The Role of Caring in Schools: A Tanzanian Case Study

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Abstract: *School-based research and practice in international education has emphasized academic outcomes, to the exclusion of other important aspects of education, such as caring in schools. In this case study, we consider the role of caring in a successful Tanzanian primary school. The practice of caring promoted by the school's leadership, rooted in identifying and meeting needs, is found to impact not only student academic success, but also to have moral and organizational implications. This includes the need for teachers to be empowered with the ability and dispositions to solve problems in schools. Further analysis of caring in schools is needed to enrich teacher education and policy planning for quality education.*

Keywords: *primary education; school quality; caring*

Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 has shifted policy and programmatic interventions in education to focus not only on access, but more widely on quality education, particularly in low and middle income countries. However, scholars in comparative education and international development have observed that most large-scale educational programs, monitoring indicators, and policy development in pursuit of quality education have pursued a narrow focus on easily measurable phenomena (such as time on task, class size, reading fluency) and improving basic literacy and numeracy skills (Alexander, 2015; Bartlett, Dowd and Jonason, 2015; Sayed and Ahmed, 2015). One emerging criticism of this focus on what is easily measured is that educational development should embrace wider aspects, including social justice, inclusive education and pedagogical processes (Alexander, 2015; Nikel and Lowe, 2010; Sayed and Ahmed, 2015; Sayed and Soudien 2003). In this paper, we too seek to widen our field's perspective on what constitutes quality education. We propose that the notion of care and caring in schools, including its possible implications for academic success, has been neglected in comparative and international education. In this exploratory paper, we examine the role of caring in one compelling case study, with the aim to raise this important aspect of schooling to the attention of researchers, teacher educators and policy makers, and to provoke further study and theorization in international contexts.

Over the past several decades, research and practice in comparative and international education has emphasized access and student academic outcomes. International bodies and government ministries have championed a specific focus on student academic achievement as an instrumental means for promoting economic development (see, for example, World Bank 2011; MOEVT 2014). Significantly less attention has been paid to the emotional contexts of learning. Although the well-

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being of teachers and aspects of care for children in early childhood learning contexts have begun to receive a small measure of scholarly and programmatic attention in the past two years (see, for example, Veronese et al. 2018; Liu, Song and Miao 2017; Campbell-Barr 2019), these areas are still underdeveloped. Recently, Socioemotional Learning (SEL) was highlighted by the World Bank in the 2018 World Development Report. The report explains SEL as work-related skills such as "perseverance" and "team work" which "various measures have been shown to significantly predict earnings" (p. 47). Thus, SEL is considered in terms of economic development and not a broader sense of well-being. In this paper, we highlight a slightly different concept of caring in education, by examining the role of caring by school leaders in fostering success for students. We consider the role of caring in a successful Tanzanian primary school to offer a novel and promising lens for widening concepts of school quality and to encourage the use of practitioner knowledge to inform policy and teacher education programs.

Context of the Study

Tanzania's education system is very typical of Sub-Saharan contexts and outcomes in certain respects. Parallel systems of public and private schools exist, reflecting a class divide in society, with public schools often (though with some exceptions) being under-resourced and low performing. Within mainland Tanzania, the government and parents judge school performance by students' average outcomes on national examinations, particularly the terminal examinations at the end of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schooling. The public school system struggles with high pupil-teacher ratios and a lack of teaching materials including desks and textbooks (World Bank 2016; BEST, 2017). Though educational policies have promoted learner-centered and competence-based practices, our observations in primary schools suggest teaching still tends to rely on lecturing, question-answer, copying notes from a blackboard and use of corporal punishment. In general (compared to countries like the US), there is a respectful tone as an indicator of a clear hierarchical power gap in relations between teachers and students/adults and children.

However, Tanzania also has a unique history in education compared to many developing countries, due to the vision of its founding president, Mw. Julius Nyerere. Nyerere promoted what was termed "Education for Self Reliance" (ESR) as a part of the country's socialist project. Nyerere gave ESR an actively decolonizing purpose of making formal education relevant to local communities, breaking down inequalities that had been fostered by the colonial education system, and leading national development through cooperation. Nyerere's vision for education was based in a humanist philosophy strongly emphasizing social values as well as productive skills, in which education's purpose is to:

> ...foster the social goals of living together, working together, for the common good. It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in terms of human well-being, not prestige buildings, cars, or other such things, whether privately or publicly owned. (Nyerere, 1967, p. 4)

While the problems faced in implementing ESR have been well documented (Cooksey, 1986; Galabawa, 2001, 1990; Morrison, 1976), Tanzania did achieve Universal Primary Education and 91.4 % adult literacy by the 1980s (IIEP, 1990). More importantly for education quality, the country in that period had regular systems and practices of ongoing professional development for teachers and collaborative analysis of test data (Mwakalinga, personal communication, October 24, 2017); practices which largely disappeared during the structural adjustment period of the 1990s and early 2000s, when school enrollment and literacy rates dropped significantly. In this period, Tanzania like other countries, was influenced by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to shift toward neoliberal approaches to governance and education. The government's vision for

education as expressed in the latest Education and Training Policy has also shifted in recent years to a more human capital approach, which sees the central role of the education sector as providing the human resources that will enable the country to reach its goal of middle-income status by 2025 (MOEVT, 2014).

In 2015, the government (re)abolished school fees and primary school net enrollment rate has again consistently risen above 90% since at least 2012 (BEST, 2017). Large-scale interventions have been launched by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and its development partners, including revision of the primary school curriculum since 2014; with Standards 1 and 2 eliminating subjects such as English and Science to focus almost exclusively on Mathematics, Reading and Writing in the national language, Swahili. Teacher training on technical literacy and numeracy instruction and materials development as well as school management training and information systems are at the center of large-scale development aid to primary schools in most regions of the mainland (for example, Department for International Development's EQUIP-T, the United States Agency for International Development's *Tusome Pamoja* (Read Together), and the teacher inset accompanying the new curriculum roll out, supported by the Global Partnership for Education, GPE). In this paper, we use the term 'technical' teaching strategies or 'technicism' to refer to teacher training or pedagogical practices that focus on the introduction and student mastery of cognitive skills (such as how to teach phonics in reading, or addition in lower primary mathematics).

In Tanzania's education system at the time of this writing, primary school comprises standards 1 – 7, with children usually starting Standard 1 between ages 5 and 7. Pre-primary classrooms are being added to existing primary schools to provide one to two years of pre-primary education; which has already begun in some schools. This means the general age of children in Tanzanian primary schools is 4 – 14 years old. While the national average for primary school student to teacher ratio is 43:1 (World Bank, 2016), actual class sizes vary considerably, from less than 20 to over 100 students per classroom/per lesson. This is influenced by a range of factors, including rural vs. urban location, the number of classrooms available at a school, and school performance. Enrollment in Tanzanian government schools is open/not limited to neighborhood residence. The enrollment at the school in this study has nearly doubled since the school started to perform well, while lower-performing schools in the same neighborhood have significantly smaller class sizes. There is a national, standardized assessment at Standard 4 and at the end of Standard 7 there is the Primary School Leaving Exam (PSLE) – a high stakes national examination. According to national data, between 2008 and 2013, 40-70% of primary school children failed the PSLE (BEST, 2013). In 2015 and 2016, this had improved to 68 -70% of examination takers passing (BEST, 2017), though the highest performing schools are private or religious rather than public government schools. However, the school in this case study provides an interesting exception to this trend.

Context of the School

The government school Ukombozi Primary is one of the highest-performing primary schools in the nation; with 99 to 100% of its students passing the PSLE with Grade A, B or C each year since 2009 (NECTA n.d.) and the school receiving national recognition for its performance each year from 2012 to 2017. The school consistently ranked in the top five (out of 49) schools in its district from 2012 to 2017, often being the only public school to achieve this rank (NECTA n.d.). The teaching staff are entirely government-trained teachers, and 90% are female. The school, located on the peri-urban edge of a mid-size town (a regional capital in agricultural highlands), has around 750 students. Due to a lack of classrooms, each grade level has only one stream. This means there are 80-115 students per lesson at this school, and Standards 1 and 2 share one classroom, operating on a double shift. The school's high performance has attracted transfer students, leading to a mixed student population in terms of economic standing. Slightly less than half of the students come from the local neighborhood, and the others are mainly children of civil servants and middle-class professionals who live in town. The local neighborhood families have lower economic means, and

tend to engage in farming, informal or semi-skilled labor. Nearly one third of the school's student population are orphans being raised by extended family members.

A number of features about the school may contribute to its high performance, including the close attention to student attendance and performance, teachers offering free, extra lessons during holidays, and flexible daily teaching schedules to allow teachers to complete topics and assess whether content is understood by all students. However, we want to focus on an aspect which is striking and explicit at this school, yet often ignored in national and international development literature on educational quality: that is, the school leadership's commitment to caring. In this article, we set out to explore what form caring takes in this leader's practice, and what its implications may be for teachers as well as for educational planners, teacher educators and policy makers. We argue that caring is an aspect of education receiving inadequate attention in the current flurry of technical school reforms.

Caring in Schools: A Literature Review

In this section, we critically examine the extant literature on educational caring. We conclude with several observations about the state of the literature and how this study may contribute.

Within comparative and international education, a review of flagship journals reveals that caring has been foregrounded in very few studies, and tends to arise as a guiding concept only when it is acutely called for (i.e., in situations involving sexual violence or conflict, education of refugees, or communities heavily burdened by HIV/AIDS) or in studies with a focus on gender. At the 2017 Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, where this paper was first presented, caring appeared in the program mostly in reference to very young children, and disappears as a concern after about age three. In short, caring has received little attention in comparative and international education research, thus, many of the theoretical positions outlined here stem from a North American context simply because caring in schools has been researched more in North America than elsewhere. While the nature of caring is doubtlessly specific to particular contexts, the theories that have been developed can still serve as a starting point, for considering caring in other contexts, including Tanzania.

Nel Noddings is the most frequently cited theorist on educational caring (Noddings 2001, 2013). Noddings articulates caring as a way of being in relation with somebody else (2013). Her vision of care is rooted in the family: good educational caring is analogous to care in a family setting (2002). Importantly, caring is also intersubjective: both the person trying to care and the person being cared for must recognize the action as caring. Noddings distinguishes this true, intersubjective caring from what she calls "virtue caring," where one party professes to care even if their actions are not received as caring (Noddings 2001, p.36).

Caring, in Noddings' conception, must also respond to (inferred or expressed) needs. Often, Noddings notes, there can be conflicts between expressed and inferred needs that prevent a caring relation from occurring: "[i]f [as the one-cared-for] my expressed needs are not treated positively, or at least sensitively, I will likely not feel cared for. Attempts to care frequently misfire this way" (2005, p.148). The need for teachers to respond to student needs is a consistent theme throughout the literature on caring (Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden 1995; Howard 2001; Demaray and Malecki 2002; Ancess 2003; Cassidy and Bates 2005). The support created by teacher caring is the "glue that binds teachers and students together and makes life in classrooms meaningful" (Noblit et.al. 1995, p.680). Ancess (2003) found that in a school characterized by a high level of academic press, teachers offered students emotional support by changing the structure of daily routines[1] (p.608).

Increasingly, caring is understood to be culturally grounded and not universal. Thompson (1998) criticizes Noddings' vision of family care as being too situated in a white, western, middle-class vision of family. Just as families act and interact in very different ways, so too must there be a variety of ways to care for and about students. Caring amidst marked cultural differences between students and school staff members has been an area of focus for other scholars as well. For example, Antrop-

González and De Jesús (2006) advance a theory of *critical care*, which focuses on a combination of high academic expectations for students, high-quality relationships between students and school staff, and especially on privileging "the funds of knowledge that students and their respective communities bring to school" (p.409).

Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri (2015) explore teachers' ethical sensitivity in Finland and Iran. They find that although "caring by connecting to others" is a culturally invariant construct central to ethical sensitivity in both countries, ethical sensitivity is "represented in different ways" based on cultural contexts (p.903). For example, they find that "taking the perspective of others" is dependent on culture, and especially a cultures' level of power distance and collectivity. Specifically, in their comparative survey study, the items on caring relate to maintaining good relations with other people and promoting their wellbeing, while the items on perspective-taking relate to tolerance of different opinions or ways of thinking. This may suggest that one way caring is culturally mediated is that some cultures may have narrower boundaries around the acceptable ways to give and receive care (see also, Gholami, 2011).

Tronto (2010) critiques Noddings from the perspective of organizationally-based caring. Specifically, Tronto points out that while the purposes of care in families and the power relationships between members of families are often taken as unproblematic, the same cannot be said of care in organizational settings. In particular, Tronto (2010) argues that caregivers in organizations must be attentive to the particular needs of those they are caring for, lest they use their position of superior power to define care in a way that doesn't serve those being cared for. The purposes of care are thus *locally defined* and *particularistic.*

Although the primary focus of the literature on educational caring has been on the ways that adults strive to care for students, there is a growing focus on the ways that caring for students impacts adults. Hargreaves (1998) emphasizes that caring for students is a form of emotional labor. The effort of caring can be positive or negative- it may demand that teachers subjugate their true emotions in the interest of performativity. However, caring that flows from student to teacher (in response to teacher caring for students) has significant benefits for teachers. As Hargreaves suggests, "the concept of emotional labor puts care into context. It takes care beyond being a personal choice, or moral imperative to an act of work that can be supported, made difficult or turned against the person exercising it ... depending on the context in which the work is performed" (Hargreaves 1998, p. 840). Through a poststructural approach to the role of emotions in teacher identity, Zembylas (2003) highlights how the emotional labor of caring is done in ways shaped by the political and organizational context. Specifically, he suggests that teacher identity is a political process- teachers are heavily influenced by the organizational and social environment in which their teaching occurs. As Zembylas puts it, "a poststructuralist view opens up a space between self-consciousness, and the interrogation of the discursive and affective conditions of a claim to identity (Bhaba 1987). Identity is formed in this shifting space where narratives of subjectivity meet the narratives of culture" (p.221). In schools, emotional rules permit and encourage some emotions in teachers, while proscribing others. The construction of these emotional rules is fundamentally a political process. Zembylas suggests that the discourses within schools attempt to reduce teacher identity to teacher *roles*, but that roles do not constitute identity- identity deals with *investments.* Zembylas' critique of the reduction of teacher identity to roles in the US context bears affinity with the 'technicist' critique of educational reform and teacher discourses in international development education (Welch, 2003, Tao 2015). Both essentially argue that there is more happening in schools than the imparting of academic or technical skills and content through prescribed or desired teacher roles.

There is a small extant literature on caring educational leadership, although this is an area of growing focus (see Louis, Murphy and Smylie, 2016; Smylie, Murphy and Louis, 2016). Educational leaders have been seen to demonstrate caring through advocating on students' behalf (Bass 2012), high visibility in the school and community (Khalifa, 2012), and embedding an ethic of care in school policies and school environment (Cassidy and Bates 2005). Other scholars who studied administrators driven by an ethic of care found that organizational practices (such as mandatory

discipline regardless of context) often stymied caring, and so these administrators were driven more by relationships than other leaders (Marshall et.al., 1996). Roffey (2008) highlights the importance of modeling interpersonal relations for school administrators who are striving to develop a caring community, and suggests that administrators who relate to teachers in a respectful and inclusive way will foster these same traits in student-teacher relations.

As noted above, one glaring shortfall in the existing literature on educational caring is that most of the theoretical and empirical work has been carried out in the United States. Given the growing recognition that caring is a culturally-rooted concept, there is ample room to foreground additional diverse and particularistic notions of care. Moreover, society expects schools to be caring places, but, "its meaning in schools is vague, ambiguous, unsettled, and weakly explicated" (Louis et.al. 2016, p.312). This is particularly true with respect to the way that national and transnational education policy bears on the ways that caring is enacted in schools. Smylie et.al. (2016, p.1) point out that, "in this time of accountability and top-down approaches to leadership and reform, caring is often neglected". In this study, we hope to open space for the further exploration, both in terms of theorization and practice, of caring in schools in the context of comparative and international education.

Research Methods and Data Analysis

School Selection and Data Collection Methods

We employed a purposeful sampling strategy in order to select a school and school leader who were strong exemplars of caring (Patton, 2005). Initially this school was selected to be part of a different study focused on pedagogy and teacher-student interactions. It was recommended by local municipal officials because of its reputation as the highest-performing public school in the district. The primary focus of this study is on the behaviors and beliefs of the school leader, and how these behaviors and beliefs foster a caring school environment.

In initial conversations with the head teacher (Mwakalinga), as the researcher asked about the school and its success, he made a remarkably blunt statement. Mwakalinga stated that only the children of poorer families come to public schools – anyone who can possibly afford it sends their children to private school - so his goal is to ensure that these children at his public school can compete and do not become the slaves of private school graduates. He also stated that the most important aspect of school success is love – love for the children. While the other study carried on, the clear and incisive purpose driving this school leader and the acknowledgment of love being the key ingredient driving success inspired this exploratory study of caring and its role in educational success. Because this school both emphasized caring and has a reputation for academic success, we felt it would be a suitable site to raise the issue of the role of caring.

This study draws on several sources of data. We conducted one long semi-structured interview with the school leader, our co-author, followed by several informal follow-up interviews. To the extent possible, we heeded Kvale and Brinkman's (2009) exhortation that interviews are self-contained narratives that are fully explicated within the context of the interview. We supplemented these interviews with several sessions of participant observation at the school (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The observation was intended to undergird the school leader's articulation of the way caring matters in school with a richer understanding of how this vision was (and was not) being carried out in practice. Sometimes these observations were followed by brief conversations with the school leader. The observations were part of the larger research study mentioned above, and were carried out over four months in 2017.

Perceptions of a caring environment at the school, particularly involving the head teacher were evident even in the two initial meetings: Students were observed approaching the head teacher without fear, to ask questions or to report a problem. Similarly, graduates who are now in secondary

school and college were observed coming back to visit the head teacher. As the researcher spent more time at the school in 2016 and 2017, additional signs of caring were noted. Firstly, in this school, in contrast to other schools observed in the larger study, the standard four teachers know all 94 children in class by name. Teachers were observed providing snacks and school supplies - on their own volition - for students with difficult home situations, and checking in with students who appeared tired or to not feel well in class. The head teacher was observed on several occasions following up on students with illness/injuries personally, and encouraging teachers to do so. When talking about students, the head teacher openly uses the word 'love' and 'care'. The head teacher also ensures the teachers are cared for–when part of the staff room was burned in a fire in 2017, he personally mobilized parents to donate money for repairs and within a week the room was fixed up better than it had been before. He also strove to keep up the teachers' morale by consistently encouraging them, and prioritizing the finding of teaching materials to replace those lost in the blaze. Thus, the initial signs that caring is regularly demonstrated in this school and by its leadership were borne out through the longer observation period.

Data Analysis

The findings presented below come primarily from the 2015 meetings and observations and 2016 interview about caring, supplemented by observations in 2017. We analyzed both interviews and observations according to the general guidelines offered by Miles and Huberman (1994). We adopted Rubin and Rubin's (2011) guidelines for coding responsive interviews, first summarizing the interview, then coding for major themes and concepts, and sorting and resorting within and between codes. We met several times during and following the coding process to discuss emergent findings. Because the first author of this paper interviewed the school leader and performed the participant observation, the second author was able to adopt a naive stance and question the first author's assumptions. We attempt to thoroughly contextualize our findings and conclusions so that readers can appropriately decide whether the findings apply to their context (Merriam and Tisdell 2015, p.267).

As Maxwell (2012) suggests, researcher positionality—"the fact that the researcher is part of the world that he or she studies" is a "powerful and inescapable influence" (p.109). The three authors of this paper are, in order: an American citizen who has lived most of her adult life in Tanzania, working mainly in international schools and teacher training, an American former teacher and researcher who has never set foot in Tanzania, and a Tanzanian school leader with almost 40 years experience in the Tanzanian public education system. Each of the authors harbors a personal commitment to improving educational quality, and the diverse viewpoints of the authors afforded a rich jumping-off point for discussions about the role of caring in schools. Interviews and observations were conducted in Swahili, and subsequently translated by the first author for analysis. Emergent findings were discussed by all three authors (meaning, the interviewee and interviewer/researchers) in English and Swahili, with the first author (due to proximity) often acting as a go-between.

Findings

When asked about the success of his school academically, one of the first aspects Mr. Mwakalinga mentions is caring. ("*Upendo*" in Swahili can be translated as "caring" or "love" in English). According to Mwakalinga, one shows caring by, firstly, respecting each child, and secondly by being near them – talking to them, asking them how they are doing, what they think; whether they are in class, in a meeting or on the school grounds. Indeed, when one spends time in the school, one sees that students, while respectful, are also close to the head teacher and come to him directly, rather than fearing to speak to him. Caring is a driving force at the school, as well as being an important aspect of making children feel safe and secure at school.

"Caring Shortens a Teacher's Journey" Caring and Academic Performance

One key theme which emerges from the interview data is the connection between caring and motivation, which impacts both students and teachers, though in different ways. Mwakalinga emphasizes that while good teaching skills are prerequisite, teachers' caring for students "shortens the teacher's journey", or makes the process of teaching and learning easier and swifter due to the good relationships fostered between students and teacher.

For teachers, caring about students motivates investigation. Mwakalinga argues that caring about the child is what inspires teachers to find ways to identify and then meet students' needs. These needs may be academic, physical or emotional. He characterizes the action of a caring teacher as research, particularly when students are not performing well: "*In every stage of childhood, whenever you teach, it should be like doing research about each student – that is your job every day … you must go back and find out what the problem is.*" Thus, academically, caring may take the form of regularly assessing students to identify those that need special instruction or extra help. The approach is *"especially taking care for those who are not doing well; to find out why they are failing. The reason for this student may be different from that other student – If you carry them all, the [school] performance will be high…. That is how to ensure your school is successful."* Mwakalinga also adds that on the other end of the spectrum students who do very well in a subject must also be given intellectual challenges. Thus, context matters in the particularity of each child's situation. Caring in this form does not lend itself to standard or universal prescriptions, but rather, careful understanding of individual needs and creative use of the resources available.

Mwakalinga notes that when a child receives care from a teacher, their motivation to please the teacher and do well in school increases. "*If a child gets the love he/she hopes for from the teacher, it will enable him/her to trust, to love and to listen to the teacher.*" In terms of physical and emotional needs, Mwakalinga points out that what may seem small gestures from a teacher's perspective can have a large impact on students. In the subject formerly called *Haiba na Michezo* (Sports and Character education) and now called *Uraia na Maadili* (Civics and Moral Education), Standard 3 and 4 children are explicitly taught social expectations of cooperation and communication, including social obligations to help relatives or neighbors in times of illness, funerals or celebrations, and school rules such as the rule that children should carry a teacher's bag/equipment for the teacher. Usually, the showing of respect through special greetings, fetching equipment and listening rather than speaking would be expected from a child toward an adult, and not the other way around. However, Mwakalinga encourages his teachers to show the same respect for students: "*If a child is sick, and s/he lives near school, go home and see them. First, they'll be surprised. … they will get better quickly. … they'll say – 'mom, I'm better, I want to go to school'. … Just because you (the teacher) went to see them. So, these things all help a lot.*" In Mwakalinga's experience, it is small yet significant actions which "shorten the journey" of educating children.

Often, the physical, emotional and academic needs of students are intertwined. This is particularly evident in the lives of orphans who are impacted by the stigma of HIV/AIDS and family members' suspicion that the child may have been infected from birth. Mwakalinga has found such children to be particularly in need of, and responsive to, positive attention and encouragement. In this case, meeting the child's needs can include building their sense of belonging and of self-worth, which usually also leads to improved performance. Mkwakalinga shared the story of one student who was consistently performing poorly in her classes:

> *There was one girl, … and there was a time she was failing in school. I tried talking to her and she said to me that she has wounds/sores; and it was true. I gave her first aid and the sores got better. She was surprised. She said she stays with her aunt, and never had her aunt even touched her, even when she showed her aunt her sores. She said her aunt told her she had a disease that her aunt wanted nothing to do with. She explained a lot. She said, you're just my teacher, yet you gave me first aid and helped me get better. When she became close to me,*

her performance rose. She became free to ask questions. And now she's gone on to secondary school. And every time she's on school vacation, she comes back to visit me. You see.

When the head teacher took the time to talk to her and to provide a simple first aid ointment available at school, it caused the girl to open up and explain the lack of care she received at home, where she was being raised by relative who would not touch her due to HIV/AIDS stigma. The care she received from school turned around both her attitude and her performance. If schools and teachers focus solely on covering academic content and skills without attention to the physical and emotional needs of students, academic learning may decrease. This should not be interpreted to mean that schools and teachers burdened with large classes and few resources can or should meet every need of a child. Rather, the significance is that being aware of needs and willing to show caring in the small ways that are feasible may contribute toward improving a child's academic success through increasing their personal motivation.

Thus far, we have discussed the importance of caring for student needs in order to motivate and improve learning. In the next subsection, we acknowledge the non-academic aspects of schooling – themes related to the moral dimension and the importance of guiding vision for the purpose of education beyond merely passing examinations or learning for learning's sake.

"They Are My Children" Moral Aspects of Schooling and Teacher Education

The responsibility of caring as portrayed by Mkwakalinga implies a moral purpose to education. The role of a teacher is not only to impart technical skills and knowledge. The teacher and all school staff are implicated in the upbringing of children and children's right to be cared for. This head teacher likens the nature of the profession itself to a religious calling: "*This work [teaching] is a calling. Because it is from God, really. It is like those priests, bishops, the way they work, that is also like our work. You have to love the children."*

Furthermore, the job of a teacher goes beyond merely purveying academic knowledge and skills, to include caring for the child as a person: "*It means that the love of parents, the care a child gets from parents, now it comes from the teacher. That is how it is,*" he states*.* In the context of Ukombozi School students, it is not uncommon for children to spend far more time with their teachers than parents. Most children are at school from early morning until late afternoon on school days and again on Saturday mornings, and even when children go home, their parents and guardians often do not reach home until late evening. Because teachers have a parental role, according to Mwakalinga, it is a professional matter that there be no permanent enmity between a teacher and a child. If they have a conflict, this must be resolved in order to maintain the caring relationship and to allow the teacher to focus on teaching the class. Mwakalinga takes very seriously the analogy of teacher as second parent, and expects teachers to do the same. *"…you have given me all these children and they are **my** children – I have to make sure each one of them, from here, I am taking care of them – I am promoting each one to reach his/her full potential to succeed academically – every single one."* Mwakalinga feels he has to cultivate both this sensibility and technical teaching skills in the teachers who are assigned to his school in order to ensure the school's success.

Considering the teacher's role as a moral responsibility entails putting the child's needs above material concerns: "*You have to love the children, don't love* things *more. Don't put things first. You must do the job you've been given with the children. – if you say, 'what is in this for me?' you destroy everything."* Thus, for this school leader, the moral obligation of caring for children outweighs economic calculations. According to Mwakalinga, this awareness of the need for teachers to care for others, and to see teaching as a calling forms a key difference in the preparation of teachers in Tanzania between the present and the period in which he was trained, i.e. the Education for Self Reliance (ESR) era of President Nyerere in the 1970s and 1980s.

…in past years my country was training teachers very well; when we studied, in the years I went to teachers' college, we student teachers were reflecting and evaluating ourselves.   When you were at college, you could find you're not fit to be a teacher, just because of the way you are [your nature/personality], so you find that person is not happy at teachers' college, and gains self-awareness… You find the teachers we get now are not like the teachers used to be. Nowadays, they are here just for work; They don't care about children, they'll just cane the child and move on.

From this perspective, a teacher who is 'just doing their job' – the technical job of imparting academic content - could see a child's mistakes as laziness or inaptitude and thus be comfortable to cane them and carry on teaching, whereas a teacher driven by a caring, moral purpose would feel obliged to investigate why the child is not performing as expected, and to find a lasting solution. This does not mean there is no corporal punishment in a school driven by caring within the Tanzanian context, but that such punishment is used sparingly[2]. Mwakalinga points out that the view of teaching as 'just a job' and what's more, as an occupation of last resort is captured in the common Swahili phrase asked of jobless graduates, "*umekosa hata elimu*?" which translates as "you could not even become a teacher?" When teaching is seen just as a job to earn income, the commitment inherent in *caring* about children may be lacking.

A clear vision as to the larger purpose of education can also support teachers' cultivation of a caring commitment to their profession. Mwakalinga notes this is another distinction between the ESR period and the more recent educational milieu. He notes that a clearly articulated vision for education can influence the way in which teachers carry out their work. If one's vision is limited to carrying out a contractual responsibility to present and assess an academic curriculum on a daily basis, and teacher training emphasizes only technical skills and accountability for test scores, without any sense as to larger or moral purposes of schooling, the result can be the lack of an ethic of care in schools and possibly correspondingly lower levels of learning.

Caring and Leadership

In considering the aspects of morality, purpose and academic performance highlighted by Mwakalinga, caring is seen to have many implications for school leadership. At an institutional level, the head teacher must monitor, inculcate and facilitate positive teacher and student relationships. The school leader must have a clear vision as to the purpose of their profession, and according to Mwakalinga, this purpose is not only to have a high-performing school academically, but ultimately to ensure that students are prepared for a positive and fulfilled future; that they are ethical people, able to meet their own and their families' needs, and that they can compete within society – often against more privileged children with access to better-resourced, private education.

The headteacher's caring becomes both a model and an expectation for teachers, and teachers are to be treated in the same caring manner as students. *"…as head teacher – the way you handle students, should be the way you handle the teachers – because each teacher has their own problems. If you divide the staff, you have destroyed the school. If you appear to not care for even one of the teachers, you've destroyed it. It is just like with the students – you have to care about the teachers, and to value what each one brings to school. One will have this talent, one will have another talent."* Thus the spirit of research, of investigating needs and strengths extends to the school staff as well as to students for this caring school leader.

Discussion and Implications

Our findings highlight several implications about the nature of caring in this particular Tanzanian school context. One implication is that caring is revealed as an *investigatory* practice in this school. The

head teacher and school staff members enact caring by actively seeking to ascertain and understand student needs. Intention – what Noddings (2001) terms "virtue caring" - undergirds this practice even in cases where teachers are not ultimately successful in meeting student needs. According to Noddings (2001), "virtue caring" is a situation where one party *intends* to care even if that intention is not understood as caring by the person on the receiving end. Noddings derides virtue caring as insufficient: according to her, authentic caring is fundamentally an intersubjective practice that must be both intended and received as care. However, even if virtue caring is not sufficient for authentic care, it is certainly a necessary condition. Teachers' intentions to care for their students motivates action on behalf of those students. According to the experience in Mwakalinga's school, authentic caring is also grounded in curiosity: teachers must wonder how they can better serve particular students who are struggling.

Perhaps most importantly, authentic caring in this context is founded on a sense of one's own ability to solve problems and exercise power on behalf of students. Not only the head teacher, but each teacher in a school must believe that, once they have developed a sense of challenges facing students, they can find an intervention or remedy that will help that student. In other words, caring actions which may improve children's experience of or performance in school are more likely to be engaged in by teachers who have a sense of agency, using agency in Biesta, Priestley and Robinson's (2015) sense of "something that people do" rather than a quality a person has (p. 626). In this case, the head teacher, Mwakalinga, leads by example in taking action to meet students' needs, and he expects and encourages teachers to do the same. In Cassidy and Bates' (2005) terms, the head teacher has consciously embedded an ethic of care in the school environment, largely through the form of role modelling that was also noted by Roffey (2008) in the Australian context. Through Mwakalinga's exemplar, caring becomes a general characteristic of interactions in the school, and not simply a characteristic of particular relationships.

A closely tied implication is that caring is a highly contextual and particularistic practice (Valenzuela, 1999; Tronto, 2010; Gholami, Kuusisto and Tirri, 2015). As seen in some of the examples above, individual students have highly particular needs, and so the purposes of care may differ significantly from student to student. So, too, may the amount of energy teachers need to expend on behalf of students. Additionally, to the extent that teachers are researchers of the students in their care, they must also strive to be researchers of their families and community in order to fully apprehend students' needs.

Caring is definitely not a transactional practice. By transactional, we refer to a sense that good behavior is rewarded and poor behavior is sanctioned without respect to context or efforts at addressing root causes. The findings of this study reinforce the notion that caring is rooted in meeting needs rather than merely a means to an end. Authentic caring often achieves the desired academic improvement, and Mwakalinga heavily emphasized academic gains as a main aim of caring. However, achieving lasting changes in academic disposition goes beyond one-off encounters. Those teachers who give a consequence to behavioral infractions and move on may miss a chance to address an underlying problem, whereas an investigatory approach to care may yield a more effective solution.

Caring is also not merely a technical practice. In the same way that students (ones cared for) have particularistic needs, school adults (ones caring) have particular ways of meeting those needs. Although training can certainly strengthen the social and instructional toolkit available to teachers, the way teachers wield these strategies will be based in their own strengths and experiences. In many ways, a caring approach actually increases the demands on teachers because it moves the emphasis from skillful delivery of curriculum to using social and pedagogical knowledge to solve novel and diverse problems. At the same time, it highlights the need for expanding teachers' locus of control and capacity for solving these problems, not as a matter of technical ability but rather in the manner of *bricoleurs* (improvisers) (Weick 1993). The need for this dynamic set of teacher skills

also highlights the importance of teacher identity formation, and the role of emotion within that process (Zembylas 2003).

Analysis and theorization of practices and implications of caring in schools are needed to enrich teacher education and policy planning for quality education. In particular, to the extent that the discourses of teaching culture that teachers are exposed to appear sterile and technicist, and to the extent that these discourses appear incompatible with local discourses of culture, teachers' narratives of subjectivity are likely to become contradictory, fractured, and transactional. In emphasizing technical solutions to problems that may or may not be applicable in the teachers' particular context, teachers may not have the broad set of tools, strategies and dispositions necessary to meet these needs. When narratives about the culture of teaching are about empowerment and determining and meeting needs, teachers' narratives of subjectivity are more likely to produce emotional investment in student personal and academic outcomes (Lutrell, 2013; Rolon-Dow, 2005).

Viewing education through a caring lens thus emphasizes the need to expand teachers' sense of their own ability to solve problems, and expand their ability to act as improvisers to implement solutions based in the particular needs they identify. This suggests that for school leadership to foster an ethic of care, educators in a school must be both empowered and equipped to meet these needs. The expertise of proven, local practitioners such as Mwakalinga can play a role, or at the least be drawn upon as a resource, in the planning and development of education policies and teacher education. For policymakers, this begs the question of how best to centrally generate discourses focused on local improvement, and how to embed an ethic of caring in educational discourses in ways which can be responsive to local, particularistic needs. While this study has merely scratched the surface of noting and theorizing forms of caring and its implications, it will hopefully open the door to further studies to inform policy development and teaching practices in a more comprehensive pursuit of quality in education.

Notes

[1] Note, in the case of flexible lesson period lengths at Ukombozi Primary mentioned above, the motivation is not direct care for students' emotional state, as suggested by Ancess (2003), but rather for teachers to complete a lesson and cover the syllabus, which often takes longer than the standard 40 minute period with a large class size, if the teacher attempts to give more students a chance to answer questions and to mark their exercises in class.
[2] Corporal punishment is legal under Tanzanian law: Corporal Punishment Regulation of 1979, which was updated to limit its severity and to require recording of punishments, in the early 2000s.

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