

‘Caring for’ and ‘Caring about’ – Leadership’s Twin Responsibilities in Challenging Times.

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While there is a developing literature relating caring and leadership (Smylie, Murphy & Louis, 2016), little attention has been paid to nuances that define different kinds of caring. In particular, theoretical framings of caring can influence actions that might characterize caring communities. This paper will explore these nuances and the implications they have for leaders in schools and universities.

Noddings (2002) made the distinction between ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’. The focus of the former is on developing a relationship with another person – as a mother does for her child. It involves time, listening, sympathy, reaching out, and helping. ‘Caring for’ can only involve two people both committed to resolving problems and issues. This presents the first challenge for leaders. How to create an environment characterized by individual care - caring for each other. As one writer put it, “genuine care requires actual encounters with others” (Havinsky, 2004, p.17).

For Noddings (2015) ‘caring for’ represents the essence of care. But she reasoned that having a concern for others, or ‘caring about’, is another expression of care. It does not replace ‘caring for’, but genuine concern for others both near and far can be an important first step since it is not possible to ‘care for’ everyone. Leaders need to be aware of this broader form of caring in terms of a world where currently there is much about which to be concerned.

Leaders need to develop strategies that will enable both ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ to characterise their communities. This means developing skills and attitudes that will make ‘caring for’ a natural part of daily life for both students and teachers – this can include special training in listening, responding and acting to solve individual problems. It may also mean providing space where these interactions can take place. At the same time, there must be opportunities for students to care about the world’ around them, both in and out of class. Service learning, global engagement and understanding current issues must be, as a minimum, part of students’ experiences. Caring organizations must be so for individuals within them as well as the societies in which they are embedded.

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