, pushing students outside comfort zones, and showing interest. Under the major theme of Context of Care emerged the subthemes of time, relatability, mutual respect, and comfort/security.

**Research Question 1**

How do caring high school teachers describe care in their classroom practice?

In addressing this question, data from the teachers’ interviews and observations revealed each one of the aforementioned themes and subthemes concerning *Purpose of Care, Actions of Care and Context of Care.*

**Purpose of Care**

According to Noddings (1984), the purpose of care should always be directly related to the well-being of the one being cared for. After analyzing the data from the interviews and classroom observations, *Purpose of Care* emerged as the first major theme under Research Question 1. During the course of the study, each of the six participants expressed a desire to enhance the well-being of his or her students and to do what was best for them. Their motivation, or in other words, their purpose of care, was vested in the best interest of their students. As Brooke aptly stated, "If you are a teacher…you know what is right for kids. You have it in your heart" (Interview 3). This was the driving motivation for each of the teachers—to enhance the lives of their students; they cared about their general well-being. For example, Nate
viewed his role as a teacher as that of a mentor and stated, “I think the most rewarding part is like I feel going home at the end of the day feeling like you're actually making a difference” (Nate, Interview 2). Similarly, Kevin mentioned more than once his “genuine concern for kids that's more than just students” (Kevin, Interview 2). Kevin also went on to discuss how various mandates, policies, and programs often seemed to interfere in the classroom, except he did not let that stop him from doing what is best for the students. When speaking of a new initiative concerning personalized learning, a districtwide approach to meeting individual needs of students, he stated:

I just know what's best and so I do what I'm asked to do but then I always find ways to do what's best for kids. So now if what's the best for kids aligns with what I've always thought then that's pretty good. (Kevin, Interview 2)

Although Kevin was in favor of this new initiative, he was trying to articulate that, even with other unfavorable initiatives, his utmost concern was always the general well-being of the students. Similarly, Justin stopped for a moment to reflect on his own motivations for wanting the students to be successful. He affirmed that it was for their own well-being and not just for his own personal success as a director:

In reality, they recognize that ultimately, I do want them to be successful and I think, (pause), I would like to think that I want them to be successful for their sake not just so that I can say my band is you know so great or whatever. (Justin, Interview 3)

I appreciated Justin’s candor as he took a moment to self-reflect on his motivations for his students’ success. In the end, he knew he wanted them to experience success for their own well-being. He stated, “So the ultimate goal is for them to be a better musician” (Justin, Interview 3). Even Tara, the self-proclaimed strict disciplinarian, wanted her students to know that she cared about their well-being. She stated:
I'm, (pause), my students would describe me as, at first, they are afraid of me but then they figure out I'm a big teddy bear. They figure out that I'm caring, and that I'll do whatever it takes to help them be successful. (Tara, Interview 2)

As each of the teachers talked through their care in the classroom, it always came back to the well-being of the students. This student-centered mindset affirmed Noddings’s (1984) premise that the purpose of care ought always to be grounded in the best interest of the one cared for. Over 21 different references to either the “well-being” of the student or doing what was “best for the student” emerged from the data; however, this theme was operationalized in the findings under the second theme of care: Actions of Care. Each of the actions of care are aimed at bringing out the best in the students, whether academically, socially, or emotionally.

**Actions of Care**

With the purpose of care being rooted in seeking the well-being of the students, the teachers set this purpose in motion by carrying out actions of care, the next major theme under Research Question 1. This theme contains subthemes of *meeting academic needs, pushing students out of comfort zones,* and *showing interest.* See Table 9 for the number of references under each theme along with a representative quote.
Table 9

Actions of Care Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Representative Quotation</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Actions of Care   | Meeting Academic Needs            | “All good teachers do that already. It is differentiation. It's all personalized, it is individualized, it is all those things, it's not something new. I mean good teachers already do that.”  
(Brooke, Interview 3)                                                                                      | 6                      | 159                  |
|                   | Pushing Students out of Comfort Zones | “I had a conversation with one of my freshmen guys, about just taking, taking the initiative, being brave, going out there and taking risks.”  
(Steve Interview 3)                                                                                           | 6                      | 145                  |
|                   | Showing Interest                  | “I go to all the football games I go to all the plays,… I have a tear in my eye because I see you one of my students up there and I did not know how well we can play the saxophone, or how beautiful your voice was!”  
(Tara, Interview 1)                                                                                           | 6                      | 130                  |

Each of the six teachers’ data revealed all three of the subthemes under *Actions of Care*. Furthermore, those three subthemes were broken down even further into smaller topics. See Table 10 for the complete breakdown of subthemes and topics under *Actions of Care*. Each subtheme with its accompanying topics will be further discussed in the sections to follow.
### Table 10
Subthemes and Topics of Actions of Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions of Care</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meeting Academic Needs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No time wasted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Checking student progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scaffolding instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing engaging activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Giving feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Differentiating instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pushing Students Outside Comfort Zones</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encourage to do hard things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Correction and Admonishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promoting excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Showing Interest</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having one-on-one conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Showing interest in student's activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meeting academic needs. The most predominant subtheme under *Actions of Care* was meeting academic needs. The teachers demonstrated acts of care relating to academic needs in several ways: not wasting class time, checking student progress, scaffolding instruction, providing resources, providing engaging activities, giving feedback, and differentiating instruction. If a teacher verbalized a concept more than three times during the interviews or clearly demonstrated the concept during the classroom observations, they were given a mark in that category. Additionally, during the post-observation interviews, I asked each teacher if what I saw was a true representation of his or her classroom to ensure that the strategies I was observing were common practice for each teacher. See Table 11 for a breakdown of how each teacher verbalized and/or demonstrated these aspects of meeting academic needs.
Table 11

Meeting Academic Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>No Time Wasted</th>
<th>Checking Student Progress</th>
<th>Scaffolding Instruction</th>
<th>Providing Resources</th>
<th>Providing Engaging Activities</th>
<th>Giving Feedback</th>
<th>Differentiating Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 confirms that not only were the participants caring teachers, but they were also master teachers who carried out best practices in the classroom. Perhaps one reason that these teachers were chosen by the students was because of the way that they worked so hard to make sure the students could succeed in the classroom. The teachers demonstrated best practices in teaching, but it is important to note that those actions were framed within a caring relationship with their students with the best interest of the student in mind. Furthermore, although many of these topics emerged during the interviews, they were also validated during my classroom observations.

The first thing I noticed in each of the classroom observations I conducted was that the teachers used time wisely. Each of the six teachers planned and executed their classroom instruction in such a way that no time was wasted at any given moment. Even their “down time” was intentional so that they could meet the needs of students. For example, the teachers often allowed group work time for the students while they had the chance to meet individually with students when needed. Furthermore, in each of the classroom observation transcripts, I mentioned being surprised at how “brisk” the pace of the classes felt and how easily teachers transitioned from one activity to the other—often multi-tasking as they transitioned so that each
minute counted. For instance, Brooke would review concepts from the previous lesson with students while she also passed out materials for the next lesson. Because of this wise use of time, the teachers were able to care for the academic needs of their students to a fuller capacity.

Another topic under the subtheme of meeting academic needs that emerged was that the teachers were constantly checking student progress, either by circulating the room during independent work time (Nate, Kevin, Brooke, and Tara) or by closely monitoring group progress during rehearsals (Steve and Justin). When answering questions about how his students know that he cares about them, Kevin responded that he believes it’s because they see how hard he works to keep up with grading and how he is “constantly giving formative feedback” (Kevin, Interview 1). Furthermore, the teachers also demonstrated scaffolding instruction by building experiences and skills in the previous weeks to ensure success on future projects, assignments, and performances. For instance, I was able to watch Kevin’s 12th-grade English students perform their graded Socratic Seminars during my observations with him. I was so impressed with their work that I asked how Kevin had prepared them for this. He responded:

The first the focus of the first seminar was on character progressions, so just limited to that. The focus of the second one was on theme and so in between, so before the first one just lots of daily activities to help with character progressions, timeline activities, just in class projects and stuff like that. Same thing then between the first and the second one that focused on theme. And then the third one that you saw was basically like a test so like it's not going to be anything new, it's just to show to a higher-level with more textual evidence that you can talk and speak about both character progression and theme. So just lots of supports in place. We didn't go from one to the next one quick, like there is a week and a half in between. And just gave lots of time for conversation and reflection and activities. (Kevin, Interview 3)

Kevin gave the students many opportunities for practice in smaller chunks and scaffolded his instruction so that by the time I was observing his class, his students were able to conduct a full Socratic Seminar that I thought could pass for a class discussion in one of my college courses. I
was so impressed by what he was able to accomplish in his classroom through the patient use of scaffolding. This is yet another example of how Kevin demonstrated care for his students as he continually met their academic needs by providing exactly what they needed in order to be successful.

Another way that all six teachers demonstrated caring actions in the classroom was by providing resources to help facilitate learning. I observed the teachers pass out textbooks, workbooks, notes, and worksheets each day. Students had access to both print materials and electronic resources to aid learning. Although this may be a typical characteristic in an average classroom, these teachers made sure that the resources reinforced the learning objectives for the students and were easily accessible. The teachers worked extra hard to recognize the academic needs of their students and to meet those needs, which once again reinforces Noddings’s (1984) description of care. Kevin and Tara both mentioned that they created most of their materials from scratch so that they could tailor them to the specific needs of the students. During one of my classroom observations, Kevin showed me some of his handouts and they included extra ideas the students could use for introducing textual evidence into their Socratic Seminars and other helpful pieces of information for the seminar. I could tell that he wrote the handouts himself because his language was warm, humorous, and straightforward, just like Kevin. His students made good use of these resources, and it was evident when I observed their graded Socratic Seminars.

In addition to providing resources, providing feedback, and scaffolding instruction, all six teachers provided engaging activities in class to help students stay motivated. In the four regular education classrooms, the teachers utilized things like videos, group projects, puzzles, and other interactive activities. In the music classrooms, Steve and Justin always had another
event for the students to be working towards, which helped foster motivation. For example,

Justin stated:

> So, there are some things that are, you know there's jazz band, percussion, there are things that they work towards that help them... aim towards, to get through. And I think that helps them to stay engaged when they don't so they don't burn... there's always something...new on the horizon. There's always something next we finish, and we are getting ready for the next thing we finish this. Either a concert or event that is really very rewarding along with the fact that they're really doing something that they connect emotionally with. (Justin, Interview 2)

Steve echoed this same sentiment when he spoke of the various concerts and retreats that the madrigal and choir students participate in. Students in all six of these teachers’ classrooms had plenty of engaging activities to help keep them motivated to learn.

In addition to these instructional strategies, I was able to observe all but one teacher give feedback to his or her students. Sometimes this came as whole-group instruction, as in one observation with Brooke: “From even your first speech... I was totally impressed. You have great eye contact, you've got great speaking voices, you, most of you were relatively prepared, and you knew when you were slacking” (Brooke, Classroom Observation). Whole-group feedback happened quite regularly during the band and choir classes that I observed. Phrases like “Basses, that was good” (Steve, Classroom Observation); “Very nice. Again!” (Steve, Classroom Observation); “Good forte tenors, again!”; “We need more clarity and precision here” (Steve, Classroom Observation); “Good, good, that’s it!”; “Yep, right now that sounds really flat” (Justin, Classroom Observation) were commonly heard in the music classrooms as the teachers gave group feedback. Many times, the feedback was positive reinforcement, but that was balanced pretty evenly against critical feedback allowing students to understand what to fix and improve in order to achieve excellence. Even though the feedback from the music teachers often felt demanding and critical in nature, the students understood that their teachers cared enough
about them to be honest about how they could improve; they understood the teachers had their best interest at heart.

In addition to group feedback, the teachers would give quick feedback individually as they circulated the room before classroom instruction. I observed this in the academic classes taught by Nate, Kevin, and Brooke. Additionally, individual feedback often came in the form of written narrative on how the students could improve. This was one of Kevin’s strengths. He mentioned:

I also like work incredibly hard to keep up with the grading. I'm constantly giving formative feedback…Yeah the grading is, they are shocked every year. They are shocked at what my grading is like. And it's something that I always tell myself I need to scale back, like I can't keep doing it like this. But when I see that it works and I see if there's growth and I see at the kids appreciate it, I don't know I don't hate it, I don't mind doing it it's just so time-consuming. It is a lot of writing. (Kevin, Classroom Observation)

Kevin would spend several hours every week writing feedback to his students on their writing, and this was one of the primary ways Kevin showed that he cared.

Other ways the teachers met the academic needs of the students included differentiating instruction. With the exception of the two music teachers, the other four verbalized or demonstrated differentiation. This included allowing students different pathways to similar outcomes (Kevin, Interview 2), allowing students to work in partners or independently (Nate, Interview 3), and allowing students to be active participants in their learning experience by offering alternative suggestions for completing projects (Brooke, Interview 3). Brooke declared, “All good teachers do that already. It is differentiation. It's all personalized, it is individualized, it is all those things…” she mentioned ways she did this in the classroom by allowing students to work in ways that fit their needs best (Brooke, Interview 3). In these cases, differentiation included the promotion of granting the students autonomy in the classroom. Perhaps the music
teachers did not show evidence of differentiation because the learners in their classrooms were already chosen for those roles based on ability and they had less autonomy because of how structured the music curriculum had to be in order for the students to be prepared for their concerts and competitions.

**Pushing students outside their comfort zones.** The next subtheme under *Actions of Care* was *pushing students outside their comfort zones*. This theme emerged in each of the six teachers’ data through subtopics of *encouraging students to do hard things*, *admonition and correction*, and *promoting excellence*, which are shown in Table 12 along with representative quotes.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Encouraging students to do hard things</th>
<th>Promoting Excellence</th>
<th>Admonition and Correction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>“We have a group speech, and I pick the groups and I tell them…I know you all hate me right now, but I'm just going to go down the roster and assign groups. Because this is life. And life, you may have to deal with people that you don't like.” (Brooke, Interview 2)</td>
<td>“I mean, I am a difficult teacher. I have high expectations for my students and they will read [books] X, Y and Z, but they're having a good time while they're doing it.” (Brooke, Interview 1)</td>
<td>“I am firm but fair, I am always the same. They know…. They know what to expect, they know that we have fun but you got to listen when you got to listen. Now we fight with the cell phones all the time so I tell the kids you know I just think it's disrespectful if I'm talking and you're on your phone… You know occasionally I'll have to borrow a phone and I'll babysit it for a class period…but it's really only once or twice and then they know.” (Brooke, Interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>“Next week we are going to be here at 8 hours a day out in the hot sun and they are expected to stand there and do what they're supposed to do. If they can't do it I'm going to ask them “Can you do this?” and I'm going to push them. At the same time, I'm looking out for them and I don't want them passing out and all that kind of stuff, but I think that what they believe about what they “...and you know I'll put pressure on them and I'm like come on you know what are you doing? … I want them to recognize like nobody, especially the percussion, no one else is going to play that part, you have to recognize that the whole band is depending on you to get your part right you know? So there is an amount of pressure but hopefully along” (Justin, Interview 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“So I think that throughout any daily time there are those moments where they recognize that I care. Sometimes it's that I care enough about the group to tell the one person to be quiet because they are being distracting.” (Justin, Interview 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on following page)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Quote 1</th>
<th>Quote 2</th>
<th>Quote 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>“They have to pick a passage from the book that we read called The Beloved Country which is a tough book as it is and they take, take a passage that is stylistically significant for some reason in a way that connects to the theme so they have to find in this 400 page already complex book a particular passage that they want to analyze because of the style contributes to a theme that they have selected. That is mind-blowingly difficult for them to start the year with…” (Kevin, Interview 1)</td>
<td>“Yeah, it, yeah so what I find most and especially in AP, I'm giving kids for the first time in their life less than A’s. So, it seems to affect him negatively at first, it seems to cause a lot of stress and anxiety, but I don't get pushed back.” (Kevin, Interview 2)</td>
<td>“It’s hard ‘cause I'm kids come in and they have just been 3 months of Summer just staring at a screen. So that's a private conversation with that kid. Maybe that kid does need to use a pocket chart or something you know.” (Kevin, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>“So for me, it's the kids that are so reserved, like I had a conversation with one of my freshmen guys, about just taking, taking the initiative, being brave, going out there and taking risks.” (Steve Interview 3)</td>
<td>“In class, I'm very driven. I have in my head with each group, each student, I have an idea of what they are capable of and I can hear and I keep pushing them to get there and I'm really unrelenting. But balancing that with having fun and the appropriate time and settings.” (Steve Interview 3)</td>
<td>“I am telling you, I have to tell you how you can get better. I can't lie to you and say this is your best when it's not. And that's not always going to feel good, but know that I see you are capable of this, and you are going to be so much better for this, and I have had frank conversations…” (Steve Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>“I am pushing you guys. The last two problems on your worksheets that you picked up today are challenging problems. I want you to try them out. I want to see if you can think through them, ok? Challenge yourself. Push yourself.” (Nate, Classroom Observation)</td>
<td>“…these are habits that carry over into your adult life. Like I can go home tonight and I can choose to grade your tests, or your quizzes, or I cannot do it. And I can put it off….So I'm like that's a work habit that has been instilled in my life from the time I was your age. So I'm trying to get you to that point too so that you can be a successful adults. And they appreciated that. One girl came up to me afterwards and said you almost made me cry.” (Nate, Classroom Observation)</td>
<td>“I think it just comes naturally organic. They give me plenty of opportunities. Plenty of opportunities to correct or redirect them, and usually end those I go on a nice little life lesson rant for them. Most of the time they like it I think.” (Nate, Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>“Quick quiz. If you know the answer to the questions, stand up.” Tara proceeds to ask questions over the material and to my surprise the students are not too bashful to stand and answer the questions over male anatomy. They use the correct terms and do not hesitate to stand and answer. After each question is read, a large group of students stand. I could not find many students who did not stand at least once to attempt an answer. I am amazed.” (Tara, Classroom Observation)</td>
<td>“And, maybe they had a bad night, and they just totally bombed that test, bring them over, keep them after class, ‘This doesn't cut it, what are you going to do about it? Do you want to retake it? Do you want to make test corrections? What you going to do about it? This isn't working in my class.’” (Tara, Interview 2)</td>
<td>“I had a student… He started doing hardcore drugs…I happened to run into him at the grocery store and he left the grocery store crying. I chewed his butt out…” (Tara, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The subtheme of encouraging students to do hard things was one of the strongest themes to emerge because of both the quality and quantity of rich data to support this theme across all six participants, as narratively represented in Table 12. This was also one of the most surprising pieces of evidence that I found in the data. In the various content areas represented by the teachers, students were presented several opportunities to accomplish challenging tasks. For example, in both music classes, the students were given very complex and challenging music to work on. In English class, Kevin gave them challenging essays to write and complex novels to read. Brooke challenged her students by giving them several opportunities to get in front of their classmates to speak publicly, and Nate challenged his students by giving them upper level problems to work through just to test their skills and give them a glimpse of what they might find in an honors class in the future. Finally, even Tara, who worked with freshmen during my classroom observations, challenged her students to stand and answer difficult questions about human reproduction by using the correct anatomical terms without embarrassment. In each of the classes, I watched students rise to these academic and performance expectations. Steve was astonished at the things that his students said about the low expectations other teachers had for them:

…far too often, they are told what they can't do as opposed to what they can do and a lot of other settings. They are not challenged to their potential. And I, I haven't witnessed that in other classes that's just based on their responses. I just get the sense that in a lot of other settings, not many people push them to their potential. So, for some of them it can be trying like when it's something different in the classroom. But they react to it pretty well. (Steve Interview 3)

Steve, along with the other teachers, gave his students challenging tasks because he wanted to show his students what they were truly capable of achieving. The teachers felt that this was a
way their students knew that they cared; they worked extra hard to help their students reach their full potential:

I always tell them I and pushing you because I know you are capable of doing amazing things. I think they believe that. I think in the end, all students regardless of how you deliver it, the students can tell if you care. (Steve, Interview 3)

Once again, this approach to helping students succeed by pushing them to reach their full potential was only recognized as being effective when coupled with genuine care for their well-being.

Along those same lines, the teachers also promoted excellence among their students. It was not enough to simply provide the students with challenging material; the teachers expected the students to master the academic and musical content with excellence, meaning they also cared about the quality of work being done. Because the teachers cared about the well-being of their students, this translated to caring that their students produced excellent work. Through examples, models, and detailed rubrics, the teachers gave their students standards for the expected levels of excellence in their classes. I found that as the teachers held high expectations for their students, the students met those expectations. For instance, Steve’s students certainly demonstrated a high level of excellence in the classes that I observed, and he continually pushed them towards improvement. He demanded excellence in their behavior (eyes on him, no distractions), in their work ethic (on task at all times, practicing at home), and in the quality of their sound both collectively and as individuals. Regardless of his demanding nature, Steve felt that his students knew it sprung from a heart of care:

…they would probably stay [I am] demanding, but they would probably say that I do care about them and that high standard…they really enjoy being a part of it. And they appreciate where they've been as a result of all those different things. (Steve, Interview 1)
Once again, just like the connection between good pedagogy and care, there is a critical connection between high demands for excellence and that occurring within a caring relationship. This was common in Justin’s class as well. Justin made the connection between his care for his students and his high expectations for them:

My hope is that they feel like that I care about them and simultaneously feel there is a challenge to be better and a desire for them to succeed and a trust that the things that we are doing our ultimately to help them progress towards something. (Justin, Interview 1)

Although he regularly pushed his students towards excellence in ways that may have seemed rigorous, Justin trusted that his students knew he pushed them because of how much he cared for them. For the regular education teachers, they also held their students to a high standard of excellence, and it often revealed itself in the grades the students received. Kevin responded:

What I find most and especially in AP, I'm giving kids for the first time in their life less than A’s. So, it seems to affect him negatively at first, it seems to cause a lot of stress and anxiety, but I don't get pushed back. (Kevin, Interview 2)

The reason why Kevin did not receive any “push back” was because his students recognized he pushed them because he cared about them. He mentioned how rewarding it was to see his students finally have a “light bulb moment” in class or to pass their A.P. tests and he said how those instances show how his students are “more than just students” to him (Kevin, Interview 2). Similar to Steve, Brooke, Nate, and Tara each also mentioned how hard their students had to work in order to receive good grades in their classes. The teachers would not accept poor-quality work when they knew the students were capable of excellence. So, it was more than just challenging their students with hard tasks; they demanded that the students pursue those challenges with excellence, and this was reflected in their grading. Although the students had to
work very hard in all of these classes, their nominations of these teachers provide evidence that
the students knew they were being cared for through those challenges.

The final subtopic under pushing students out of their comfort zones was admonition and
correction. The teachers cared about their students enough to step in and correct when
necessary. At times this meant correcting their academic work or their musical endeavors, but at
other times this meant addressing behaviors or habits that were not beneficial to the individual
student or to the group. When interpersonal problems arose between students, each of the
teachers mentioned stepping in to help those students navigate through social situations.
Sometimes students were corrected in front of the group if it was a public offense, but in most
cases the correction involved one-on-one conversations with the offending students in order to
mentor them, which is another description of care. For instance, Nate mentioned helping a
student become more patient and understanding with another girl in her class (Nate, Interview 3);
Tara helped two girls settle a dispute over a boy they both liked (Tara, Interview 3); Steve helped
a group of seniors learn how to overcome jealous and bitterness with one another (Steve,
Interview 2), and Justin mentioned correcting students who spoke out of line or showed
disrespect to others (Justin, Interview 2). In the last instance, Justin clarified:

Throughout any daily time, there are those moments where they recognize that I care.
Sometimes it's that I care enough about the group to tell the one person to be quiet
because they are being distracting. (Justin, Interview 2)

In each of these scenarios, the teachers were correcting students because they cared for them and
wanted what was best for their students. Furthermore, I was able to witness group correction
several times in the music classes when students played a wrong note or needed to improve
something. In fact, in Steve’s madrigal class, the students had been conditioned to raise a hand
when they made mistakes to indicate that they were the offending voice, and they knew how to
correct it. This helped avoid unnecessary starting and stopping to fix things since the students were indicating that they knew how to self-correct. Then if they did not know how to correct something, Steve was quick to address the error and get the group moving again. In each of my classroom observations, I did not notice any situations where a student was corrected in a way that was embarrassing or insensitive. The students responded well because it was obvious that they were committed to what was happening, they knew they were cared for, and they were invested enough to receive corrective feedback in order to improve.

In summary, as these teachers cared for their students, they pushed them outside their comfort zones, promoted excellence, and corrected and admonished when necessary. Each of these themes was couched within a caring relationship between the teacher and student, otherwise the results could have been different:

I had an honor chemistry teacher that…you could tell he didn't care about students… he made kids cry and stuff. He was just like really really rough with kids and not a whole lot of compassion, like he would hammer into them and stuff. I don't know if he was trying to be relatable and like sarcastic, but it was sometimes coming off just very mean. (Nate, Interview 1)

Nate believed that as a teacher he must ensure his students know he cares about them, otherwise he will not be effective when he tries to push them, correct them, or help them reach excellence.

Justin had a similar response about a colleague in the district:

There's another teacher in the district that we've been having conversations about who has a real issue with him losing some students for the kind of the opposite reason [not being caring]. And the only reason why I bring it up is because someone was saying that their kid got called out by him in a class for not playing the part right, and in my mind, I'm thinking ‘I do that all the time! What is the difference?’ Part of the difference is …that if I'm calling them out on something, it is that either they know what they're supposed to be doing and they're not doing it or if they don't know what to do I'm trying to give them the tools to be successful…The ultimate goal is for them to be a better musician. (Justin, Interview 3)
Once again, Justin emphasized the importance of keeping the best interest of the student in mind so that these actions are from a heart of care. Overall, these teachers cared too much about their students to let them continue behaviors that were destructive to themselves or to others or behaviors that were preventing them from reaching their full potential.

**Showing interest.** The final subtheme under *Actions of Care* was *showing interest.* Students recognized that teachers showed personal interest in them when teachers spent time in one-on-one conversations and/or showed up to various student activities such as sporting events and fine arts programs. Table 13 includes examples of all six teachers showing interest to operationalize how they demonstrated actions of care for their students.

**Table 13**

Representative Quotes for Showing Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>One-on-One Interactions</th>
<th>Showing Interest in Students’ Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>“But for me it's like the natural conversations that I have. I thought it was cool that you saw study hall. Those were good natural conversations, and I feel more inclined to relax and have fun and goof around with them as long as they're like not going crazy and stuff, but that's more of a laid-back environment where a lot of conversations happen.” (Nate, Interview 1)</td>
<td>“One of the things too I try to do is let them know, if there's something you want me to come to, let me know what it is. And I will try to make it.” (Nate, Interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>“I try my best to find something to connect to. You know, find something that I can initiate a conversation with to maybe get them to you know I mentioned something the other day, my husband put fall fertilizer on my lawn what would you suggest that I use?” (Tara, Interview 1)</td>
<td>“I go to all the football games. I go to all the plays. I know nothing about music, but every time I go to a play or musical or band or choir concert, I always tell the kids, I say, “I have a tear in my eye because I see you--one of my students--up there and I did not know how well we can play the saxophone, or how beautiful your voice was!” (Tara, Interview 1)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Brooke  | “Just by talking to that student after class for 5 minutes you are doing it, you are meeting that student’s needs. It doesn’t have anything to do with making a cutout of our hands and making chains outside in the hallway… it has nothing to do with that.” (Brooke, Interview 3) | “I go to the boys’ home basketball games, and I was a libero scorer for the girls for a while. I like to do the track meets because that's my thing. You know. I try to get to like one event for each of the sports because the kids want to see you there. And I like to watch it I really do. And then I can talk about it in class the next (Continued on following page)
Table 13. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>“I mean the biggest thing that I do that guarantees that I'm going to meet privately with every kid is just make sure that I structure my class in such a way to allow for individual conference needs to happen.” (Kevin, Interview 2)</td>
<td>“Yeah, I like, that Nolan kid, I don't know that he's ever had a teacher actually show that much interest in him before. So. That just sets up for a good year. So, we'll have a fun year together.” (Nate, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>“You know if I see kids in the hall, I definitely tried to hey say hello…I will go out of my way to try to intentionally pull them out of their (pause), you know like this one girl I was telling you about I see this one girl in the morning almost every day like before school and she just is like so dark and I usually, she's one that I sometimes don't ‘cause I can tell she's not going to respond, but every once in awhile look up and I'll get that little bit.” (Justin, Interview 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>“I think a lot of the stuff I already do in formerly with the students. I'm always having conversations, yeah like especially for me, those students that are really, withdrawn and reserved, I really try to reach out and find ways to help make them comfortable.” (Steve Interview 2)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the interviews and classroom observations, all six teachers showed evidence of spending time in one-on-one interactions with students. One-on-one interactions included long conversations over lunch or brief moments before or after class with individual students. Not only did the teachers talk about these interactions in their interviews, but I also was able to observe this in the classroom. For instance, each of the six teachers engaged in conversations with their students as they entered into the room at the start of class. Additionally, at the end of each classroom observation, the teachers spent time circulating and talking with students one-on-one during the last few moments before the bell rang before they filed out of the classroom. On multiple occasions, I noticed that the conversations were not school related. For instance, at the end of one class Brooke spent a few minutes checking up on a student who seemed especially
tired that morning in class. When I followed up on this conversation during our third interview, Brooke explained:

She just works a lot….And she was really worried about the store next door ‘cause there was a creeper guy that would come over and say inappropriate things to the girls and, she works at Subway, and I'm like I am just going to come there… but I do worry about her because she does work an awful lot. So, we talked about that stuff. (Brooke, Interview 3)

Although that conversation only took a matter of minutes, it was clear that Brooke was showing this student that she cared for the well-being of her students. Other conversations I witnessed between the teachers and students were much lighter in nature. For example, it was quite normal for Kevin, Nate, and Steve to be found joking with students one-on-one as they filed in and out of class. Sometimes these one-on-one casual conversations happened during the course of the actual class. For instance, as Nate circulated around the classroom, he would ask students about how they spent their free time over the weekend in order to show them attention but also to find out whether or not they were able to complete homework. Speaking of these short conversations with students, Nate said in our third interview:

They don't have to be long, they don't have to be like taking away from class, they don't have to be 10 minutes long. I can make a connection with some of those kids in less than 5 seconds by just talking about something that we've already talked about or talking about something that they're interested in. It's those little things that don't take away from curriculum which I think makes the class much more enjoyable for everyone too. (Nate, Interview 3)

Similarly, I was able to witness Steve talking with students about their favorite hockey teams (Steve, Classroom Observation); Brooke talking with students about shopping at Target (Brooke, Classroom Observation); Tara talking with a student about music preferences (Tara, Classroom Observation); and Kevin talking about movie choices and cartoons (Kevin, Classroom Observation). Each of these interactions was brief, but they gave the teachers opportunities to show interest and care with individual students.
Each of the six teachers also mentioned times when they had longer one-on-one conversations with students over lunch or during a prep period. Kevin intentionally scheduled one-on-one conferences with each student at the beginning of the school year to ensure he got to know them and show individual interest:

I mean the biggest thing that I do that guarantees that I'm going to meet privately with every kid is just make sure that I structure my class in such a way to allow for individual conference [which] need to happen. I've done it different ways and different years. Usually some sort of group project that is going on in the classroom while I sit in the hallway with each kid. I try to do it early with each class. (Kevin, Interview 1)

For other teachers, they were able to have longer one-on-one conversations with students who sought them out during pockets of time during the day. Tara said that she posts a sign on her door so students know when and where they can find her. Brooke and Nate had extra pockets of time to talk to students during study hall supervision. Steve and Justin both talked about the large amounts of time they are able to spend with students during rehearsals and camps which give them many opportunities for one-on-one conversations.

The other way that teachers showed interest in the students as individuals was when they showed up to support the students at sports games or fine arts events. Brooke especially liked to do this because she liked being able to talk about the event with the students the next day to show that she cares and to connect to their personal interests. During my first classroom observation with her, she mentioned the previous night’s basketball game on three separate occasions—twice to praise one of the players and once to connect the idea to something she was teaching in the lesson. As mentioned above in Table 13, Brooke was not the only teacher who made it out to the students’ games and events. Tara, Kevin, and Nate also mentioned the time they would spend showing the students personal interest by showing up to events. Perhaps music teachers were not represented in this subtopic simply because it was too obvious that they
showed interest in the students’ activities since they were all involved in music; therefore, the music teachers showed their care in other ways.

**Context of Care**

The final major facet of care that Noddings (1984) emphasizes is that caring actions must happen in the context of a relationship. This leads to the last major theme, *Context of Care.* Throughout the interviews and classroom observations, each teacher demonstrated in his or her own way how they developed relationships with students that served as a platform to carry out actions of care. This also included several subthemes that emerged across the participants relating to how these relationships formed and also the nature of those relationships. The subthemes include *relatability, time, mutual respect,* and *security/comfort.* See Table 14 for a representative sample of each subtheme under *Context of Care.*

Although each case was unique, the teachers each demonstrated a genuine desire to build a relationship with their students so that their social, emotional, and academic needs could be met. The building and sustaining of those relationships served as the context of care in each of their classrooms.

**Relatability.** The strongest subtheme under *Context of Care* was *relatability.* The teachers took time to reveal parts of their personal lives in order for the students to view them as regular humans and not just teachers:

> I let things for my personal life into my lessons so I kind of open up to them that way…so I feel like that makes a big difference to them. If I can open up and kind of share that stuff with them, I feel like that kind of opens the door for them to do the same thing. (Nate, Interview 1)

Nate, as well as the other teachers, believed that sharing personal parts of his life with his students was a key piece to building meaningful relationships with them in ways that would
facilitate mentorship. Brooke echoed this sentiment as well:

I like to use my real-life stories because I'm a human being, I mean when you are a student you don't think that your teacher is a human being. (Brooke, Interview 1)

In addition to verbally sharing pieces of their lives in order to become more relatable, several of the teachers also displayed pictures of their families and favorite sports teams in their classrooms as a way to share their lives. Kevin explained, “The two bulletin boards are full of pictures of my family, getting the kids to see that I'm more than just a teacher” (Kevin, Interview 3).

Another way teachers became more “relatable” was admitting mistakes and talking about their own struggles. Tara said, “I may be wrong sometimes, and I will admit that to my kids. ‘Hey, I make mistakes when I grade. That's why we're going over this test really quick.’ At 9 at
night H's look like V’s.” (Tara, Interview 2). Nate also said, “If I do something stupid in class, if I say something stupid in class if it's something I need to seek out a student to apologize for something I will. If it's something where I need to say something to the whole class I will” (Nate, Interview 2). Brooke articulated how this aspect of admitting mistakes to her students helps them see her as being more relatable:

I let the kids know that you know Smith [referring to herself by her last name] gets in trouble sometimes. But it helps to make me more real to them… letting them see that I am human. My students have seen me upset, they have seen me cry, I am not above any of that with them. (Brooke, Interview 2)

This idea of helping students see their teachers as more “human” and relatable emerged from both the interview transcripts and also the classroom observations. Nate struggled to draw a figure on the board and when his students giggled at him, he openly joked about his lack of artistic skills. Kevin also talked with his students about the challenges of adjusting to the new grading system. He told them, “You have to understand that for me … having the same grading system for my ten years of teaching and then just now doing it differently, you know it is unimaginably difficult for me as well” (Kevin, Classroom Observation 2). In these cases, the teachers became more relatable to their students by admitting weaknesses and failures; this in turn became another building block for developing strong relationships.

Finally, the last important aspect of becoming relatable was utilizing humor. This theme emerged in both interview transcripts and classroom observations. Kevin used humor intentionally in order to share about his life and connect to class content by saying, “I try to have a sense of humor. I try to tell them about my life as it pertains to what we're doing in class when I can” (Kevin, Interview 3). Tara also mentioned humor as an important part of connecting with students. She said, “You've got to figure out something that you could joke around with them
about. You just have to make time to do that” (Tara, Interview 1). Nate mentioned this importance as well by saying in the middle of class, “…it doesn't hurt to take a five-second break to you know make a joke with someone or two, 'cause those are little things that I think I do well to help you to make that connection” (Nate, Interview 2). In my classroom observations, several of the teachers incorporated humor into their lectures in ways that even had me laughing in the back of the room. I noted this in Steve’s second classroom observation:

… he sang a note in a humorous manner to prove a point, but also to loosen up the students a bit. They giggled and he jumped right back into the music. Steve has a good balance of humor and direct critical feedback. He relates well with the students. (Steve, Classroom Observation 2)

This occurred in Justin’s classroom as well during a time when he was correcting a student:

Justin raised his eyebrows, his eye widened seemingly to the top of his hairline and he exclaimed, “Brother, WHAT?!?!!?” He humorously threw his hands in the air and the students laughed. (Justin, Classroom Observation)

This aspect of humor helped the teachers seem more relatable to their students, and perhaps it also paved the way for students to receive direct correction more willingly. This piece of relatability was noted by the teachers in being significant in allowing them to build caring relationships with their students.

Time. The next subtheme that emerged from the data under the major theme of Context of Care was time. There were a couple different ways that extra time with students allowed the teachers to develop these relationships. The first aspect was simply spending extra time with students beyond regular classroom time. One strong connection across all the teachers was that they interacted with students in some form of extra-curricular activity in addition to another form of social interaction beyond the classroom. In some cases, the teachers were current coaches; in many cases the teachers simply spent time during their lunches and prep periods interacting with
students. See Table 15 for a listing of the different ways that the teachers spent time with students outside of class.

In some of these instances, the extra interactions were due to regular work responsibilities (i.e., coaching, rehearsals, extra-curricular assignments). However, in many of the cases, the teachers sacrificed their lunches, prep periods, or time before/after school in order to invest in

Table 15

Time Outside of Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Extra Interaction Time</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Tara     | • P.E. teacher  
           • Former tennis and cheer coach  
           • Students visit during office hours | “...we see them in a different way. They are social in class. They don't have to sit and be quiet and take notes in class, that sort of thing. So I think, health and PE teachers see kids in a different light.” (Tara, Interview 1) |
| Brooke   | • Track coach  
           • Former P.E. teacher  
           • Coffee with students  
           • Running club | “…we get together for coffee once in a while, and they will be like hey Smith we're meeting together at Dunkin Donuts do you want to come? And I'll say sure if I can make it I'll be there! And if I can, I will.” (Brooke, Interview 3) |
| Justin   | • Band camps  
           • Band retreat  
           • Extra rehearsals  
           • Students eat lunch in his room | “I do wonder if the time factor is a huge thing. You know what I'm saying? Just the amount of time that I'm with them. We do two weeks in the summer of marching band camp or they're there all day everyday hearing my voice over the loudspeaker because you know I am intentionally trying to encourage them you know.” (Justin, Interview 1) |
| Steve    | • Choir rehearsals  
           • Summer retreat  
           • Choir trips (including international) | “You have to show them that you care about them in a different way. You have to have those opportunities to interact, whether it be like we had a tailgating party, being goofy playing soccer, playing bags, just kind of interacting.” (Steve Interview 2) |
| Nate     | • Wrestling Coach  
           • Lifting with students  
           • Playing basketball with students  
           • Students eat lunch in his room | “…or like one of the other wrestlers always stands at the door with me and talks as class begins. So those are the ones that I feel like I've already had a significant relationship with because I've been around them a significant amount of time.” (Nate, Interview 3) |
| Kevin    | • Former tennis coach  
           • Book clubs  
           • Presence on social media  
           • Students seek him during preps  
           • Former yearbook teacher | “We have a book club... so far they always vote to meet at my house. The administration is okay with that, so then they meet there and I'm always like, you know, we can go somewhere else, but we meet at my house. One time we rented out a coffee shop in downtown Galesburg. We rented out the top floor of that. But they like seeing my kids.” (Kevin, Interview 1) |
their relationships with their students. This was an important subtheme under the major theme of Context of Care because it laid the groundwork for developing these relationships. Relationships take time.

The second aspect of time is that some of the teachers even mentioned maintaining relationships with students beyond the school year. For instance, Kevin still lives in the same community as many of his former students and said it is a “rare day to not run into a student” (Kevin, Interview 1). When he did see his students out in the community, they were quick to approach him and engage in conversation. Tara also mentioned a few different scenarios where she interacted with students out and about in the community after they graduated. Brooke regularly met up with former students in the summer for coffee or sometimes went for a run with former track members. Brooke also had an interesting situation because she formerly taught in the middle school, so she had already known many of her students for several years before working with them again in high school.

Steve and Justin were in their own unique situation because they were able to interact with their students for four years since music classes and lessons can be taken throughout high school. This gave the music directors extra years to cultivate and develop relationships with students more than many other classroom teachers. Finally, although Nate had only been at the school for a short time, he had already begun developing habits that would allow him to extend his relationships with the students beyond the school year. At the time of the interview, Nate had recently begun playing pick-up basketball with students after school, and he felt that gave him another platform for relationship development. All in all, these teachers were able to cultivate strong relationships with their students as a result of the amount of time spent together.
Mutual respect. Another important subtheme under the major theme Context of Care was mutual respect. The teachers treated the students like adults and that contributed greatly to the development of genuine relationships. Not only did the students show respect for their teachers, but the teachers mentioned they needed to show that same respect to their own students. This was a topic that was verbalized or demonstrated by each of the six teachers. See Table 16 below for representative quotes from each participant.

The theme of mutual respect was one that appeared in multiple interviews across all participants, but it was also a theme that I observed when I watched each teacher work with his or her students in the classroom. It was obvious that the students respected their teachers, but it was also obvious that the students felt respected by their teachers. This subtheme of mutual respect was crucial in the development of these caring relationships.

Comfort and security. Once a relationship was established, it was possible for the students to gain a sense of comfort and security, the final subtheme under Context of Care. According to Noddings (1984), care cannot happen unless the one caring knows the needs of the one they are caring for. This sense of security, comfort, and trust is the final characteristic of these relationships to set the groundwork for caring actions to take place. See Table 17 for representative quotes from each teacher that mentioned the theme of comfort and security.

Similar to the theme of relatability, all participants verbalized or demonstrated the theme of comfort and security, except for Justin. Although I sensed that the students were comfortable with him during classroom observations, the theme did not emerge in the interview data. In general, the comfort and security that the students experienced in those relationships directly contributed to their sense of believing that their teachers cared about them. Conversely, they would not feel cared for by teachers with whom they felt uncomfortable or insecure.
Table 16

Mutual Respect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>“But I like I let them know at the beginning of the school year that this is how I am. I am far from perfect. There might be times that I say things and they upset you or offend you, just come talk to me. Like we are people, we are human beings. Come talk to me and I'll give you the same respect. If you ever do anything that I feel is disrespectful or out of line, I'll talk to you, I'll pull you aside and I'll talk to you. Like a human being. Like I'm not going to go to your parents right away. Because my issue is not with your parents my issue is with you. And I think that goes a long way in terms of building that relationship too. Kids see that.” (Nate, Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>“The ideal relationship, well I mean so obviously we are talking student-teacher relationship, so I think there's a sense of mutual respect.” (Justin, Interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>“A big thing for me is respect. Once you know I respect them I respect that life happens. I know that they have way more on their plates than I did when I was their age, just with social media alone, it causes so many issues for our kids. And I feel like if that line is being crossed I'll bring it up instantly.” (Brooke, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>“I mean I don't have to work too hard to establish you know behavioral expectations and stuff like that beginning. I treat them like adults. I tried to, I don't confiscate their phones. You walk into a lot of classrooms and see a hanging cell phone pocket. I don't do that. I addressed that personally if it becomes abusive. Behavior then I do. So, I think they like feeling like adults, to try to talk to them like adults.” (Kevin, Interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>“The ideal relationship, it's kind of two-fold. And class there has to be an understanding that of respect, and that has to be for everyone, student-to-student, because you're opening up and you're sharing music, you have to be comfortable with someone telling you all the time, that's not right, that's not your best, and so there has to be mutual respect. They have to feel comfortable putting themselves out there because they do that. So, they have to be comfortable with their peers, they have to be comfortable with me. So, there's that respect.” (Steve Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>“I always tell kids, whatever we have in these four walls, unless it threatens your health and I have to report it, it's going nowhere. It doesn't go home to my husband. It doesn't go to the faculty lunchroom. It can't. Because when I break that trust with the kids, I'm never getting it back. Never. It's like breaking trust with your mom and dad, it takes a long time to regain that. So that's what I try to tell the kids. Really within the first couple weeks of school.” (Tara, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Representative Quote</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>“I noticed that students feel comfortable asking Kevin for help. Students did not need to get out of their seats for help because Kevin worked his way around the room making him accessible to students as he went.” <em>(Kevin, Classroom Observation 2)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>“We had a tragedy last year where two kids were killed in a car accident. And a lot of students wanted to talk to me instead of going down to counseling because they've had me in class, some of them have had me since junior high, and they just felt comfortable talking to me, and I am forever honored that they feel comfortable enough to come talk to me about these things. It means a lot to me.” <em>(Brooke, Interview 2)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>“It's just cause she's comfortable with me. So, she will like sit in the desk. Or like one of the other wrestlers always stands at the door with me and talks as class begins.” <em>(Nate, Interview 3)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>“I'm always having conversations, yeah like especially for me, those students that are really, withdrawn and reserved, I really try to reach out and find ways to help make them comfortable.” <em>(Steve, Interview 2)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>“You can't just, so when, and they are comfortable with me now. I couldn't start out my class the first two weeks of school talking about reproduction. We talked about relationships, we talked about communication skills, we talked about dating, we have grown into this, okay now we are going to get into sex, STDs, drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. The heavy stuff is at the end of our curriculum because you've got to build that rapport.” <em>(Tara, Interview 2)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Research Question 1

In summary, findings from interviews and confirmations from observational data have answered Research Question 1 with multiple themes from Noddings’s (1984) theory of care: *Purpose of Care, Actions of Care, and Context of Care.* Overall, these findings revealed that the teachers performed caring actions within the context of trusting relationships with their students. Those caring actions were specific to the unique social, emotional, and academic needs of their individual students and were aimed at the well-being of the students. As the teachers continued to develop relationships with their students, they became more aware of specific ways they could care for those needs. Furthermore, this included pushing students to reach their fullest potential, not just academically, but socially and emotionally. As Noddings (1984) described, these teachers cared about helping these students become the best versions of themselves. By
providing excellent academic instruction, challenging students to accomplish great things inside and outside of the classroom, and helping students navigate through many personal challenges, the teachers showed how much they truly cared about their students.

Research Question 2

How do caring high school teachers promote SEL development in their students through planned curriculum and instruction?

To answer this research question, “planned” was operationalized as teachers intentionally seeking to promote SEL development by embedding principles into their curriculum and instruction, or in other words, the explicit curriculum (Eisner, 2002). Data collected from the teachers regarding SEL development were coded as “planned” if it included something that was part of the teacher’s premeditated lesson planning: i.e., instructional strategies, learning objectives, assessments, activities, essential questions, and/or resources used. Two major themes emerged:

1. Specific subject matter included opportunities for emphasizing certain areas of SEL development
2. Specific instructional strategies included opportunities for emphasizing certain areas of SEL development

The teachers used their subject matter and their instructional strategies as vehicles to promote SEL development in the classroom.

Specific Subject Matter That Included Opportunities for SEL Development

In a number of the classroom contexts, there were opportunities for the teachers to intentionally promote SEL development through planned curriculum and instruction because they were able to connect SEL principles to principles that were being taught in their subject
matter. Table 18 reflects the ways that three out of six teachers were able to promote SEL development in conjunction with their subject matter.

**Table 18**

Specific Subject Matter That Included Opportunities for SEL Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Type of SEL Development with Corresponding Illinois SEL Standard</th>
<th>Where SEL fits in the subject matter</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>Communication skills (2C)</td>
<td>Embedded in lessons on relationship development</td>
<td>“I teach communication skills. I teach my kids all the time, communication skills, sometimes you just need to shut up and listen. You know?” (Tara, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>Communication skills (2C)</td>
<td>Embedded in all speech projects</td>
<td>“It’s speech class, so…we talked about how 60% of your message is nonverbal… we talked a lot about how important listening is… we talk about body language.” (Brooke, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>Developing Empathy for others (2A)</td>
<td>Embedded in creative writing assignments</td>
<td>“In creative writing, we work on empathy. You know we had two kids talking about being abused. You know the format of that class is you have the writing assignment and you write and then you can read yours out loud…So they do that, and there is a lot of emotion, or they can say when they submit their paper ‘Can you read this?’ So, the beginning of the year I would read some things and the class would become very emotional and they wanted to help each other even though they didn't know who that person was. So, then we started writing responses to each other, not knowing who that person was, and so it was just a great, great class.” (Brooke, Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>Managing Anxiety (1A)</td>
<td>Embedded in lessons on stage fright</td>
<td>“…we talk about everyday situations and people have so much anxiety about public speaking, so, like I told the kids, I don't have that but you might and I think that as long as we address each other's emotions...(tails off). (Brooke, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>Responsible decision-making (3B)</td>
<td>Whole unit devoted to this topic</td>
<td>“We have a model and our book it's called a responsible decision-making model. It has six steps. I have them right on the board decide. And each of those letters mean something. I'm going to define the problem, I have to think about, evaluate the decision, and most of those decisions are I do it or I don't do it. I give them a scenario.” (Tara, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on following page)
It should be noted that not every subject matter taught by the teachers naturally lent itself to SEL development. Specifically, only three teachers -- Tara, Kevin, and Brooke -- taught academic subject matter lending itself to SEL development. All three teachers addressed communication skills because that connected to the subject matter already being taught in their classes. For example, Kevin and Brooke taught subject matter connected with English language arts, which included communication skills; furthermore, Brooke taught a unit on relationships which included communication skills. Tara was also able to focus on the SEL skill of responsible decision making because it was a required unit of study in her subject matter area. Similarly, for Kevin it was natural to embed lessons on societal norms into a literature unit because the content they discussed included stories about people in different cultures and societies. As Kevin read
this material with his classes, he was able to discuss norms in society because that already connected with his subject matter.

Furthermore, this did not mean that the other three teachers did not promote SEL development in their classes, but rather their subject matter (musical content and chemistry) was not mentioned as a vehicle for promoting SEL development. In other words, the nature of the subject matter in chemistry class and in the two musical classes posed greater challenges to naturally embedding SEL principles into the content more so than a class that focused primarily on communication skills such as speech or English class. All six teachers did demonstrate the second theme, however, which revealed specific instructional strategies included opportunities for emphasizing certain areas of SEL development.

**Instructional Strategies That Provided Opportunities for SEL Development**

Observational data revealed different instructional strategies the teachers used to promote SEL development: group discussion, Socratic Seminars, learning partnerships, and rehearsals for the music classes. Each of these instructional strategies involved having the students work with other, which provided opportunities for the teachers to help them develop social and emotional skills in relationships. For instance, group discussion was utilized by Kevin when preparing for the Socratic Seminars—a student-centered approach to in-depth discussion focusing on textual analysis. These discussions were completely student led; the students created questions and facilitated discussion among their peers in order to become partners in the learning process. Although this was student led, Kevin mentored the students through this process and helped them hone their social skills along the way. Similarly, two teachers, Nate and Tara, utilized learning partnerships, a strategy that gave students the opportunity to work in pairs in order to
master the material being taught. Finally, the music teachers’ primary instructional strategy was leading whole-group rehearsals and also providing opportunities for students to work in small groups to rehearse music. This provided many opportunities for the music teachers to help their students develop interpersonal skills as they learned to work with one another.

During interviews, the teachers expounded on various instructional strategies they used to promote SEL development with their students. Table 19 details how each teacher utilized the other aforementioned instructional strategies to promote SEL development.

From the table, a common thread among the different instructional strategies was allowing the students to work together in some form or another. For Brooke’s group speech assignment, she intentionally chose the group members so that the students could learn to work with people outside their friend circles. Similarly, Tara tried to get her students outside of their comfort zones with her learning partnerships strategy involving “appointment clocks.” Each student drew a clock and then had to choose four students across the room to meet with for separate “appointments.” Each “appointment” was used as a review tool for students to discuss the content they just learned. Students were required to choose partners across the room, forcing them to work with students they did not know as well. Tara wanted her students to grow in their social skills while also reviewing the content from her lectures. Meanwhile, even though Kevin and Nate allowed their students to pick their own groups for learning partnerships and Socratic Seminars, they still viewed these as opportunities for the students to develop interpersonal skills. For instance, Nate mentioned several opportunities that he had to step in and help students navigate through interpersonal conflicts as a result of working together in groups. Kevin also gave his students several resources in order to help them develop strong communication skills to employ during their Socratic Seminars. His handouts included examples of word stems to use in
# Instructional Strategies That Provided Opportunities for SEL Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Type of SEL Development with Corresponding Illinois SEL Standard</th>
<th>Instructional Strategy</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills (2C)</td>
<td>Assigning Group Speeches</td>
<td>“We have a group speech, and I pick the groups and I tell them this I tell them I know you all hate me right now, but I'm just going to go down the roster and assign groups. Because this is life. And in life, you may have to deal with people that you don't like. [or] that you disagree with.” (Brooke, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Social Anxiety (1A); Interpersonal Skills (2C)</td>
<td>Group Discussion/Socratic Seminar</td>
<td>“I just want them each individually to improve in an area, like if it is social anxiety, I'm hoping that they are participating in Socratic Seminars, raising their hand at least once in a class, something like that. For some kids, maybe it's the opposite. Maybe they need to learn to let other people have a voice. So, maybe it is knowing what is socially acceptable. So, with each kid I'm just looking for areas of growth.” (Kevin, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills (2C)</td>
<td>Learning Partnerships</td>
<td>“The movements of the appointment clock, that hit social and emotional big time. They actually have a clock, and I make them make an appointment, they have to go to…somebody across the room. … that forces them to work with kids that they never talk to or work [with] whatever. It might make them a little uncomfortable, but we are talking about what makes them uncomfortable. So, it's kind of fun to see their reaction to, and I always make them pick at least one person of the opposite sex.” (Tara, Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills (2C)</td>
<td>Learning Partnerships</td>
<td>“I try to do things in my classroom so that there's maybe some of that [opportunities to develop social skills] with each other rather than just with me. For those classes where I let kids choose their groups… you can kind of like nurture healthy relationships between them.” (Nate, Interview 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills (2C)/Goal Achievement (1C)</td>
<td>Sectional Leader Preparation</td>
<td>“I have invested a lot of time in my student leaders and in the summer, I do three days of leadership training with my kids who are marching band leaders. They go through a whole process of being selected to be a leader, it's multi-leveled and different facets.” (Justin, Interview 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Goal Achievement (1C)</td>
<td>Ensemble Rehearsals</td>
<td>“The other thing I have always felt strongly about, if you build in large tasks and goals for them to work towards, and you constantly keep moving that bar, they are engaged because they see that goal they want to work towards it.” (Steve, Interview 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the discussion such as, “I see your point; however, I disagree because…” in order to help the students have healthy disagreement. Finally, the groups that were utilized in the two music classes were chosen based on skill level and vocal/instrument part, so students were not always with their closest friends. Both music teachers mentioned how these groups served as a vehicle for the students to learn how to work together to achieve common goals as well as develop leadership qualities.

Summary of Research Question 2

There were two ways that teachers promoted SEL development through planned curriculum and instruction. The first was the way that some SEL skills were naturally embedded into the subject matter taught, as verbalized by three of the teachers: Kevin, Brooke, and Tara. The second was the use of specific instructional strategies that provided opportunities to promote SEL development, which emerged across all six teachers. In each of these themes, the common thread was that the teachers took advantage of opportunities to address SEL development mainly through communication and interpersonal skills. Subject matter included in speech, health, and English class naturally included these types of lessons. Similarly, the various instructional strategies that involved having students work together in groups or partnerships likewise provided opportunities to help students hone their interpersonal and communication skills. In either case, caring teachers took note of these opportunities and sought to promote SEL development in their students through their planned curriculum and instruction.

Research Question 3

How do caring high school teachers promote SEL development in their students outside of regularly planned curriculum and instruction?
For this research question, “outside of regularly planned curriculum and instruction” was operationalized as opportunities that the teachers used to promote SEL development which arose spontaneously and were not part of the teacher’s pre-planned curriculum. “Outside of regularly planned curriculum and instruction” was not being interpreted as simply incidents outside of class time but involved all teachable moments, one-on-one exchanges, and anything else that was not intentionally included in the teachers’ lesson planning or explicit curriculum. In most cases, the teachers in this study promoted social and emotional growth in their students organically as social and emotional needs arose, meaning that the teachers addressed SEL development during the natural ebb and flow of class or during one-on-one conversations as students discussed their social and emotional needs. For instance, when I asked Nate how he met the social and/or emotional needs of his students, he responded, “I feel like it's something that happens naturally when you build those [student/teacher] relationships” (Nate, Interview 2). The teachers rarely planned specific ways to teach concepts of SEL development; rather, they took advantage of opportunities as they made themselves available. This required flexibility, intuition, and care on the part of the teacher. The concept of helping students develop socially and emotionally outside of planned curriculum and instruction resulted in three major themes: being accessible and approachable, teachable moments in the classroom, and helping students navigate grief. Table 20 provides examples of each of the three themes under Research Question 3.

The most prominent way that teachers promoted social and emotional development outside regularly planned curriculum and instruction was by being accessible and approachable. As the students recognized that their teachers were accessible and approachable, they often sought out those teachers for help in areas of social and emotional development. Each of the findings under this theme was associated with a student approaching a teacher and the teacher
### Table 20

Promoting SEL Outside of Planned Curriculum and Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Theme</th>
<th>Representative Quotation</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Being accessible and approachable</strong></td>
<td>“I can just think of countless, just many students who have asked to eat lunch in my room because they don't feel comfortable in the lunchroom. So that leads to conversations about whatever is going on emotionally with them.” (Kevin, Interview 2)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachable moments</strong></td>
<td>“So yeah like I said it's a class by class basis, so if there's an opportunity to teach a lesson about this I'm going to do it regardless of whether or not its chemistry.” (Nate, Interview 3)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Helping students navigate grief</strong></td>
<td>“We had a tragedy last year … Sometimes they just wanted to cry in a safe place. So, a couple girls came in and we just cried…we just …held hands and cried. One student wanted to pray so we've prayed. I mean I'm not opposed to any of that. It's whatever they need.” (Brooke, Interview 2)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

being able to offer guidance through one-on-one interactions. Conversely, the theme of *teachable moments* was operationalized as opportunities that arose in the middle of a class or a group rehearsal whereby teachers were able to address SEL development in a group setting. Even though these moments were occurring during class time, they are included in this research question because the teacher did not plan those teachable moments during lesson planning for their given curriculum. Rather, these lessons were part of the null curriculum, meaning they were
not originally included in the explicit curriculum (Eisner, 2002). Finally, helping students navigate grief is its own theme because it emerged several times across the teachers, and those moments included both one-on-one interactions and also situations where the teachers addressed the entire group of students. Just like teachable moments, the opportunities to help students navigate grief occurred outside of the teachers’ planned curriculum and instruction. Each of these themes will be addressed in detail in the sections to follow.

Being Accessible and Approachable

The theme of being accessible and approachable emerged across all six teachers and was operationalized as evidence showing that students felt comfortable approaching their teachers with their social and emotional needs and teachers being able to promote SEL development in those students via one-on-one conversations as those opportunities arose. Several of the teachers talked about how they ensured their students knew how to reach them if they needed anything. For instance, Brooke had been known to tell her students things like, “I'll check my email later. If you just want to talk… you can say ‘you don't have to respond’ or that you would appreciate a response, but either way I'll be at the other end of that computer” (Brooke, Interview 3). Similarly, I observed Kevin telling his students all the ways they could connect with him for extra help:

Alright, so if any individual questions come up that you don’t want to ask out loud in front of the class, as always, I am always available and willing to spend time with you during one of my free times or during lunch, or before school or after school or through email or through tweet. Any way you would like to talk to me. (Kevin, Classroom Observation)

Although this was in regard to academic questions, it also sent the message to the students that he was approachable and accessible for other concerns they may have. This was proven by the
simple fact that many students took advantage of his offers to spend extra time with him and they used that as opportunities to discuss their social and emotional challenges (Kevin, Interview 2).

Besides evidence of the teachers telling the students how they could be reached, other evidence of the teachers being accessible and approachable included times when students did indeed approach their teachers with their social and emotional concerns. Many of these conversations occurred during lunch because the students knew they had an open invitation to spend their lunch hours with these teachers. Justin mentioned wanting his classroom to be a “safe place” for his students and that sometimes students would come in during lunch periods (Justin, Interview 2). Kevin also said, “I can just think of countless students who have asked to eat lunch in my room because they don't feel comfortable in the lunchroom. So that leads to conversations about whatever is going on emotionally with them” (Kevin, Interview 2). Like Kevin and Justin, Nate had different students approach him to eat lunch in his classroom, which gave him additional opportunities to meet their social and emotional needs outside of regularly planned classroom instruction and activities. Nate explained:

Like, by the end of the year, you know, I have a couple of kids that would come into my room for lunch, and I would write them a pass every day because they didn't want to do anything else. They just want to sit there and relax, and you know one girl had issues with other people. So, she was just like, “Yeah can I come in for lunch?” (Nate, Interview 2)

Nate explained a few different instances where these lunch conversations led to him helping his students navigate through their interpersonal struggles. One particular student was having problems with another girl in the class. Nate was able to give her advice during their lunchtime chats and eventually see some progress. He mentioned:

Just seeing, seeing her overcome [her social struggle], it was like [she started] understanding, this person is different from me. This person says things that can be bothersome to me but realizing that I don't have to say something. I don't have to visibly
express my frustration, or like I can develop that friendship with that girl, where we can joke around about it. (Nate, Interview 3)

Because Nate was approachable and accessible, his students felt they could confide in him about their interpersonal struggles, knowing that he would be able to help them.

The other teachers gave additional examples of how they were able to meet the social and emotional needs of their students during one-on-one conversations outside of class as a result of being, caring, accessible, and approachable. In one example, Brooke mentioned Jared, a student who approached her about his struggle getting along with his parents; this conflict created additional problems relating to picking a career path. Both the parents and the student in this particular situation approached Brooke wanting guidance, and eventually she was able to help Jared and his parents come to some positive conclusions. Brooke said:

We have had conversations with him and conversations with his parents about his choices, and now he's going to aeronautical school...he's not a dumb kid he just hated school. But I think that they [the students] feel safe enough to bring those kinds of things up and I can help them apply strategies to their lives. (Brooke, Interview 2)

Brooke’s caring relationship with her students helped them know they could approach her with their various problems. Another example, given by Steve, was of a student who approached him with a different kind of family problem at home. This student’s father was having inappropriate relations with a minor. The son, who was the one who reported his father to the police, was a student in Steve’s choir at the time. Steve recalled, “Luckily the student came to me first and told me after school. And I had sense for about a week that he was just disconnected...And then that student shared with me and said like, ‘Hey, this is what's happening...’” (Steve, Interview 1). Steve talked about how he was able to support that student and also get him connected with the kind of counseling he needed.
More than any other teacher, however, Tara gave example after example of students approaching her with various life struggles or crises. Part of this is due to her having taught in the field longer than any of the other teachers. She also believed the reason why students approached her so often was simply because of the nature of being a physical education teacher; students naturally felt like they could connect emotionally with her since they discussed so many personal matters in class (Tara, Interview 2). Tara also believed that students knew she was accessible and approachable because so many of them had her as a teacher their freshman year and others heard through word-of-mouth that she would listen. She explained:

I see 72 freshmen every day. I think if you establish that rapport with them when they're young enough, they're going to come to you. I think that every junior or senior in my contemporary health class, they have either had me or they have heard how awesome my class is. So, I think word-of-mouth. You know, especially the girls that say, “Go talk to Mrs. Mohler. She will help you through this.” I think they have either had me as a student or word-of-mouth. I really think that is why they come to me. (Tara, Interview 2)

Tara’s students knew they could trust her because they had either had her as a freshman or they heard from their friends that Tara was a trustworthy teacher. Most of Tara’s stories started with a student approaching her in her office.

If I'm in my office in the locker room, all the time girls are [coming in], even if they come to the door they say, “Hey Mohler, what's up today? Do you know what we're having for lunch today?” Just silly things. But sometimes the door needs to be shut, you know. They come in and they know…I always tell kids, “Whatever we have in these four walls, unless it threatens your health and I have to report it, it's going nowhere. It doesn't go home to my husband. It doesn't go to the faculty lunchroom.” It can't. Because when I break that trust with the kids, I'm never getting it back. Never. So that's what I try to tell the kids. Really within the first couple weeks of school. (Tara, Interview 2)

Tara made sure that her students knew her door was always open and that they could trust her with whatever they wanted to talk about. Because she was accessible and approachable, Tara was able to address everything from what she called “the boyfriend/girlfriend talks” (Tara, Interview
2) to much more serious issues such as anorexia and teen pregnancy (Tara, Interview 3). The story that stood out the most to Tara was when a high school senior approached her about an unexpected pregnancy. Tara recalled:

I'll never forget her coming in here. Just, I mean, she cried for ten minutes. Before I could even [ask what was wrong] I knew she was pregnant. I knew when she walked in and said, “I need to talk to you.” I knew. And she was adamant about having this abortion. Every now and then she will hug me and say, “Hey, Tara, how is it going?” She says, “You know, I'll never be able to thank you.” So that is probably the number one story that is always going to stick with me. (Tara, Interview 2)

Tara said that girls came to her frequently when they thought they were pregnant and needed help. She talked about how she always explained to these girls what they could expect from an abortion, and she also talked about other options for them to consider, such as adoption.

Stephanie, along with a few other students whom Tara had helped through difficult circumstances in life, still visited Tara’s classroom regularly to share her story with other students. This was one of many instances where Tara was able to meet the social and emotional needs of one of her students because she was accessible and approachable.

Teachable Moments

The next theme focuses on how the teachers used teachable moments in order to promote SEL development as part of whole-class instruction, but “outside” what was originally outlined in their lesson planning for the day. As Brooke said, “Sometimes we don't do the lesson for the full day because something happens, and they want to talk about it. If they are willing to talk, I’ve got to listen, because that's what they need” (Brooke, Interview 2). This also resonated with Nate, who mentioned that when teachable moments arose, he did not mind taking time out of class to address his students’ immediate needs. He said, “So…it’s a class-by-class basis. So, if there's an opportunity to teach a lesson about this [a “life lesson”] I'm going to do it regardless of
whether or not it’s chemistry” (Nate, Interview 3). Although other teachers may see these moments as distractions from instruction, these teachers recognized them as opportunities to promote social and emotional development in their students.

At times, these teachable moments were a direct result of unique classroom compositions. For instance, it seemed to Kevin that the administration purposefully chose his classroom for placing students who came into the school with severe emotional and/or social needs. For example, Kevin affectionately remembers when Angela, a girl with Turner’s Syndrome, was placed in his English class. He recalled:

She had both male and female sex organs and Asperger’s was part of it…. So, she came into my class in October or November of the school year. Her counselor asked if it would be okay and so I said sure. They explain to me the severity of her situation and why this was happening and really it was just to appease a difficult mom and they didn't think that she could do it. My biggest concern was… the way that she talked. I mean it's not her fault, but the way that she talked, she had never been in a classroom environment before, so she really couldn't control the volume of her voice. Behaviorally she was not suited really to be in a regular education classroom. Frequent outbursts. Very, very, very emotional. Very stressed about everything. And so, I said yeah come on in it's fine. Had a brief talk, I didn't want to overblow it, so I had a brief talk with my other 30 kids the day before she came in. And I was astounded at how awesome they were. And so, she went into the whole year, did all of our assignments. I did not make many adjustments, just little things like if her fewer options are fewer questions or physically giving her notes but that was it she did all of her major essays… For her it was just exciting to do those things because she never had, she had always been babied, she always felt so different and so she will always stand out to me. To see her graduate was amazing. Seeing her genuine excitement at everything that most seniors are just too cool to get excited about or show outwardly, she would not, like she went sprinting across the stage, screaming, throwing her diploma in the air. So, a girl who they thought never could or should be in a regular classroom, who was who wasn't like a stellar student… survived, and we'll look back at high school remembering that she did that. (Kevin, Interview 1)

Not only does this story demonstrate Kevin’s care for this particular student and how he helped her academically, socially, and emotionally, but it also provides an example of Kevin using teachable moments to help the rest of the class learn to interact socially with someone very
different from themselves. Kevin mentioned this story more than once, saying that it was a fond memory for him to watch the class come together and help Angela make it to graduation. When he mentioned this story a second time, he added:

I had to talk to the whole class the day before she came. I had to take advantage of times that she would be out of the class to talk about her with the class. [I would] praise them for their mature behavior or offer suggestions. They were never bad, but [I would] often give suggestions for things that they could do to make her feel even more involved. (Kevin, Interview 2)

Kevin felt that the whole experience was not only a sweet memory for him and Angela, but that the class grew and matured as a result as well. This is an excellent example of how Kevin was able to meet the social and emotional needs of his students outside of regularly planned instruction through the use of teachable moments.

Other teachable moments occurred as a result of students exhibiting behaviors that needed to be addressed. For instance, Nate said, “They give me plenty of opportunities. Plenty of opportunities to correct or redirect them, and usually I go on a nice little life lesson rant for them” (Nate, Interview 3). Nate talked about one of these “life lesson rants” when he had to address the class about some poor homework habits they were developing. Nate explained that he was disappointed with the students because only about 75% of them had turned in their homework that week. He saw this as a teachable moment to address a need in his class. Nate recalled:

I said to them, “Some of you I'm going to have next year and some of you I'm not going to have. But I still care about what you're doing and what you're going to be. It might seem a little stupid right now to get the stuff done, but these are habits that carry over into your adult life. Like I can go home tonight, and I can choose to grade your tests, or your quizzes, or I can [choose] not do it. And I can put it off. And I said one of the things you appreciate about me as a teacher is that I get things back to you right away. So, that's a work habit that has been instilled in my life from the time I was your age. So, I'm trying to get you to that point too so that you can be successful adults.” And they appreciated that. One girl came up to me afterwards and said, “You almost made me cry.”
Because Nate cared about the development of his students beyond his class, he saw his students’ failure to turn in homework as an opportunity to address a simple need in their lives that would affect their work habits in adulthood. Justin also mentioned instances when student behavior emerged as an opportunity to address social and emotional issues during teachable moments. Justin mentioned a couple times when students were struggling to get along interpersonally in their sectionals and he used these teachable moments to teach them leadership skills and give tools for successful social interactions in challenging circumstances:

Last year there was a senior who, he was one of those like rough kids, like he would say something [negative] about the other kids…and I had to come down on him pretty hard. And in my communication to the other leaders, when they would say things like, “So-and-so is saying this about the group,” or whatever, on one hand, I would try to minimize the drama, you know like [tell them], “Shake it off. Slough it off and keep moving forward,” but to the individuals who are the recipient of that, I try to let them know that I support them, you know? And where the other kid is wrong, I let them know in no uncertain terms if that keeps happening we will end that relationship. They will go and find another class you know. So, I think they feel supported. (Justin, Interview 2)

These conversations would be considered as part of the null curriculum, but they occurred because he cared enough about his students to help them navigate their social struggles as they emerged. Justin went on to say:

Yeah there's definitely been times where I've had to mediate between students who were having issues and conflict. Last year the percussion section…just their whole their whole vibe was really bad last year, and it was because the leader was very insecure and did not know how to (pause), she was a good, smart musician but just did not know how to get that group to really get behind her and just a lot of division. So, at one point [I addressed one of the students who was struggling with her leadership] and I said, “Have you thought about just going to her and telling her, ‘Hey, I think you're a really good leader. I think you lead well, and I just want you to know that I respect you.’” This kid was just particularly mature, so he could do it and mean it and so then for the rest of the year those two worked really well together because it disarmed her insecurities and fears. (Justin, Interview 2)
Justin cared about developing leaders and helping his students navigate through conflict while keeping the big picture in mind. Steve also mentioned using conflict between students as teachable moments to promote social and emotional development:

The class last year was a whole bunch of seniors that would just come in tears because there was so much animosity between each other… There's one point last year where I was in tears, and I was like, “With all the crud going on in the world, the fact that you guys [cannot get along], (pause) think about what's happening in our world right now. All the different animosity that's happening between people and all these different things [and] you guys are fighting over these types of things and not lifting each other up.” That's the only time in my career that I've really come to tears, but I was like I need you to care for each other. (Steve Interview 2)

Steve frequently talked about promoting empathy and respect in his classes and he was able to do this as a result of many teachable moments that emerged in the midst of student conflict.

Finally, in addition to teachable moments emerging as a result of classroom composition and student behavior, sometimes teachable moments simply emerged as a result of a student sharing something personal which opened the door for the teacher to address social and emotional issues with the class. For instance, in two different interviews Brooke brought up the work she does in her creative writing and how the students often share difficult things with one another that spontaneously provides Brooke with opportunities to pause the class and help the students work through their emotions. Brooke told stories of girls who admitted they had been abused and one particular boy who “came out” to his classmates during class and Brooke was able to help the students empathize and navigate through the various emotions they were experiencing. These teachable moments allowed for Brooke to meet the social and emotional needs of her students even though they occurred outside of regularly planned classroom instruction and activities.
Helping Students Navigate Grief

The final theme that emerged was helping students navigate through grief. Although Table 21 only lists 12 records of this theme, each time it was mentioned, the teacher became very sober and spoke at length on the matter. Over the past decade, the school has averaged about one student death per year (Kevin, Interview 2). For teachers who had been working at Melo High School over the duration of that time, they had many opportunities to help students cope with loss and tragedy. Table 21 gives a representative quote from each teacher who spoke on this topic.

Each teacher, with the exception of Justin, mentioned different ways that they helped students navigate through these difficult circumstances. Even though the school provided grief counselors and had social workers and other support staff prepared to counsel students, many students opted to go to caring teachers with whom they already had established relationships with. Brooke mentioned that she felt even more equipped than some of the counselors simply because she already had relationships with the students:

Honestly, I think that I actually irritated a lot of people last year when we had that tragedy because the kids were asking to come see me instead of the counselors But why are you offended by that? If it's best for the kids? And I was totally comfortable with them and they would even come in three or four at a time to sit down because I've had them since sixth grade, so that gives me an advantage. (Brooke, Interview 2)

This connects back to the theme of approachable and accessible because the students felt comfortable enough to approach these caring teachers knowing they could trust them in the midst of such extenuating circumstances.
Helping Students Navigate Grief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>“We had a student at Melo pass away. Well we had three different students passed away this year at Melo. One of them was in one of my chemistry classes and it was a smaller class too. So that was rough. So, like obviously around those times, I had a plan something (pause), I think that might be a big part of why kids saw me as a caring teacher because, because of the way I addressed it. I think. You know, talking with them about it, you know letting them know that if they needed anything, to let me know.” (Nate, Interview 2)</td>
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<td>Brooke</td>
<td>“We had a tragedy last year … Sometimes they just wanted to cry in a safe place. So, a couple girls came in and we just cried and we just, so you know held hands and cried. One student wanted to pray so we’ve prayed. I mean I'm not opposed to any of that. It's whatever they need. And some of them didn't want to talk about the incident at all, they just were like so Smith tell us what you're doing this weekend so okay told him what we were doing this weekend and what are you guys doing this weekend? They just wanted to diffuse all of that and have a distraction. So, it really is about the students’ needs.” (Brooke, Interview 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>“So many traffic accidents have happened. It sucks because I would say probably an average it's happened one every year since I thought here it has been every year but last year there were two boys that were killed….and I had siblings of both and my class so there's obviously a lot of conversations with those particular kids. So rarely with the contents that I teach in the level I teach do I have lessons cater to that sort of thing but daily conversations with kids who need it.” (Kevin, Interview 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>“There's been bigger things, where unfortunately there have been several times where students have died as result of car accidents. One of my students who currently lives in Cincinnati who became a music teacher, was just totally devastated because one of her best friends, and it was just the week of our magical dinner, and so helping her sort through when she could just go ahead and relax and not be a part of that rehearsal but then come back, because she needed to be there to and so just trying to help her work through that.” (Steve Interview 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>“We had two boys lose a little brother last year in a car accident. … So, I had both of the brothers and class at the same, the same semester…my son was the first paramedic on the scene. My son tried to drag the kids out of the burning vehicle. When he found out that my son was there, he asked a lot of questions that I couldn't answer for him. I said James, you don't need to know any details. You just need to know that he's in a better place.” (Tara, Interview 2)</td>
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Summary of Research Question 3

Each of these teachers had numerous opportunities to invest in the lives of their students simply because they were accessible and approachable. Tara had very vivid stories to share about girls who struggled with eating disorders and teens who were dealing with unexpected pregnancies. Brooke told multiple stories about students who came to her for questions on career and life decisions, while Kevin told stories about working with troubled teens in his classes who
came to him for extra guidance and support. Steve told a story about a student whose parent got arrested for inappropriate relations with another student, and Steve was able to provide support and comfort through that situation. At one point in time or another, each of these five teachers mentioned helping individual students navigate through social situations during one-on-one chats with them. None of these stories would be possible, however, if these caring teachers were not accessible and approachable.

The second theme was *teachable moments*, moments during whole-group instruction when a teacher sensed it was the right time to teach a life lesson whether or not it directly connected to the lesson or objective. Although neither Tara nor Justin mentioned taking advantage of teachable moments, each of the other four teachers gave examples being tuned in to the needs of their students and addressing them with the whole class when the opportunity for teaching a “life lesson” arose. They did not view these moments as distractions but rather as opportunities. They genuinely cared for the well-being of each child, and they believed in educating the whole child.

The last way these teachers helped their students work through social and emotional issues outside of regularly planned classroom instruction and activities was taking the time to help students navigate through grief. Over the past decade, the school has averaged about one student death per year (Kevin, Interview 2). For teachers who had been working at Melo High School over the duration of that time, they had many opportunities to help students cope with loss and tragedy. Each teacher, with the exception of Justin, mentioned different ways that they helped students navigate through these difficult circumstances. Even though the school provided grief counselors and had social workers and other support staff prepared to counsel students,
many students opted to go to caring teachers with whom they already had established relationships.

In summary, the teachers had many examples of how they met the social and emotional needs of their students outside of planned curriculum and instruction. Most of these instances happened naturally and spontaneously; the teachers simply met needs as they arose. Being approachable and accessible allowed the teachers to have many opportunities to work with students one-on-one as needs arose. Second, being sensitive to teachable moments in the classroom afforded these teachers additional opportunities to promote SEL development in a whole-group format. Finally, the unfortunate tragedies that the students and staff experienced at Melo High School gave these teachers ample opportunities to help students navigate grief.

**Research Question 4**

Which SEL standards do caring teachers promote most with their students? Which SEL standards do caring teachers promote least with their students? Why?

Using the Illinois SEL standards for my final round of coding (see Appendix F), I tracked the frequency of each standard as they emerged in the data. I found that although all six teachers promoted SEL development in their classrooms, not every standard was emphasized equally, and some were favored more than others. In the sections to follow, I will share the findings for which SEL standards were promoted most, which SEL standards were promoted least, and then discuss why.

**SEL Standards Promoted the Most**

The criteria for categorizing a standard as one that was “promoted the most” included (1) being referenced or observed by at least five of the participants and (2) being referenced or
observed at least 15 times throughout the course of the study. As shown in Table 22, each of the six teachers either verbalized or demonstrated four out of nine of the Illinois SEL standards for high school: (1C) Demonstrate skills relating to achieving personal and academic goals; (1B) Recognize personal qualities and external supports; (2C) Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others; and (3B) Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations. Two of the nine standards were addressed by five of the teachers: (2A) Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others and (1A) Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.

Table 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1C) Demonstrate skills relating to achieving personal and academic goals</td>
<td>“So…that is my goal. I try to give them ownership of it, you know. Do this, and these are the results. Give them the picture of what we are doing. With marching band, we talked a lot about vision and what we want to accomplish, who we want to be as a group, what things we want to do, kind of give them that picture [of] that goal so that when they are standing out in the hot sun next week, when they'd rather go home and take a nap, they have a clear goal.” (Justin, Interview 2)</td>
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<td>46</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1B) Recognize personal qualities and external supports</td>
<td>“And so, she [a student] went into the whole year, did all of our assignments. I did not make many adjustments, just little things like give her fewer options or fewer questions or physically giving her notes but that was it. She did all of her major essays. She did things that no one else thought she was capable of doing. For her it was just exciting to do those things because she never had, she had always been babied, she always felt so different and so she will always stand out to</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
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(Continued on following page)
Table 22. Continued.

| (1A) Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior | “By me being able to openly express my emotions in front of people, and be okay with it, or express my emotions and come back the next day and say those emotions were not okay, it was not okay, hopefully they will be able to do the same thing.” (Nate, Interview 3) | 5 | 17 |
| (2A) Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others | “In creative writing, we work on empathy. You know we had two kids talking about being abused. The format of that class is you have the writing assignment, and you write and then you can read yours out loud...So they do that, and there is a lot of emotion, or they can say when they submit their paper ‘Can you read this?’ So, the beginning of the year I would read some things, and the class would become very emotional, and they wanted to help each other even though they didn't know who that person was. So, then we started writing responses to each other, not knowing who that person was, and so it was just a great, great class.” (Brooke, Interview 3) | 5 | 20 |
| (3B) Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations | “My laptop goes home with me. I look at kids that I've had that got in trouble. I look up their discipline records, and I think, oh I need to talk to Tommy tomorrow.” (Tara, Interview 2) | 6 | 29 |
| (2C) Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others | “Socially [learn] how to interact with their peers because that's always a challenge at that age. I think it's more of a challenge now with social media. Because the way kids communicate is completely different, or the way they don't communicate, in my opinion. So, I am pretty wide open with my kids, and I talk about it with them.” (Nate, Interview 2, June 23, 2017) | 6 | 42 |
| | “To see her graduate was amazing.” (Kevin, Interview 2) | 6 | 44 |
Standard 1C--Demonstrate skills relating to achieving personal and academic goals--was the most frequently addressed standard, possibly due to the goal-oriented approach taken by all six teachers. For instance, the music teachers worked with individual students on their strengths and weaknesses with their voices or instruments while the academic classroom teachers helped students recognize their skills in things like writing, analysis, computation, and critical thinking. The teachers frequently spoke using goal-oriented language. Justin mentioned, “My goal is to again encourage them to [reach their goals], we are always getting better. We're always working towards the goals of [making] progress, taking steps, making strides towards becoming even better” (Justin, Interview 3). The teachers also demonstrated this in classroom observations by reminding students of their music performance goals (Justin, Classroom Observation; Steve, Classroom Observation) and helping them with goals for their speeches (Brooke, Classroom Observation), seminars (Kevin, Classroom Observation), and assessments (Tara, Classroom Observation). Not only did the teachers help their students with academic goals in their current classes, but they also gave counsel regarding their students’ goals for the future. When speaking of how he interacts with his students in study hall, Nate explained, “Sometimes it's just joking around, but sometimes it's me helping the kids with college stuff, and it leads into conversations like, ‘Hey what are you interested in? What do you want to do? What is your plan?’” (Nate, Interview 3). Brooke also mentioned numerous times how much she was able to talk with her students about their future goals, and Kevin even stated that he knew each of his students’ tentative post-secondary plans for the following year based on conversations they had over the course of the school year (Kevin, Interview 2).

Furthermore, each teacher also mentioned helping students recognize personal qualities and get connected to external supports (1B). One of the substandards under Standard 1B is
1B.5.A, “Implement a plan to build on a strength, meet a need, or address a challenge.” This standard was met frequently by the teachers. For instance, Brooke told a story of a student who had severe speech anxiety. They brainstormed together for a solution, and the student was able to give her speech from the back of the classroom while directing the audience’s attention to the front screen (Brooke, Interview 2). Kevin also addressed this standard multiple times with the students who had unique needs in his classroom. As they identified challenges, Kevin helped them implement plans to meet the class objectives in creative ways that helped the students overcome those challenges while recognizing personal strengths (Kevin, Interview 2). In one of my classroom observations with Kevin I noted:

Kevin repeatedly said things like, ‘If this is a struggle for you...then here is something to help you along with some examples.’ One of the handouts was a checklist where the students could develop a plan for themselves in order to be successful in the seminar tomorrow. (Kevin, Interview 3)

This standard was also commonly observed in both music classes as those teachers helped their students build on their musical strengths while overcoming challenges in the music (Justin, Classroom Observation; Steve, Classroom Observation).

In addressing Standard 2C--Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others--this appeared in the form of teachable moments or group projects, as well as in the form of one-on-one conversations with students. For instance, Kevin helped his students develop strong communication skills in his Socratic Seminars (Kevin, Classroom Observation); Nate talked about helping his upper-classmen get along socially with the under-classmen (Nate, Interview 3); Tara frequently helped her students work through what she called “boyfriend/girlfriend” situations (Tara, Interview 3); Steve worked with a challenging group of seniors who needed to learn how to love and respect one another (Steve, Interview 2); and Justin
was frequently talking about developing interpersonal skills with his section leaders (Justin, Interview 2).

Next, the teachers addressed Standard 3B -- Applying decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations-- both in the form of whole-group instruction depending on the content of the class, but more often they addressed this standard one-on-one with students as needs arose. Tara, especially, worked on helping her students make responsible decisions. This was largely due to the content in her class (an entire chapter in her curriculum was dedicated to this) and also because Tara had many opportunities to work with students one-on-one as they made difficult decisions. This included working with students who had eating disorders, students who had unwanted pregnancies, and students with alcohol and drug problems (Tara, Interview 3). She said, “My laptop goes home with me. I look at kids that I’ve heard that got in trouble. I look up their discipline records and I think, ‘Oh, I need to talk to Tommy tomorrow’” (Tara, Interview 3). This was also a common topic in Brooke’s class as she sought to teach responsible decision-making skills when teachable moments arose. She mentioned, “I talk about bad choices, and [I tell the students], ‘When you guys are in the future, you need to make choices. You need to think before you speak. Watch your body language, etc.’” (Brooke, Interview 2). Furthermore, Justin and Steve emphasized how their students needed to make responsible decisions because their actions affect entire groups of students (Justin, Interview 3; Steve, Classroom Observation), and Kevin emphasized this concept of responsible social skills when working on Socratic Seminars with his students (Kevin, Classroom Observation).

The final two standards were only addressed by five teachers. Standard 2A--Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others—was referenced 20 times. This standard emerged often
during the conversations that teachers had with their students over interpersonal conflict such as Steve working with his troublesome group of seniors (Steve, Interview 2); Nate working with the conflict in his mixed-grade classes (Nate, Interview 3); and Tara working with the girls who were fighting over a common love interest (Tara, Interview 3). Kevin also addressed this standard quite often as he helped his classes learn to tolerate and accept classmates with differences. Kevin talked about helping his students know “how we should just be empathetic and welcoming and do our best” even when it was difficult (Kevin, Interview 2).

The final standard in this category was Standard 1A--Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior. Extenuating circumstances often prompted the teaching of this standard such as times when students were grieving losses or navigating through personal challenges. Tara talked about helping a student manage his emotions in the aftermath of his brother’s fatal accident (Tara, Interview 2), and Brooke also mentioned working with several students who needed emotional support during those times (Brooke, Interview 3). In other instances, students were not working through deep grief but still experienced circumstances that gave teachers opportunities to address emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Justin retold the story of a student who needed help recognizing how his attitude needed to change before continuing in the band program:

There's this kid that was a freshman. He came to the band camp...he came the first day he was just a freshman, and he kind of had an attitude, and he actually gave me the finger in a really subtle way, but I totally caught it, and I said, ‘Hey, you're going to talk to me before you leave.’ And I had a really firm conversation with him afterwards and I just said, ‘Hey, if you're going to do this [have a bad attitude], you're going to do this [leave the program]. And you need to make a decision, otherwise you're done, and we are not going on any further from this.’ Thankfully, it was so obvious and so clear he had recognized what he had done...By the time he was a senior, he was one of my most passionate most dedicated leaders. (Justin, Interview 2)

Nate also talked with his students about managing their behaviors and emotions when struggling to get along with others:
If someone is annoying you, it's okay to express that, but maybe [you can say], “Oh, hey can you stop tapping your pencil?” instead of [yelling], “EVERY FREAKING DAY YOU’RE TAPPING THAT PENCIL AND YOU’RE DRIVING ME CRAZY! What's wrong with you?” There is a way that you can do that civilly. (Nate, Interview 3)

Between comforting grieving students and working with students who encountered other types of challenges, the teachers had several opportunities to help their students identify and manage their emotions and behaviors during everyday events in the classroom.

**SEL Standards Promoted the Least**

Table 23 displays representative quotes from the three standards that qualified for this category. The criterion for categorizing a standard as one that was “promoted the least” was that it was referenced or observed by less than five of the teachers. Two of the nine standards were addressed by three teachers, with a total number of 12 references each: Standard 2B--Recognize individual and group similarities and differences and Standard 3A--Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions. One of the nine standards was addressed by only one of the teachers, with a total of three references: Standard 3C--Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community.

Nate, Kevin, and Brooke were the three teachers to address 2B--Recognize individual and group similarities and differences. Brooke intentionally worked on helping her students recognize and appreciate individual differences in other students. For instance, this was a topic she addressed in her speech classes:

I challenge them to be less judgmental. [I tell them], “I know when you see a kid that has a shirt that says, ‘I shop at Walmart,’ you think one thing, and then when you see someone else who wears an Abercrombie shirt [you think more highly of them]. Let's try not to do that because you don't know that the kid with a Walmart shirt, his mom is working two jobs and has to put food on the table and really wants to buy him that Abercrombie shirt but just can't.” (Brooke, Interview 2)
Table 23

SEL Standards Promoted the Least

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<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Total number of References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2B) Recognize individual and group similarities and differences</td>
<td>“But yeah, I'm wide open in my class. I'm like, ‘Guys, you need to realize that you are all over the place in terms of where you are at academically, so some of you are going out to college next year, some of you are sophomores who are going to be in the same class. So, you're going to have to learn how to at least treat one another with respect in the classroom.' There are a couple times where I have had to have those conversations.” (Nate, Interview 2)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3A) Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions</td>
<td>“It's one of those things where she [a student] was determined that she was going to have an abortion, and she was determined that she was going to do this without her mother ever finding out. So, we sat for a long time and talked about it, and 3 years after she graduated from high school, I brought her back to my contemporary health class. I had her tell her story. You know 4 years later. And this little boy is almost going into kindergarten, and she brings him to school sits in my class and tells her story.” (Tara, Interview 2)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3C) Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community.</td>
<td>“We have a program called the Give Program…so you go to a church and you help at the food pantry. Your pastor will sign on the line and say you worked there for 2 hours. At the end of the school year if you have…10 hours up to 60 hours, there are incentives at the end of the year.” (Tara, Interview 3)</td>
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<td>3</td>
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Brooke wanted her students to stop being quick to judge others based on individual differences.

Nate also wanted his students to be able to get along with one another despite differences in academic abilities, reminding them, “You're going to have to learn how to at least treat one
another with respect in the classroom” (Nate, Interview 2). This was after a conversation he had with them about how they needed to recognize each other’s strengths and weaknesses and be able to appreciate one another despite those differences.

Next, Tara, Kevin, and Brooke were the three teachers to address 3A--Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions. This standard was addressed in both whole-class instruction time as well as in one-on-one conversations with students as needs arose. This standard was important to Tara, who had several opportunities to teach her students how to make safe and ethical decisions in the midst of unplanned pregnancies, difficulties with eating disorders, and struggles with substance abuse. Tara’s lessons on safe and ethical decision making were preventative in nature, meaning she emphasized this standard with her entire freshman class each year before problems arose. She also reinforced the idea of considering ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions as individual students approached her in the middle of their life crises, such as the story of Sarah’s unplanned pregnancy mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, a substandard included in this standard is Standard 3A.5B—Examine how the norms of different societies and cultures influence their members’ decisions and behaviors. Both Brooke and Kevin mentioned ways they taught this standard in their classes. Brooke talked about a time when she taught a class on ancient civilizations and had a unique opportunity to discuss various cultural and religious norms:

I was fortunate enough to have a Muslim [student] and a Buddhist [student] and the typical Baptist and Catholic [students] and all different people who even say, “I’m just a Christian” … And we had the best discussions about how so many wars can be related either to religion or greed. But then we also talked about how similar all of our religions really are too. (Brooke, Interview 3)
Brooke helped her students understand their own cultural and religious backgrounds as they studied ancient civilizations and how the norms of society and culture affect behaviors and outcomes. Kevin also addressed this topic in his literature classes:

> In English 12, we are examining how the norms of different societies and cultures influence their members decisions and behaviors. I mean absolutely that is something that we talk about. It's a British literary history class, so that's absolutely part of the conversation that we have. (Kevin, Interview 3)

In both of these instances, the teachers were able to help their students understand individual and group differences as they progressed through the curriculum.

Finally, there was one standard that was only addressed by one teacher: 3C--Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community. Tara was the lone teacher to address this standard and she mentioned it three times during the interviews. Tara was very passionate about community service and verbalized her disappointment that the students at Melo High School were not required to log community service hours for graduation. Nonetheless, she worked hard to provide opportunities:

> We have a program called the Give Program…so you go to a church and you help at the food pantry. Your pastor will sign on the line and say you worked there for 2 hours. At the end of the school year if you have…10 hours up to 60 hours, there are incentives at the end of the year. (Tara, Interview 3)

I got the impression that Tara emphasized community service with her students more out of personal conviction rather than it being directly connected to her content area. The other teachers simply did not mention community service at all. This leads into the final subquestion under Research Question 4: Why was it that some of the SEL standards were promoted more frequently than others?
The reason the teachers were not always likely to address each standard is perhaps because most of the participants viewed their work on SEL growth as something that was need based and specific to the uniqueness of their individual students. For example, Nate mentioned, “I think a lot of this stuff happens naturally in our classroom. You know, showing evidence of it would be difficult because how do you show a student's social or emotional growth? You can't put it on paper” (Nate, Interview 3). Nate frequently addressed the standards dealing with interpersonal conflicts simply because those were the types of needs that arose in his classroom on a regular basis. He did not plan to address those standards as part of the curriculum—he, along with the other teachers, addressed specific needs as they arose.

Furthermore, some of the specific academic content areas led more naturally into specific SEL standards. For instance, it is natural to work on communication skills in a speech class and talk about healthy decision making in a health class. These issues are less likely to emerge in a chemistry class, however. Likewise, some of the teachers’ personalities and passions led them to promote some standards more than others, with the example of Tara’s emphasis on community service being the most prominent.

The final reason was that the teachers were less inclined to emphasize every standard equally is simply because the teachers were unaware of the specific state-required standards. During my first interview with each teacher, I quickly realized that although social and emotional health was a priority for them, the district did not enforce any mandate to ensure that teachers were promoting the SEL standards that Illinois requires its schools to address. The data from this study emerged from areas of SEL growth that the teachers were already promoting
because they were simply caring teachers addressing the needs of their students. At times, their actions fit into the various categories that Illinois articulated as state standards but were not intentional as a result of it being mandated by the state. Then, once I showed the list of standards to the teachers, they were able to recognize ways they already address many of them. In other cases, some of the teachers recognized that some standards were better left addressed by other staff in the school. Kevin said:

(Reading from SEL standards) ‘Setting up post-secondary school with time steps and to evaluate achievement,’ that doesn't happen like in the English classroom. That doesn't happen formally. I'm not meeting with each kid to develop a post-secondary goal. That strikes me more as a guidance counselor sort of role, so doing that in any sort of formal way in the classroom, sure we talk about what kids want to do after high school, but not to that level. So that strikes me as an unrealistic, teaching 150 kids and doing that with all of them and an English class. (Kevin, Interview 3)

Kevin recognized that while some standards were already being addressed in the classroom naturally, other standards were being addressed by social workers, guidance counselors, or other support staff in the building.

**Summary of Research Question 4**

In summary, the standards that related to academic goals, communication/social skills and emotions/attitudes were among the standards that were addressed the most by the teachers. By contrast, standards that were addressed the least included those relating to differences in others, ethical decision making, and community service. There are many reasons why the frequency of each standard being promoted varied across participants. Some of the standards could be embedded more naturally into specific lessons taught in academic or musical content while other standards were simply favored by the interests of the individual teachers. Finally, a general lack of understanding of the specific standards was another reason why the teachers did
not address each one in the classroom. Further discussion on this matter along with the other aforementioned themes will continue in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter includes a discussion of the findings which emerged from the current study. Major themes and subthemes relating to teacher care and SEL development will be discussed in light of past research and the theoretical framework which guided this study. This study was framed within the intersection of the theory of care (Noddings, 1984) and the current educational emphasis on promoting social and emotional development in the classroom (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Noddings, 2005). In the midst of an educational landscape that favors high-stakes testing and state standards, even social and emotional learning is being subjected to benchmarks and standardized curriculum; however, according to Noddings’s (1984, 2005) framework, the role of the caring teacher is crucial in understanding and meeting the SEL needs of high school students. Noddings (1984) posits that actions of care must occur within the context of a relationship between the one caring and the one being cared for. These caring actions are performed with the intention of helping the “cared-for” individuals become the best versions of themselves (Noddings, 2005). For teachers, this means concerning themselves with the best interest of their students. This caring approach entails educating the “whole child” (Noddings, 2005) and thereby meeting their social and emotional needs as well as their academic needs. The current study sought to understand how caring high school teachers described care in their practice and also how caring teachers promoted social and emotional development as part of their explicit curriculum as well as outside of that curriculum.
This study, rooted in the theoretical framework of care and SEL development, confirms that the high school teachers who were nominated by their students for being caring did indeed seek to meet the social and emotional needs of their students; furthermore, findings from the data revealed various ways this was accomplished. Findings also confirmed past research concerning care and SEL in the classroom while also offering insight to fill gaps in the current body of literature. Finally, the findings from this study offer several valuable recommendations for the field of education, specifically in the area of teacher preparation programs and state mandates involving SEL standards as well as avenues for future research.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Theoretical Framework

The major themes that emerged from the study regarding how teachers describe care confirmed each of the major facets of Noddings’s (1984) theory on care. First, because the teachers were each recommended by the students as being caring, it modeled Noddings’s premise that care must be recognized by the one being cared for. Second, Noddings states the foundation of care springs from a relationship between the one caring and the one being cared for. Each of the teachers in the study described their care as happening in the context of a genuine relationship with their students. Furthermore, Noddings states that actions of care must be rooted in the well-being of the one being cared for. In other words, the purpose of a teacher’s care must be aimed at the best interest of the students. This was evident in the findings as the teachers repeatedly made statements reinforcing their desire to see their students grow and become successful. Examples from the data include teachers seeking “what is right for kids” (Brooke, Interview 3), “making a difference” in their students’ lives (Nate, Interview 2) and being “genuinely concerned for students’ [well-being]” (Kevin, Interview 2). Then, according to
Noddings’s (1984) framework, when the caring individual engages in a genuine relationship with the one being cared for and is seeking that person’s best interest, he or she is able to determine actions of care to meet one’s specific needs. But first, in order to meet the needs of students, the teachers needed to know the students well enough to be acquainted with their specific needs (Buber, 2003; Garza et al., 2014; Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 2015; Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996). In this study, findings supported that as the teachers got to know their students on a personal basis, they sought to meet their individual needs. For instance, Nate mentioned how as he gets to know his students, he becomes aware of their social and emotional needs: “In terms of what they need emotionally, I think it's all over the map. My student whose mother passed away is going to need something quite different than a kid who wants to just joke around all the time” (Nate, Interview 3). Likewise, Noddings’s (1984) theory states that caring individuals "act with special regard for the particular person in a concrete situation" (p. 24), thereby implying that caring actions vary across situations and persons. This was also supported by the findings as the data revealed a multitude of individualized ways the teachers carried out actions of care with their students, many times occurring spontaneously as student needs arose. These actions ranged from helping students receive counseling for eating disorders (Tara, Interview 3), to helping students cope with the death of a loved one (Brooke, Interview 3; Steve, Interview 2), to assisting students with many other personal needs. When discussing her interactions with students who needed help grieving the loss of a fellow student, Brooke said:

So, it really is about the students’ needs. I think that's another fault of the system--We try to put every kid and every situation into a box…It can't. It's just all about with the kid needs at the time. (Brooke, Interview 3)
Brooke was trying to stress that teachers must be prepared to meet the individual needs of their students in ways that are meaningful to those specific students, which is a crucial touchpoint for Noddings (1984).

Furthermore, although findings revealed many actions of care relating to meeting the academic needs of their students in ways that kept the best interest of the student in mind (i.e., checking student progress, scaffolding instruction, giving feedback, etc.), findings also supported the relationship between care and the theoretical framework concerning SEL development by revealing many actions of care that addressed the social and emotional needs of students. Noddings (2002, 2003, 2006, 2013) places emphases on helping students learn critical thinking skills, develop as moral beings, and become happy individuals who have meaningful relationships, love their jobs, and benefit society. These characteristics each fall under SEL development. As the teachers in this study cared for the needs of their students, they recognized the importance of helping students grow socially and emotionally alongside achieving academically. For instance, findings in this study revealed teachers helping students navigate through interpersonal conflicts (Justin, Interview 2; Nate, Interview 3; Steve, Interview 2), develop strong communication skills (Brooke, Interview 3; Tara, Interview 3), develop empathy for others (Kevin, Interview 2; Nate, Interview 3; Steve, Interview 2), manage their own emotions (Kevin, Interview 2; Nate, Interview 3; Steve, Interview 2; Tara, Interview 3), make healthy decisions (Tara, Interview 3), and appreciate group and individual differences (Kevin, Interview 2). Each of these actions was performed within the context of teacher/student relationships as teachers became aware of specific needs; furthermore, in addition to supporting Noddings’s (1984, 2005) theory of care, they also support the framework of social and emotional learning.
Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Research

In addition to having strong connection to the theoretical framework of care and SEL development, the current study also has strong connections to past research. First, the current study provides insights relating to the qualities of a caring teacher. Second, the current study provides insights relating to SEL programming on the high-school level.

**Qualities of a Caring Teacher**

To begin, the current study addressed a significant gap in the literature on teacher care on the high-school level. First, one difference between the past research and the current study is that the findings from the current study emerged from interviews and observations with teachers who were nominated by their students as being caring, whereas previous studies focused on teachers who were nominated by their administration (Garza et al., 2014), or the findings emerged from how students responded to interviews and questionnaires concerning their teachers (Ferreira, & Bosworth, 2001; Suldo et al., 2009). The current study focused on caring teachers nominated by their own students, thus featuring the voice of the caring teacher. Furthermore, most studies on teacher care typically focus on elementary and middle school teachers (Goldstein, 1998; Hayes et al., 1994; Spilt et al., 2012), which may imply that caring teachers are primarily needed in elementary and middle schools as opposed to high school. Additionally, when high school students have been asked to report on their school environment, studies indicated they responded negatively to answering questions about if they felt their teachers cared for them (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001; Perry & Quaglia, 1997; Tosolt, 2008); however, this study found a group of high school teachers who were nominated by their own students for being perceived as caring.
In addition to verifying that caring high school teachers do exist on the high school level, another way the current study adds to the body of literature is by providing unique qualities that may be found in caring high school teachers. For instance, a couple themes that emerged as new findings in the field of teacher care are that the caring high school teachers in this study pushed their students out of their comfort zones and they corrected and admonished them when needed, but in ways that were understood as being in the best interest of the students. In other words, even though at times the teachers gave the students challenging tasks and often had difficult conversations with their students to correct destructive behavior, the intentions behind these actions were altruistic in nature. In these cases, care was demonstrated in a way that might have initially felt unpleasant to the students, but in the end the teachers hoped the students would realize it was for their own benefit and personal growth (Brooke, Interview 2; Justin, Interview 2; Steve, Interview 2). For instance, when Brooke would push her students out of their comfort zones by choosing their groups for them during their group speeches, she would tell them, “I know you all hate me right now, but …this is life. And in life, you may have to deal with people that you don't like” (Brooke, Interview 2). Likewise, Steve would speak very directly with his choir students when they needed to be corrected:

“I am telling you, I have to tell you how you can get better. I can't lie to you and say this is your best when it's not. And that's not always going to feel good but know that I see you are capable of this, and you are going to be so much better for this.” I have had frank conversations… (Steve Interview 3)

In each of these circumstances, the initial act of care may not have been well received by the students, yet it operationalized what Noddings (1984) proposes as acts of care that bring about positive change in the ones being cared for. These concrete examples from the current study are
valuable new findings which add to the body of literature on teacher care on the high school-level.

Furthermore, two other new findings from the current study are in regard to how the caring teachers developed relationships with their students. Past research has not mentioned time or relatability as major building blocks to developing caring relationships between high school teachers and their students. The first aspect of time revealed that the caring teachers needed to invest in their students beyond simply their 45-minute period of class each day. As opposed to elementary and some middle school teachers, high school teachers only see each student for a short amount of scheduled time each day and they have a considerably larger total number of students under their care. Although this makes it more challenging to get to know students on a personal level, the caring teachers in this study took extra time to be with their students in order to get to know them and care for their needs. This meant they had to be creative and flexible. For instance, several of the teachers mentioned opening up their classrooms as places where students could eat lunch. Along with providing opportunities for students to come see them before and after school as well as during their prep periods, the caring teachers in this study found extra pockets of time to interact with their students in smaller groups and in one-on-one conversations.

Many of the teachers also interacted with their students during their involvement in extra-curricular activities. For example, Tara, Brooke, Kevin, and Nate each spent time coaching various athletic teams, and Steve and Justin worked with band and choir students outside of class time as they prepared for concerts and competitions. Each teacher mentioned these as opportunities to spend more time getting to know students and developing relationships with them. Additionally, the second aspect of time is that some of the teachers extended relationships with their students beyond the school year. For instance, Kevin, Nate, Tara, and Brooke would
still meet up with some students during summer or subsequent semesters just to continue the relationships that were developed during the previous school year. Moreover, because of how the band and choirs at Melo were set up, Justin and Steve were afforded the opportunity to have the same students for multiple years in a row as they progressed through the music programs. In summary, in each of these scenarios, caring teachers were able to develop lasting relationships with their high school students, which provided additional opportunities to benefit their lives.

In addition to the aspect of time in regard to relationship building, another new finding was the aspect of relatability. Although high school teachers may feel the pressure to remain socially distant from their students (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013), one finding that emerged from the current study was that the caring teachers sought to be known by their students in order to become more relatable. This broke down walls, which promoted relationship development, and it helped the teachers seem more trustworthy and approachable. The teachers in this study became more relatable to their students by admitting when they were wrong, sharing personal pieces of information with their classes, and by using humor. Examples from the data include Brooke saying how she “threw herself under the bus” several times when sharing stories with her students in order to help them see her “human” side. Furthermore, Nate mentioned a time when he got angry with his students and had to ask for forgiveness from them (Nate, Interview 3). Finally, all six of the teachers used humor at some point in time or another, and they felt this also contributed to being able to build relationships with their students. Kevin mentioned, “I try to have a sense of humor. I try to tell them about my life as it pertains to what we're doing in class when I can.” (Kevin, Interview 3). Nate also concurred, “…it doesn't hurt to take a five-second break to make a joke with someone or two, ’cause those are little things that I think I do well to help you to make that connection” (Nate, Interview 2). This concept of using
humor and sharing personal stories in order to become more relatable adds valuable insight into the relationship-forming aspects of caring high school teachers.

In addition to providing new findings for the field of teacher care, the current study also supported past research by offering similar findings for the characteristics of a caring teacher. Previous research found that caring teachers give extra help academically (Ferreira, & Bosworth, 2001; Garza et al., 2014; Suldo et al., 2009), provide engaging activities in the classroom (Ferreira, & Bosworth, 2001), get to know students on a personal level (Ferreira, & Bosworth, 2001; Garza et al., 2014), and help students become the best versions of themselves (Falkenberg, 2009; Tate, 2006). Even though previous research focused primarily on teachers in younger grades, these qualities were also found in the group of caring high school teachers from the current study. For instance, the theme of meeting students’ academic needs emerged in the current study with findings revealing that the caring teachers did this by not wasting time in class, checking student progress, scaffolding instruction, providing resources, providing engaging activities, giving feedback, and differentiating instruction. Each of these qualities of good pedagogy occurred within the context of a caring relationship and were aimed at the best interest of the students. These findings support previous research that caring teachers give extra help academically as well as provide engaging activities in the classroom. Furthermore, the current study revealed that the caring teachers got to know the students on a personal level, which also supports previous research (Ferreira, & Bosworth, 2001; Garza et al., 2014). For instance, Nate made it a point to get to know each student’s name within the first few class periods (Nate, Interview 2) and Kevin scheduled one-on-one meetings with each student during the first few weeks of school in order to get to know them on a personal level (Kevin, Interview 2). Likewise, Tara said, “I try to get to know my kids quickly… I try to find out something that's
going on, especially if they're not doing well in school (Tara, Interview 2). Finally, the theme *Purpose of Care* supported findings from previous research that show caring teachers helping students become the best versions of themselves. In the current study, the caring teachers sought to help their students grow not only academically but also socially and emotionally. This demonstrates that the purpose behind their care was always to help their students reach their fullest potential both inside the classroom and beyond. In summary, the current study relates to previous research on caring teachers by supporting findings on what constitutes a caring teacher as well as by providing new rich examples of what care may look like on the high-school level.

**SEL Programming**

The second way that the current study relates to previous research is by making connections regarding social and emotional learning. To begin, the current study supports previous findings about high school students and their social and emotional development. Past research found that high school students have many social and emotional needs which must be addressed (Baldwin, Keating, & Bachman, 2006; Girod, Pardales, Cavanaugh, & Wadsworth, 2005; Williamson, Modecki, & Guerra, 2015); the current study validated these claims as well. Dropout rates and risky behaviors are increasing among high school students (Girod et al., 2005), and depression among high school students is becoming more common (Girod et al., 2005; SAMHSA, 2015). They also experience other mental health issues, relational stresses, identity crises, and other environmental stresses (Baldwin et al., 2006; Girod et al., 2005; Williamson et al., 2015). The current study found that the caring teachers were aware of these social and emotional stresses in their own students and sought to aid in their development. As examples, Kevin mentioned several students of his who had been admitted into mental health institutions...
for depression and other mental health disorders (Kevin, Interview 2); Justin mentioned that more and more students are depressed (Justin, Interview 2); Brooke talked about several of her students struggling with identity issues and self-esteem (Brooke, Interview 2); Steve discussed two different scenarios involving students enduring emotional stresses due to family crises (Steve, Interview 3); Nate and Steve both frequently discussed students experiencing stress due to relational conflict (Nate, Interview 2; Steve, Interview 3); and Tara talked through the stories of individuals struggling with eating disorders, unwanted pregnancies and other stressors linked to emotional duress (Tara, Interview 2). As students overcome these types of challenges, they have the potential of becoming the best versions of themselves. Furthermore, by helping high school students become more socially and emotionally mature citizens, they can make a greater contribution to society (Noddings, 2005). Therefore, the current study as well as the previous research on the social and emotional needs of high school students underline the importance of promoting SEL development in the classroom.

One major deficit in the literature on SEL development is the lack of examples showing SEL programming that has been implemented effectively on the high-school level in a way that is repeatable with lasting results (Weissberg et al., 2015; Williamson et al., 2015). Although many studies have found positive correlations between the implementation of SEL curriculum and SEL development for students at the elementary and middle-school levels (Durlak et al., 2011; Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2016; Williford & Wolcott, 2015), SEL curriculum has yet to show that it can be effective at the high-school level (Durlak et al., 2011; Williamson et al., 2015). It has been suggested that the delivery method of such programs on the lower levels is inappropriate for high school students (Girod et al., 2005; Williamson et al., 2015) and that an alternative to SEL programming is to emphasize SEL development within the context of
relationships between caring teachers and their high school students (Noddings, 1984). One significant way the current study fills the gap in this research is by operationalizing Noddings’s theory of care (1984) in light of promoting SEL development among high school students. The narratives from the teachers provide rich examples of how caring teachers are already seeking to meet the social and emotional needs of their students without the use of SEL-specific curriculum and programming. Brooke even criticized the approach that some schools are taking to implement isolated lessons on SEL development:

I do believe that a good teacher already embeds these things [SEL development] in the classroom. When they [lessons focused on SEL] are taught in singularity, it is ineffective. When you have a real-life issue or a real-life situation that you can bring up to your kids…they can relate to that as opposed to ‘let's trace hands together and make a nice little chain of our hands and talk about it.’ The problem…is that if we do teach it in isolation then they might not have the cyber bullying lesson until February. So, we shouldn't talk about cyberbullying until February? I mean I don't understand that. (Brooke, Interview 3)

Nate echoed this response by simply saying, “I feel like it's something that happens naturally [promoting SEL development] when you build those relationships” (Nate, Interview 3). As opposed to teaching isolated lessons on SEL development, the teachers simply cared for their students and, as a result, they sought to meet their social and emotional needs as they arose.

The findings revealed several ways the teachers in this study accomplished this as part of their explicit curriculum and also as part of their null curriculum. For instance, Tara talked about several times when students approached her in her office with their social and emotional needs:

All kinds of kids come to me…I had a young lady come in the third week of school. She said, ‘My girlfriend told me I could come in here and talk to you about a bus issue.’ So, I took care of it. So, those kinds of things happen all the time they really do. (Tara, Interview 2)

She also mentioned times when students needed to have “girlfriend/boyfriend” talks with her (Tara, Interview 2) or other times when the circumstances were more serious. Likewise, the other
teachers discussed many times when they had opportunities to help students develop socially and emotionally as students approached them with their needs. Brooke mentioned stories about helping different students find their career paths. In one such case, she said, “We had conversations with him [the student] … about his choices and now he's going to aeronautical school… they [the students] feel safe enough to bring those kinds of things up and I can help them apply strategies to their lives” (Brooke, Interview 2). Steve mentioned stories of students approaching him about different emotional stressors going on at home. In one case, the student’s father was arrested for inappropriate relations with a minor. Steve recalled, “Luckily the student came to me first and told me after school. And I had sense for about a week that he was just disconnected…And then that student shared with me and said like, ‘Hey, this is what's happening...’” (Steve, Interview 1). In each of these examples, the teachers demonstrated being flexible with their time and as a result of students seeing them as being relatable and approachable, the teachers were able to meet the SEL needs of their students on a case-by-case basis without the use of a scripted SEL curriculum.

Furthermore, at other times teachers addressed the social and emotional needs of their students by utilizing teachable moments in the classroom. For instance, Nate mentioned that when these arose, he did not mind taking time out of class to address his students’ immediate needs. He said, “So…it’s a class-by-class basis. So, if there's an opportunity to teach a lesson about this [a “life lesson”] I'm going to do it regardless of whether or not it’s chemistry” (Nate, Interview 3). Steve, Justin, and Nate also took class time to address relational issues happening between students. At one point, it even brought Steve to tears in front of the class because of how passionate he was about helping them learn to empathize with one another. He recalled, “That's the only time in my career that I've really come to tears, but I was like, ‘I need you to care for
each other’” (Steve Interview 2). All in all, the teachers found ways to promote SEL
development with their students apart from having a pre-made curriculum designed around the
Illinois SEL standards; they simply remained attentive to their students’ social and emotional
needs and sought to meet those needs as opportunities spontaneously arose. This was a
significant addition to the field of SEL development on the high-school level. The findings from
this study suggested that caring high school teachers may already be seeking to meet the social
and emotional needs of their students without the aid of specific SEL curriculum.

Finally, although the above examples demonstrate how caring teachers met needs as they
spontaneously arose, the current study also provided examples of how the teachers naturally
embedded SEL principles into their content curriculum. These examples add to the research on
SEL programming by suggesting that some areas of social and emotional development are more
easily promoted in certain subject areas because of the topics that naturally emerge in those
classes. For instance, Illinois SEL Standard 2C on communication skills is most naturally
addressed in a speech communication class. As Brooke mentioned, “It’s speech class, so…we
talked about how 60% of your message is nonverbal… we talked a lot about how important
listening is… we talk about body language” (Brooke, Interview 2). Likewise, SEL Standard 3B
applies to responsible decision making which, is a lesson already embedded in Tara’s health
curriculum:

We have a model and our book it's called a responsible decision-making model. It has six
steps. I have them right on the board decide. And each of those letters mean something.
I'm going to define the problem, I have to think about, evaluate the decision, and most of
those decisions are I do it or I don't do it. I give them a scenario. (Tara, Interview 2)

While it may seem unnatural to embed a lesson on healthy decision making or nonverbal
communication skills in a chemistry class, Brooke and Tara were easily able to include these
SEL lessons in their curricula because of the nature of their subject areas. Furthermore, this study also suggested that some of the standards are better fit to be addressed by other school personnel, such as guidance counselors as opposed to classroom teachers:

[Commenting on Illinois SEL Standard 1C.5a] ‘Setting up post-secondary school with time steps and to evaluate achievement,’ that doesn't happen like in the English classroom. That doesn't happen formally. I'm not meeting with each kid to develop a post-secondary goal. That strikes me more as a guidance counselor sort of role, so doing that in any sort of formal way in the classroom, sure we talk about what kids want to do after high school, but not to that level. So that strikes me as an unrealistic, teaching 150 kids and doing that with all of them and an English class. (Kevin, Interview 3)

Although some of the teachers may have been addressing post-secondary goals with their students, this standard (1C.5a) was already something being addressed by guidance counselors.

To conclude, findings from this study supported past research showing the importance of teachers seeking to address social and emotional needs of high school students; additionally, the current study added new insight into the field by providing rich examples of how a group of caring teachers sought to meet those needs.

Recommendations from Findings

In light of the findings from the current study, several recommendations can be made in regard to caring teachers and SEL development on the high-school level. First, the findings may offer several recommendations for the field of education as a whole. Second, the limitations and delimitations from the current study, as well as the gaps in the previous research on care and SEL development, warrant several recommendations for future research in these areas.
Recommendations for the Field of Education

The educational landscape, dense with standardized curriculum and state testing, has shifted in recent years to include an emphasis on social and emotional learning (Bengston & Connors, 2014; Kohn, 2000; Ravitch, 2011; Richmond, Bartell, & Dunn, 2016; Semel, 2010; Shirley & Lahann, 2008). In keeping in step with the current trend of mandating state standards for education, many states like Illinois have instituted state standards for SEL development as well (ISBE, n.d.). As aforementioned, however, programs designed to implement SEL state standards are failing on the high-school level (Durlak et al., 2011). Conversely, the caring high school teachers in this study were finding ways to promote SEL development in their classrooms apart from having a deep knowledge of the state standards and without using specific SEL curriculum. It is likely that other caring high school teachers are doing the same. This implies that the answer to helping students grow socially and emotionally may be found in hiring more caring teachers rather than creating more state mandates and standardized curriculum. Therefore, one recommendation is for school personnel search committees to include questions concerning care and SEL development on their interview protocols. For example, interviewers can ask prospective teachers to give examples of how they show care in the classroom and how they promote social and emotional growth in their students. Interviewers can also include prompts that include situations involving students with social and emotional needs and assess how caring the teacher may be based on how they would choose to respond in those scenarios. Careful consideration should be given to how prospective teachers respond to such questions when search committees consider the kinds of teachers being hired in a high-school building. Furthermore, the caring teachers in this study were demonstrating best practices in their
instruction and pushing students to demonstrate excellence in all areas of life. This implies that caring teachers may be more likely to care about using best practices in teaching to bring about the educational success of their students. Once again, this offers support in favor of schools seeking to hire more caring teachers.

Additionally, one recommendation for the field of education is to include aspects of care and SEL development in teacher preparation programs for teacher candidates and in professional development programs for in-service teachers. Teacher preparation programs in recent years have placed the focus primarily on content knowledge and assessments and have neglected addressing relational aspects of teaching (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Hochstetler, 2014; Noddings, 1992, 2006). Although content knowledge is crucial for teachers on the high-school level, the current study also shows the value of positive teacher-student relationships for the sake of the students’ overall development. One way this could be emphasized in both teacher preparation programs and professional development alike is by providing teacher candidates and in-service teachers with research on motivation in the classroom. This should include content concerning the impact of caring teacher-student relationships on student achievement and on social and emotional development. In teacher preparation programs, this could be accomplished by embedding principles of care and SEL development into courses already being offered, such as Educational Psychology, Developmental Psychology, or Foundations of Education. For in-service teachers, this could be accomplished by inviting guest speakers who are experts on care and SEL development in high school students to give presentations for professional development. Additionally, Noddings would agree that modeling care is essential for nurturing caring individuals (1984, 2005). Therefore, another way to encourage teachers to be caring is to foster caring relationships between teachers and their
mentors as a form of modeling. This means pairing teacher candidates with caring teacher educators and pairing in-service teachers with veteran teachers to serve as caring mentors. Additionally, this necessitates that teacher educators become more reflective in their own practices of care and how that translates to their relationships with the teacher candidates they are mentoring.

In addition to bolstering teacher preparation programs and professional development programs, the findings offer other valuable insights for improving the quality of teacher-student relationships. For example, one strong theme in this study was that of time—these caring teachers spent extra one-on-one time with their students inside and outside of the classroom and several of them had ongoing relationships with their students that extended past the school year. One recommendation is for schools to offer additional opportunities for teachers to interact with students apart from just classroom instruction, whether this be including more “homeroom” periods or offering additional benefits to encourage teachers to become involved in extracurricular activities such as overtime pay or reduced course loads.

Additionally, another strong theme that emerged from the findings was that the caring teachers in this study pushed their students outside of their comfort zones by encouraging them to do hard things, promoting excellence, and providing correction and admonition when needed. One recommendation for high school teachers from these findings is to warn against providing students with less challenging material and assignments with the intention of creating an easy pathway to success. Teachers must not be fearful of student failure, but rather they must care enough about their students to help them navigate through challenges and overcome failure if and when it arises. Difficult circumstances such as these may also provide additional opportunities for teachers to care for the social and emotional needs of their students (i.e., goal
achievement, emotional regulation, etc.). In order for this message to be made clear to teachers, however, administrators must emphasize the value of rising to challenges and using failure as an opportunity to grow and develop. Changes such as these must occur from the top down.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In addition to offering recommendations for the field of education, the limitations and delimitations from this study along with gaps in the literature offer recommendations for future research in the areas of teacher care and SEL development. First, because this study was limited to a specific group of teachers in one Midwest high school, one recommendation for future research is to replicate this study in other high schools across the country, with additional focus in urban or more diverse settings. Furthermore, the study may be replicated with teacher educators and their reflections on care in the classroom.

Additionally, in replicating this study I would recommend using video recording for the classroom observations in order to capture richer data to be reviewed during analysis. I would also recommend including a field on the Google form for students to explain why they chose the teachers whom they nominated as being caring. This would add another layer of trustworthiness to cross reference against the findings emerging from the teacher interviews. Furthermore, because this study was limited to the teacher voice, other recommendations include studying teacher care and SEL development from the perspective of students, parents, and administrators. Also, in addition to studying caring high school teachers, another recommendation is to study teachers who are perceived as being uncaring to find out what factors create that perception. Other research recommendations include studying differences in care across teachers from various academic areas, genders, experience levels, ages, and educational backgrounds.
Finally, a quantitative research design can be utilized. For example, questionnaires can be used to measure students’ levels of various SEL constructs such as self-efficacy, depression, and anxiety. The relationship between these outcomes and teacher care can offer valuable insight into the impact that caring teachers can make in the lives of their students.

Conclusion

This study explored the perspectives of teachers who were nominated by their high school students as being caring. Interviews and observations revealed how teachers described care in the classroom as well as how they promoted SEL development in their high school students. Findings from the current study, along with connections to previous research and the theoretical framework of care and SEL development have informed the recommendations given in this chapter.

Intentional consideration for the relational aspect of teaching and how that can impact the social and emotional development of high school students can greatly benefit the field of education and future generations of students. While some look to standardized curriculum and state mandates as the answer to mitigating teenage depression and anxiety, one may not need to look any further than to the caring teachers who are already faithfully concerning themselves with the social and emotional well-being of their students.
REFERENCES


Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). Designing your study and selecting a sample. *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*, 73-104.


Sampling: Phase one, student responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students received a google form electronically during an approved study hall. They answered the following question:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“A caring teacher is one who wants the best for his or her students. A caring teacher seeks to serve his or her students by helping them lead better lives. A caring teacher develops positive relationships with his or her students. He or she knows students well enough to be able to meet their needs. A caring teacher is characterized by actions that respond to the needs of students in a variety of ways.

List the names of teachers you believe are caring:
______________________________

Student Gender:
Student Grade-level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses were collected electronically and tabulated. Faculty members who appeared on the list were contacted one by one beginning with the member with the highest number of nominations. Faculty members were contacted electronically through email until six members with a minimum of 10 of nominations gave consent to participate in the study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INTENT
Dear _____________________________,

Congratulations! You have been nominated by several students in your school as being recognized as a teacher who is caring. My name is Bobbi Jean Geosling, and I am a graduate student at Northern Illinois University in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and I am asking for your involvement in my dissertation project titled, “Caring High School Teachers: Promoting Students’ Social and Emotional Development.”

The first phase of my research was to identify teachers whom the students believe to be caring. From this group of teachers, I am looking for individuals who would be willing to participate in a few interviews and classroom observations so that I can add to the body of research on care and social and emotional learning. By participating, you are allowing me to showcase an exemplar on care.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to do the following: participate in 2-3 individual interviews during a time that is mutually agreed upon lasting 45 minutes each and participate in 2-3 classroom observations lasting 50 minutes in length. During the observations, I will be noting the ways in which you care for your students and promote social and emotional growth in the classroom. The interviews and observations will be audio recorded for the purpose of the study, and transcripts will be destroyed upon completion. No information will be shared with students, faculty, or staff, and pseudonyms will be used in the write-up to protect confidentiality. The interviews and observations will take place over the course of 4-6 weeks’ time.

Your participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and if you have any additional questions concerning this study, you may contact me at --- or my program adviser, Beth Wilkins at ---. Also, if you wish further information regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at ---.

Thank you so much for considering this opportunity! Please respond back by email or phone before (date) if you are willing to participate.

Sincerely,

Bobbi Jean Geosling
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS
Initial Interview

1. Tell me the story of how you became a teacher.

2. Tell me about a teacher (or teachers) you had who embody the kind of teacher you aspire to be. What about him or her do you want to emulate?

3. (If not already answered) How long have you been at Generic High School? What is your role at this school? Did you have any roles prior to your current role?
   a. (If applicable) (How) have these other roles impacted what you see as important in your own teaching?

4. What is the most rewarding part of your job? What is the most challenging part of your job?

5. Describe a typical day in your classroom. What is the atmosphere like? What kinds of activities do you normally do? If a random passer-by were to peek in at any given moment, what sorts of things are they most likely to see?

6. How would you want your students to describe you?
   a. How do you think your students actually describe you?

7. Tell me the story of a student who you felt needed support and you felt successful in providing that support.
   a. Tell me the story of a student who you felt needed support and you felt unsuccessful in providing that support.

8. Describe what you see as the ideal relationship between you and your students.
   a. What obstacles do you encounter in creating this type of relationship with your students.

Second Interview

1. What do you see as some of your students’ greatest social/emotional needs?
   a. In what ways do you think it is most important for your students to develop socially/emotionally?

2. Describe some ways in which you (attempt to) address your students’ social/emotional needs.
a. (If necessary) Describe for me some ways that you might incorporate social and emotional learning into daily planning.

b. (If necessary) Describe some ways in which addressing students’ social/emotional needs emerges organically in your interactions with students.

3. Tell a story of a particular student that stands out in your mind as demonstrating noticeable social/emotional growth. What are some ways that you believe you contributed to that growth?

4. In what ways does your school support (or fail to support) you in addressing your students’ social/emotional needs?

5. Which of the SEL standards do you find can be most naturally imbedded in your work with students? Which SEL standards are most challenging to address?

**Third Interview: Critical Incidents Approach (Flanagan, 1954)**
APPENDIX D

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL
*Care and SEL Coding Guides were also used as a guiding tool for observations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time/Activity</th>
<th>Care Codes</th>
<th>SEL Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

CARE CODING GUIDE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facet of Care</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Purpose of Care               | • Focused on the well-being of the student  
                               • Looking to meet both the academic needs and other “whole child” needs  
                               • Aimed at creating more caring individuals |
| Context of Care               | • Evidence of a relationship  
                               • Knowledge of the academic, social, and emotional needs of the student  
                               • Direct communication  
                               • Attentive, receptive, empathetic, responsive  
                               • “Seeing things” from the student’s perspective |
| Actions of Care               | • Acting on the student’s behalf  
                               • Inaction in the best interest of the student  
                               • Engrossment  
                               • Motivational Displacement  
                               • Meeting academic needs/differentiating instruction  
                               • Meeting SEL needs |
| Recognition and Reciprocation of Care | • Sign that student recognized care  
                                 • Student returns acts of care |
APPENDIX F

SEL CODING GUIDE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standard</th>
<th>Early H.S.</th>
<th>Late H.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior.</td>
<td>1A.4a. Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decision making and responsible behavior.</td>
<td>1A.5a. Evaluate how expressing one’s emotions in different situations affects others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1A.4b. Generate ways to develop more positive attitudes.</td>
<td>1A.5b. Evaluate how expressing more positive attitudes influences others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Recognize personal qualities and external supports.</td>
<td>1B.4a. Set priorities in building on strengths and identifying areas for improvement.</td>
<td>1B.5a. Implement a plan to build on a strength, meet a need, or address a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1B.4b. Analyze how positive adult role models and support systems contribute to school and life success.</td>
<td>1B.5b. Evaluate how developing interests and filling useful roles support school and life success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals</td>
<td>1C.4a. Identify strategies to make use of resources and overcome obstacles to achieve goals.</td>
<td>1C.5a. Set a post-secondary goal with action steps, timeframes, and criteria for evaluating achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1C.4b. Apply strategies to overcome obstacles to goal achievement.</td>
<td>1C.5b. Monitor progress toward achieving a goal, and evaluate one’s performance against criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standard</th>
<th>Early H.S.</th>
<th>Late H.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Recognize the feelings and perspectives of others.</td>
<td>2A.4a. Analyze similarities and differences between one’s own and others’ perspectives.</td>
<td>2A.5a. Demonstrate how to express understanding of those who hold different opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2A.4b. Use conversation skills to understand others’ feelings and perspectives.</td>
<td>2A.5b. Demonstrate ways to express empathy for others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Recognize individual and group similarities and differences.</td>
<td>2B.4a. Analyze the origins and negative effects of stereotyping and prejudice.</td>
<td>2B.5a. Evaluate strategies for being respectful of others and opposing stereotyping and prejudice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2B.4b. Demonstrate respect for individuals from different social and cultural groups.</td>
<td>2B.5b. Evaluate how advocacy for the rights of others contributes to the common good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.</td>
<td>2C.4a. Evaluate the effects of requesting support from and providing support to others.</td>
<td>2C.5a. Evaluate the application of communication and social skills in daily interactions with peers, teachers, and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2C.4b. Evaluate one’s contribution in groups as a member and leader.</td>
<td>2C.5b. Plan, implement, and evaluate participation in a group project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goal 3: Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Standard</th>
<th>Early H.S.</th>
<th>Late H.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A: Consider ethical, safety, and societal factors in making decisions.</strong></td>
<td>3A.4a. Demonstrate personal responsibility in making ethical decisions.</td>
<td>3A.5a. Apply ethical reasoning to evaluate societal practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B: Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations</strong></td>
<td>3B.4a. Evaluate personal abilities to gather information, generate alternatives, and anticipate the consequences of decisions.</td>
<td>3B.5a. Analyze how present decision making affects college and career choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Contribute to the well-being of one’s school and community.</strong></td>
<td>3C.4a. Plan, implement, and evaluate one’s participation in activities and organizations that improve school climate.</td>
<td>3C.5a. Work cooperatively with others to plan, implement, and evaluate a project to meet an identified school need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3C.4b. Plan, implement, and evaluate one’s participation in a group effort to contribute to one’s local community.</td>
<td>3C.5b. Work cooperatively with others to plan, implement, and evaluate a project that addresses an identified need in the broader community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

DATA COLLECTION DATES
### Interview Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interview 1</th>
<th>Interview 2</th>
<th>Interview 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>October 16, 2017</td>
<td>October 16, 2017</td>
<td>December 6, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>June 22, 2017</td>
<td>July 21, 2017</td>
<td>October 19, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>June 23, 2017</td>
<td>June 23, 2017</td>
<td>October 19, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>October 20, 2017</td>
<td>October 20, 2017</td>
<td>December 6, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>October 16, 2017</td>
<td>October 16, 2017</td>
<td>October 19, 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Classroom Observation Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Observation 1</th>
<th>Observation 2</th>
<th>Observation 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>December 5, 2017</td>
<td>December 6, 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>December 5, 2017</td>
<td>December 6, 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>October 16, 2017</td>
<td>October 17, 2017</td>
<td>October 18, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>October 18, 2017</td>
<td>October 19, 2017</td>
<td>October 19, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>December 5, 2017</td>
<td>December 6, 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>October 17, 2017</td>
<td>October 18, 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>