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## Care Ethics in Online Teaching

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### Care Ethics in Remote Instruction

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## Care Ethics in Remote Instruction

### Abstract

As a teacher educator, I sought to understand how to operationalize care ethics in my remote teaching over a three-year period. Through surveys, student work, interviews, and video-ed synchronous class sessions with seven cohorts of teacher-candidates, the lenses of care ethics revealed particular challenges and possibilities for operationalizing care with authentic modeling through story, dialogue and collaboration, and addressing power and confirmation in assessment.

### Introduction

Caring is a core responsibility for educators if we consider teaching as a moral endeavor (see for example, Goodlad et al, 1990; Hansen, 2001; Noddings, 2002a). In care ethics, relationships are considered the impetus and medium for moral learning (Noddings, 2002a). An innate desire to be in caring relationships motivates our learning to relate with care. The isolation, automation, and standardization of the online environment diminishes opportunities for the caring encounters that are central to care ethics (Kostogriz, 2012; Damarin, 1994). In recent years, researchers have begun to explore the possibilities for care ethics in the online environment (Mastel-Smith, Post, & Lake, 2015; Robinson, Kilgore, & Warren, 2017; Robinson, Al-Freih, & Kilgore, 2020; Velasquez, Graham, & Osguthorpe, 2013; Swartz, Gachago, & Belford, 2018). Care ethics has been both curriculum and a research focus for me as a teacher educator (Author, XXXX); In this three-year self-study, I explored my efforts to operationalize a care ethic in online instruction. This inquiry became particularly relevant as the 2020 pandemic pushed all instruction online.

### Conceptual Framework and Background

#### *Care Ethics in Education*

The ethic of care developed in opposition to a traditional ethics focused on abstract norms and duties in which an autonomous rational agent strives for a pure expression of norms through transcending context (Gilligan 1982; Held, 2006). A care ethicist is an interdependent social agent embedded in a particular situation and positionality. Applied to education, learning to care is a primary purpose of schooling (Noddings, 2002a). Reciprocal, responsive, and enduring relationships are recognized as the medium through which experiences of schooling create habits of mind. "We cannot separate means and ends in education, because the desired result is part of the process,

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and the process carries with it the notion of the persons undergoing it becoming somehow 'better'" (Noddings, 1984, p. 174).

Unlike traditional moral education where virtues are taught didactically, care ethics focuses on experiences of caring as the medium through which we learn to care. Caring-for entails engrossing oneself in the cared-for's concerns enough to understand their experience and undergo motivational displacement to respond to their needs. Noddings' (2002a) approach to moral education centers on open-ended process-oriented experiences: modeling, practice, dialogue, and confirmation. A teacher *models* caring relations, creates opportunities for *dialogue* and to *practice* caring, and *confirms* an other's best intentions.

Teacher preparation programs seek to develop candidates' capacities for caring relationships as well as dispositions to care (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013; Schussler & Knarr, 2013; Rector-Aranda, 2019). However, teacher education frequently overlooks preparing candidates to develop professional let alone caring relationships with other teachers (McHatton & Daniel, 2008; AUTHOR, XXXX; Murawski, 2013; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). Caring teacher relationships could support collaboration (Avila de Lima, 2003; Hargreaves, 2002; AUTHOR, XXXX) and contribute to collective efficacy (Goddard et al, 2004), which is associated with responding to the emotional labour of teaching and teacher retention (Kostogriz, 2012; Boe et al, 2008).

### Critical Care Ethics

Care ethics initial framing was critiqued for not explicating sociocultural context as morally salient and for the uncritical whiteness of its stories (Barnes, 2018; Valenzuela, 1999). Rector-Aranda (2019) adds a holistic and inclusive understanding of care ethics through acknowledging culture: "Although all teachers most likely care about students' academic growth and achievement, in a climate of "subtractive schooling," where students of color are denied connections with their culture and community, this aesthetic caring still serves as a falsely apolitical rejection of essential parts of students' personhood" (p. 389). Valenzuela's research (1999) distinguished *authentic* from *aesthetic* caring. Aesthetic caring focuses narrowly on the teacher-student(s) relationships in a school context as a fetishistic focus on institutions as holders of learning and knowledge whereas authentic caring transcends this limitation to embrace culture and community. Valenzuela's authentic caring requires transcending a false veneer of neutrality and equality to affirm students' cultural, racial, and community identities and further their well-being beyond

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narrowly conceived academic achievement. "To care.., in culturally responsive ways, for marginalized students of color, it is imperative for teachers to *know* before they can and should *do*" (Gay, 2018, p. 59). Critical authentic care requires transcending assimilationist and deficit-oriented approaches to authentically and critically care.

### Relationships in Remote Education

On first glance, the automation and standardization characterized by the online environment is antithetical to caring. Interactive opportunities are limited for practicing caring, particularly authentic caring, which highlights narrowly focused aims of schooling and the need for connections to community and culture. Further, caring-for was originally conceived of as a face-to-face matter (Noddings, 1984) and thus arguably impossible in the online environment.

The primacy of affective labour in teaching is associated with the creation and modulation of affect in and through human contact, ethics of responsibility, and communication. This labour is situated in proximal, face-to-face contact zones where teachers and students experience teaching and learning as an essentially corporeal and affective social activity. (Kostogriz, 2012, p. 402)

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Despite concern over limited interactions in relationship in an online environment, remote teaching was an exigency in my program. As a teacher educator for whom care ethics has been course curriculum and a research focus (Author, XXXX), I was interested in operationalizing a care ethic online as a subset of Whitehead's (2000) question, "How do I live my values more fully in practice?" (p. 90).

For decades, scholars have researched the problem of isolation in remote learning and how to develop relationships to address the psychological and physical distances that impede learning (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Tu (2000) defines social presence as "the degree of person-to-person awareness" (p. 1662). Social presence research differs from care ethics in that the quality of the relationship is morally salient in care ethics. Social presence research informs inquiries into care ethics since it helps us understand the relational dimensions of online teaching. As such, initial case studies conducted on care ethics in remote instruction reference social presence theory (Mastel-Smith et al, 2015; Robinson et al, 2017; Robinson et al, 2020; Velasquez et al, 2013; Swartz et al, 2018).

Social presence theory focuses on reducing the psychological impact of physical distance in virtual environments through presence and immediacy. Salient interpersonal relationships increase engagement and participation in learning (Tu, 2000; Wighting, 2005). Research examining efforts to cultivate social presence has shown that instructor vulnerability, promptness, humor, and eagerness contributed to increased student interactions, motivation, engagement, and better learning outcomes (see, for example: Aragon, 2003; Du, Havard & Li, 2005; Lam, Cheng, & McNaught, 2005; Tu, 2000). Social presence can be cultivated in the online realm through whole and particularly small group discussion where students interact frequently to share opinions and contribute to each other's learning (Hamann, Pollock, & Wilson, 2012; Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016; Knapp, 2018). Specific applications of remote discussion, such as sharing through peer blogs, video conference, or small group discussions have been found successful in cultivating social presence (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016; Knapp, 2018). Despite educators' desire to operationalize social presence, time constraints and instructional demands frequently take precedence (Berry, 2019). Theoretically, care ethics frees educators from this tension, since care is both means and ends of education.

## Care Ethics in Remote Education

There is limited research on care ethics in remote education, yet several case studies and one theoretical

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exploration stand out. With the advent of the Internet Boom of the nineties, Damarin (1994) explored the theoretical application of caring to online design. Damarin argued the need to interrupt the automation that removes face-to-face encounter from the equation. Teaching online would necessitate drawing on aspects of students' identity, such as their narratives through cultural artifacts. Instructors would design affordances for freedom and interest:

For use by ones-caring, designer/developers could provide numerous material resources; these must be particular in their intent to convey a message to an interested user rather than normative. In recognition of the obligation of the cared-for to continue the caring relation through acknowledgement, designers might also turn their attention to the provision of multiple opportunities for the one cared for to express learnings and to exercise the practice of free thinking. (Damarin, 1994, p. 37)

Interrupting the automation at the heart of online teaching would make way for "free thinking" towards connection and ultimately, care.

Several notable case studies have explored instructor and student perceptions of caring in remote learning (Mastel-Smith et al, 2015; Robison et al, 2019; Velasquez et al, 2013; Swartz et al, 2019). The findings mirror social presence research, but also reveal aspects of relationship in remote environments that could go overlooked without the lenses of care ethics. Aligned with social presence, a plethora of pedagogical choices were perceived as caring: synchronous activities; peer-to-peer support through groupwork; projects drawing on students' interests; options for representing learning; solicitation of student feedback; and, relevant and simplified resources (Robinson et al, 2017; Robinson et al, 2020; Velasquez et al, 2013). Students perceived instructors as caring when they appeared observant; responded in timely personalized ways; reflected awareness of their tone in communications; affirmed students' abilities; and included multiple discussion fora (Robison et al, 2020, 2020; Velasquez et al, 2013).

The lens of care ethics revealed dimensions of relating online through modeling, confirmation, reciprocity, and tensions between caring, paternalism, and patronization. When instructors demonstrated flexibility, welcomed revisions, and softened deadlines, students described experiencing confirmation, the assumption of best possible intentions (Robinson et al, 2020; Velasquez et al, 2013). Caring was also perceived when instructors transcended niceties to provide constructive feedback, repudiate and remind students of boundaries (Robinson et al, 2020). This touches on how the lenses of care ethics

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2  
3 reveal the moral qualities of relationships and harkens to early  
4 research on caring as "more than gentle smiles and warm hugs"  
5 (Goldstein, 2009, p. 259); care defined within an ethic differs  
6 from the quotidian connotation of the term, caring, as a warm  
7 fuzzy static female personality trait (AUTHOR, XXXX).

8  
9 Caring was also perceived as requiring reciprocity,  
10 reflecting Noddings' (1984) philosophical conception of caring  
11 (Mastel-Smith et al, 2015; Velasquez et al, 2013). Students  
12 pointed to not only instructors' modeling promptness necessary  
13 for social presence, but also highlighted the salience of  
14 instructors' disclosure, freedom from judgement, willingness to  
15 give the benefit of the doubt, and eagerness to connect (Mastel-  
16 Smith et al, 2015; Velasquez et al, 2013). Velasquez et al  
17 (2013) noticed a virtuous circle: factors of caring interrelated  
18 and served to create a repeated cycle in which the instructor  
19 gained understanding from students' feedback and executed  
20 actions students perceived as caring. Witnessing students'  
21 growth reenergized the instructor to continue caring.

22  
23  
24 In a case study exploring the tension between caring and  
25 paternalism in remote teaching during a crisis, Swartz et al  
26 (2019) decided to continue teaching their courses remotely  
27 during South Africa's 2016 student protests over access to  
28 higher education. They analyzed their unilateral assertion of  
29 authority during a crisis in the distanced context of online  
30 teaching and in retrospect they questioned whether their actions  
31 were caring. They emphasize the importance of balancing power  
32 with involvement of all stake-holders. This balance was elusive  
33 in the remote environment during a crisis, and Swartz et al  
34 (2019) assert the nature of care - in contrast with a norm - as  
35 an ideal we can never perfectly achieve: "(C)are is not  
36 something that we can ever achieve, but that we can strive  
37 towards, allows us breathing space in our attempts as providing  
38 the best care possible to our students and us..." (p. 61). As an  
39 ideal, caring is elusive and cannot be predetermined; issues of  
40 power in the dispersed online environment make understanding the  
41 cared-for's needs complex.  
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### Methodology

45  
46 In this self-study in one multiple-subject joint  
47 credential/MA program at a large public state university, over  
48 the course of six iterations and seven courses (one semester I  
49 taught two sections), I sought to understand my students' (who I  
50 will refer to as teacher-candidates) interpretations of care  
51 ethics in a fully remote course with both asynchronous and  
52 synchronous activities. Care ethics was course content in our  
53 teacher preparation program; thus, the tension between  
54 instructional demands and care was resolved (Barry, 2019).  
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Quotidian definitions of caring are diffuse compared to the term, care, within an ethic. With care ethics as curriculum, my teacher-candidates-students were uniquely situated to critique its implementation (AUTHORS, XXXX). I drew on LaBoskey's (2004) characteristics of self-study as self-initiated, self-focused, improvement-aimed, interactive, drawing on multiple qualitative methods, and demonstrating validity through trustworthiness (Mishler, 1990). I was interested in how (and if) I could design for care in the remote environment. This appeared implausible but imperative to me to "live my values more fully in my practice" (Whitehead, 2000).

### **Context and Participants**

Over the course of six semesters, seven cohorts of multiple-subject teaching credential candidates enrolled in one fully remote course, Health and Special Education. Of the 203 candidates (average 29 per course), a third had taken Sociology of Education with me or another instructor; in the sociology course, candidates encountered care ethics by discussing Noddings' seminal work, *Caring*, and intersections of care, culture, and racial context, in Gay's (2018) *Culturally Responsive Teaching* and Valenzuela's *Subtractive Schooling*. Candidates explored care ethics in practice through ethical dilemma cases from Richert's (2012) *What Should I Do?*. They composed their own cases and discussed them in a conference format (AUTHOR, XXXX). In the health and special education course, care ethics was integrated through cases related to caring-for students; inclusion; diverse ways of knowing; interrupting deficit mindsets; de-centering neurotypicality (Fernandes, 2019); physical and mental health; and caring-for teachers given the emotional labour of teaching (Kostogriz, 2012; AUTHOR, XXXX). I referred to participants by pseudonyms when I reference interviewed or coursework data; the other data was anonymized.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection was iterative; I implemented changes in my teaching each semester based on what I learned from teacher-candidates (LaBoskey, 2004). Data included candidates' written reflections over their learning, student work, video-ed synchronous class sessions, four periodic surveys per semester of all candidates, and self-nominated candidate interviews (See Appendix A for survey/interview protocol). Given my own subjectivity and position of power, I interviewed any willing teacher-candidates only after they'd completed my courses and assessments were finalized, engaged them in member-checking, offered group or solo interviews, and explicitly requested their critiques. I opened interviews with a request for "brutal honesty" to help me improve my practice. To reflect the focus on

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relationships and dialogue, I offered candidates the choice to interview in groups of 3-4 and only 5 candidates interviewed solo. I found that candidates critiqued my practice more freely in a group than when they were alone. 108 candidates interviewed in groups (~5 interviews per semester, 28 group and 5 solo interviews). At the end of interviews, I engaged candidates in member-checking my interpretations of themes in the data gleaned thus far. Since they were learning teacher inquiry methods as part of their joint credential-masters research project, they had preparation to serve as critical friends. I shared that I was seeking to complicate my interpretations.

To analyze this data, I used a grounded theory approach (Merriam, 1998) and also employed interpretive categories within care ethics: caring, modeling, practice, dialogue, and confirmation. I examined the entire data set and conducted inductive interpretive coding to identify emergent themes. Each semester, I identified themes, highlighting phrases, sentences, and longer excerpts.

### Findings

With each course iteration, I revised for teacher-candidates' insightful feedback on the challenges to enacting care ethics in the remote environment. Seemingly immutable remote learning dimmed relational experience and heightened teacher power. When teacher-candidates described experiencing caring, it involved authentic modeling, continuity through the practice of leveraging authentic stories to care, dialogue, and confirming assessment. Ultimately, candidates described caring as cumulative and idiosyncratic.

#### ***Decontextualized Relationships Emphasize Teacher Power***

Throughout this study, the lens of care ethics highlighted the decontextualized nature of relating in the remote environment; context is what's needed to care and in contrast to the reciprocity of caring, the distances between us emphasized my power as the teacher. The candidates described how online interactions were "higher-stakes," "rigid," and "more formal somehow" and this could foreclose developing caring relationships. In an end-of-the-semester group interview, Amber, who I'd taught face-to-face in my other (sociology) course, said, "I knew you are not at all intimidating. But when we went online and I watched your videos I had to remind myself I knew you and try not to be intimidated by you." Across my two dozen years of teaching evaluations, I am not referred to as intimidating; instead, I am described as "warm" and actually, perhaps because I teach and try to practice care ethics, "caring." Rose added, "Yeah, it's like we don't get the feeling

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with the complex ideas." Unsurprisingly, the impersonal disembodied environment online distanced us.

This heightened candidates' vulnerability to my pedagogical choices. In end-of-the-first-year interviews, candidates often shared their worst prior experiences of remote learning. A theme throughout these stories was their subjectivity to teacher-directed pedagogies, which were "even less engaging" than face-to-face. Lola said:

You are more vulnerable to the teacher's ways of teaching because maybe in person you could check out a bit and get caught up by peers or you can interact and casually ask to do something another way but online you must figure it all out.

When asked how this teacher-student power dynamic played out in my course, Lola added, "There's just more infrastructure to get through that has to be all teacher-centered stuff. That stuff you made can be great but still, it's definitely teacher-centered at first." Online instruction was not only distanced, but also intractable from candidates' perspective; however, Lola admits an opening for reciprocity when she said it was teacher-centered, "at first." I was curious to explore what pedagogies could interrupt this default power down experience of the remote environment to foster the reciprocity of caring relationships.

### ***Authentic Modeling***

Starting in the first semester, I focused on humanizing pedagogies to cultivate reciprocity and caring in the remote environment through authentic modeling. "To be effective it (modeling) must be genuine ... Modeling may be more effective in the moral domain than in the intellectual because its very authenticity is morally significant" (Noddings, 2002b, p. 287). I began class synchronous or asynchronous sessions by modeling authenticity through sharing stories of my own experiences (mostly teaching) and this was frequently noted throughout the data as legitimizing the relevance of the whole person: "You showed us that we mattered, our experience mattered, when you'd start with the stories in each class and then your narrative paper. It's like, I'm a human before I'm an authority here." This candidate refers to a reflection I wrote to provide the context that is missing online - on my own schooling experiences and how they intersect with race, class, gender, and sexuality (the classic sociology of education autobiography that I assign) and despite this being optional reading in a reading heavy program, candidates often referenced this. Modeling authenticity through sharing aspects of my identity seemed especially important given the distance of the remote environment. In surveys, candidates wrote that the online environment required

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3 "breaking through" and "Anything personal helps but it has to be  
4 authentic. It's like more of you is required."

5 I assumed we would need to share deeply - that I should  
6 avoid aesthetic caring by focusing us on contextualizing  
7 ourselves and our stories and candidates confirm this. Peter put  
8 it in his interview:  
9

10 We are more likely to truly share when you have modeled  
11 doing it in a real way. Then we did it. Without sharing our  
12 situations there is no way we can support each other  
13 because we wouldn't know how. That said, I wasn't going to  
14 share anything until I saw it was invited and you did. You  
15 didn't just tell us to. That would have been canned.  
16

17 I began synchronous class meetings and designed all group  
18 activities with introductions focused on sharing our narratives  
19 in some way; for example, I shared about the challenge of  
20 teaching online (or the pandemic) and candidates could  
21 reciprocate anonymously (in word clouds, for example).  
22 Introductions ranged from setting norms for dialogue and  
23 groupwork to sharing about our identities guided by questions  
24 such as: "What's your earliest memory?"; "Share a family story  
25 about your name."; "Share a time when you felt excluded in  
26 school."; "How are you?"; and, "Describe one worst and best  
27 thing about this course thus far." These could be critiqued as  
28 formulaic and predictable and thus not caring within an ethic;  
29 still, in surveys, 190 out of 203 candidates recalled these as  
30 caring. I tried to transcend formulaic superficiality by  
31 connecting themes in candidates' stories to course concepts, the  
32 program's trajectory, university, and current events; in the  
33 final year of this study, the pandemic and Black Lives Matter  
34 movement were central and our stories included our recognition  
35 of our collective losses and the need to learn to be caring  
36 teachers seemed all the more evident. Perhaps the repetition  
37 alone of the introductions led to their notice, but one  
38 candidate's characteristic interview description points to the  
39 relevance for caring of my vulnerability and in contrast,  
40 candidates' anonymity, "One of the first things that comes to  
41 mind about caring was the intros like the ones with the word  
42 clouds about how we were. That felt caring. It was more so  
43 because you'd always share and we could share anonymously and  
44 there were options. It was also a bit more on you." In her  
45 interview, Julia focused on authenticity:  
46

47 There is no way for emotional and relationship stuff to  
48 work unless you as the teacher mean it. You show it by  
49 being who you are and weaving it everywhere, tons of tiny  
50 things, like modeling.. It would be worse if it was  
51 inauthentic. It can't be authentic unless it acknowledges  
52 challenges to manage emotions in general and to care.  
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3 While modeling through sharing stories and crafting  
4 opportunities for candidates to do so was often described in  
5 surveys as caring in-and-of-itself, in interviews, candidates  
6 pointed out that transcending aesthetic caring within an ethical  
7 framework requires actions that can be elusive in the remote  
8 environment:  
9

10 With a tone set, we will be nice to each other, but we  
11 won't go far enough to really know each other, to be  
12 present enough to actually care like to help each other to  
13 learn. It's way harder online. The specific structures that  
14 asked us to do that in context helped, like when you  
15 described all the various ways we could work in a group  
16 depending on our strengths. We had the freedom to work that  
17 out so we could value each other.  
18

19 Affordances for caring in the distanced remote environment  
20 required integration throughout the learning experiences.

### **Practice and Continuity**

22 In the end-of-the-second-year interviews, while the  
23 reciprocal vulnerability of authenticity through story-telling  
24 was perceived as caring in-and-of-itself, candidates led me to  
25 understand that to transcend superficial or aesthetic caring, it  
26 helped if all activities were initiated with reminders to listen  
27 for and operationalize understandings of one another. I didn't  
28 micromanage what they did with their reflections, like by  
29 grading or even checking up that they took time to do them but I  
30 did design all opening activities with a nod toward  
31 relationships, such as at the beginning of lesson-planning with  
32 Universal Design for Learning, I wrote: "We're about to do  
33 groupwork with a new group remotely; Start by teaching each  
34 other one word from your home language or sharing one artifact  
35 that represents your family or something you care about." Within  
36 care ethics, care is an acknowledged response on behalf of the  
37 care-for (Noddings, 1984); this requires transcending aesthetic  
38 caring by acknowledging the context of identity (Valenzuela,  
39 1999). As a candidate in a survey put it, "If all we do is say  
40 we are stressed, it helps us individually but it's not enough."  
41 Another reminded me of how inauthentic it could be for me to  
42 request candidates share their emotions and then put them in  
43 groups without framing any caring aim: "A lot of care and  
44 emotional management lessons where you share your story and say  
45 how you are feeling and then how to manage the feeling, feel  
46 surface-level and so it's worse than if the feelings were not  
47 brought up cause you just feel put off." Aesthetic caring can be  
48 a lack of continuity.  
49

50 Given this understanding, in my third-year course  
51 adaptations, I framed activities for candidates' story sharing  
52 while explicitly naming their purpose within care ethics; For  
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3 example, I asked candidates to name the challenges they noticed  
4 in their dialogue during collaborations, such as imbalances in  
5 participation. For example, as they learned how bias (how bias  
6 functions is course content) plays out across culture, language,  
7 race, and ability, I prefaced groupwork with prompts to consider  
8 how to interrupt these underlying attitudes toward one another;  
9 they could share if they wanted, but the focus was reflection.  
10 In her interview, Leah referred to this practice, "The learning  
11 about bias on the first day and then the explicit focus on  
12 asking us to examine our biases in the moment in groupwork...so  
13 from the start it wasn't about 'nice'; it was deep and it was  
14 about applying what we were learning." In their group interview,  
15 Sara, Jamie, and Lola commented on the importance of continuity  
16 toward transcending aesthetic caring:

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18  
19 Sara: Setting "a nice tone" is not enough. It has to be  
20 woven into the class. You did that with the anonymous share  
21 time about feelings and then asking us to consider each  
22 other's feelings in groupwork in specific things like not  
23 judging each other for not turning on the videocam.

24 Lola: And that's all in the context of teaching what care  
25 ethics is.

26  
27 Jamie: And this is critical we notice stuff like this as  
28 teachers, like is it our colleagues from another language  
29 or culture that we are judging before figuring out what's  
30 going on.

31 In the remote environment in particular, one's needs could be  
32 hidden and thus, explicit structures or gentle reminders to  
33 listen to each other for ways to care helped.

34  
35 The data revealed several stories of possibilities for  
36 caring. In one reflection on a group collaboration (one of the  
37 introductory discussions), Maria shared that she was bilingual.  
38 She asked to assume the role of scribe to practice her English,  
39 but only upon explicit agreement from her colleagues to refrain  
40 from judging her note-taking. When I asked her about the  
41 experience in an interview, she questioned if she would have  
42 been willing to assume this role without "counting on caring  
43 responses":

44  
45 I shared how I feared being judged for my writing and in  
46 our small groups you gave us the opportunity to shape the  
47 groupwork based on those feelings. I told my group I was  
48 bilingual, English my second language. I'd volunteer to be  
49 note-taker but I needed everyone to know I was working on  
50 my writing. I welcomed feedback. It felt like some control  
51 of the situation, like counting on caring responses.

52 Without this, I would never have chosen this role.

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54 Given this candidate's hesitation to volunteer, if all she was  
55 asked to do was to share her personal story, it is less likely  
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3 that she would assume this leadership role and caring would  
4 remain on an aesthetic level, disconnected from her cultural  
5 identity.

### *Dialogue*

6  
7 Throughout the data, candidates pinpointed any  
8 opportunities I gave them for dialogue in collaboration as  
9 important to cultivate caring in the remote environment. For  
10 decades, dialogue has been taken up as a relational approach to teaching (see Noddings,  
11 1992; 2002a; Burbules, 1993; Snell & Lefstein, 2018) and to remote teaching in particular as part  
12 of social presence (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Du et al, 2005; Aragon, 2003). In Burbules'  
13 (1993) philosophical analysis of dialogue, he argued that Noddings' conception of care was an  
14 emotional factor necessary for dialogue. Discourse analysis is beyond this study's confines, and I  
15 do not claim discussions were dialogic in the sense Burbules defines: pedagogical,  
16 communicative, and relational; here, I refer to my efforts to cultivate dialogue through  
17 nonteleological questions to unearth candidates' lived experiences and intersecting identities. As  
18 a long-time teacher focused on care ethics, I have centered  
19 dialogue in my teaching. Yet I came to realize that my initial  
20 remote course was uncharacteristically heavy on concrete  
21 tangible products (such as independently written responses  
22 instead of times-taking and slippery-to-capture dialogue). To  
23 the degree I did this, I had confined caring between teacher-  
24 and-student.

25  
26 In their end-of-semester surveys in the first year,  
27 candidates convinced me that they needed more of the freedom  
28 Damarin (1994) suggested decades ago would be necessary to build  
29 caring collaborations in the remote environment. Candidates  
30 pinpointed the dialogic and collaborative assignments as those  
31 that cultivated caring; one wrote in a survey: "The carefully  
32 set up groupwork for dialogue, that makes way for caring and  
33 learning. Give students more chances to work together. Also, you  
34 should require it." Each semester, with this clear request for  
35 collaboration, I increased the opportunities for dialogue;  
36 however, I continued to offer an option to complete assignments  
37 individually. Again, candidates told me bluntly and repeatedly  
38 that this was my mistake - as in this survey comment: "The  
39 flexibility in this course with choosing to work alone rather  
40 than groups was a poor decision. We would have dug deeper in the  
41 later assignments if we had been told to collaborate and got to  
42 dialogue over those topics." Anika connected the necessity of my  
43 including dialogue in collaboration to their professional  
44 preparation:

45  
46 We are not just students in this program; we are students  
47 becoming teachers. By modeling that we take the time to  
48 dialogue and value it, you teach us to make the time for  
49 our own students to be able to have these opportunities.  
50 Otherwise, classroom community and collaboration is an  
51 abstract thing.

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The questions I've included here are examples of how I revised for candidates' feedback in their physical education lesson-planning assignment (italicized questions represent revisions):

Reflect on your experience in PE as a child. Did you hate it? Love it? Why? How were you included/excluded? *Share a story with your colleagues that you think teachers ought to know. Discuss what you would do as a teacher to improve PE for if you were each other's teachers.* How can you actively remove barriers to include diverse students?

I included more discussion-based experiences. I still provide multiple options for capturing discussion to model Universal Design for Learning instead of writing vs discussion; I realized that the candidates convinced me to align my teaching with the assumption within care ethics of our innate desire to care, for one another and for learning. The balance between using teacher-power in ways that squelch versus open opportunities for caring was challenging for me to find.

After the fourth course iteration, I worried that I'd incite a revolt, but I still designed the fifth semester with (almost all) collaborative dialogic assignments. In my introductory video-ed and transcribed announcements about my efforts to cultivate caring collaboration, I shared my reasoning. I quoted candidates' critiques of the prior course design. As part of each assignment, I asked candidates to reflect on their dialogue and collaboration. I mentioned these reflections above (Maria's story as a bilingual candidate), initiated with questions such as, "What's one dynamic in your collaboration you hope to improve on? What's going well? Share one aspect of your plan for collaboration in your post." One response shows a candidate's plan and reasoning: "I have noticed what I can learn from other teachers but I have to come prepped... I struggle with that and have scheduled in procrastination time next week."

By the seventh course iteration, all but a final portfolio was collaborative. Even the weakest group assignments were stronger than typical individual work. Discussion often served as the product (a mini-podcast, screen-share, or talking-heads video). In the two course iterations since this shift, no candidates have asked to work independently on collaborative assignments (yet and I still question my use of power in this decision). It seems to be working in that less candidates voted to change homegroups (83% in the first year to 94% in the final iteration); in their explanations of why they chose to remain with their groups and often mention the efforts they made to collaborate. Candidates' commitment to dialogue in collaboration may also have something to do with my having addressed (by the third course iteration) an impediment: assessment.

### ***Assessment and Balancing Power toward Care***



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2  
3 Assessment was a foundational undercurrent of power  
4 dynamics in teacher-student and student-student relationships.  
5 In the end-of-the-first-year interviews in response to, "What  
6 gets in the way of caring in this course?", Laura mentioned that  
7 without addressing hierarchical dynamics in evaluation, caring  
8 is less likely. Two other interviewees enthusiastically chimed  
9 in with their stories of the lack of care in online assessments.  
10 From the third-course-iteration onward, I added the interview  
11 and survey question, "How does caring manifest, if it does or  
12 not, in your experience of assessment?" Interestingly, only  
13 twice did assessment arise (and this includes the first time);  
14 Their reticence reflect the power dynamics at play, which  
15 candidates described as salient in the remote environment:  
16 deeply socialized power dynamics might make it difficult to  
17 name, especially to me as the instructor. In my prior research  
18 on caring in collegial relationships, I found that power  
19 dynamics in teacher-candidates' relationships needed to be  
20 articulated and addressed (AUTHOR, XXXX). In remote teaching in  
21 particular, I realized how easy it might be for me to see  
22 collaborations as successful or even caring if students withheld  
23 their complaints to appear collaborative because I would be  
24 grading them.  
25

26  
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28 In the end-of-the-first-year interviews, candidates told  
29 negative experiences in other online courses, such as, "Once I  
30 didn't get feedback and a grade in a reasonable amount of time.  
31 Like, I waited all semester. It makes you feel... helpless."  
32 Another said: "And it's worse for being online for your utter  
33 lack of agency." Candidates didn't critique my grading per se,  
34 which was portfolio and self-assessment based, but they  
35 illuminated how assessment was still a roadblock in their  
36 relationship with me and their developing caring collaborations.  
37 Emma said: "You know, it's always true, I mean in school, but  
38 there's a bottom line and that's you grade us. I waited to see  
39 if the grading statement was really the case." In terms of the  
40 groupwork, Monique's characteristic critique follows: "It's a  
41 set up to not get along because you alone get a grade so you  
42 have a worry that the other person won't help or will freeload,  
43 so how will you get them to work and so on." The remote  
44 environment heightened these dynamics; Katya said:  
45

46  
47 It's much scarier to submit work online; there's even more  
48 a sense of loss of control. You can't say anything to the  
49 professor like I was up all night. I threw away 3 drafts.  
50 If you write that you make a big deal. So you don't say  
51 anything, just press submit, and you see the letters, LATE  
52 in red, if you're 2 minutes past the due date.  
53

54 Survey comments also revealed the power dynamics in mechanized  
55 grading, which could exacerbate concerns for groupwork and trust  
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of the instructor, "There's an awareness of the possibility of rigidity, like quizzes that grade you mechanically."

In the second and third years of the study, I altered my remote assessment practices to diminish the visibility and impact of grades. I felt comfortable to try this since groupwork had already been noticeably richer and stronger. Along with a classic 'virtual walk around the course,' I shared a video-ed (and transcribed) "grading statement" summarizing research on the impact of focusing on grades (Kohn, 2011). An excerpt follows: "I'll take on responsibility for chasing after missing members and accountability complications of groupwork; assessment will be formative during groupwork to free you to focus on learning; feedback will be public and in video format; any coursework can be revised till all are satisfied; and, you will self-assess; when our assessments differ we'll meet to chat about it." In the longer version, I included quotes from graduates' interview data (above), such as formative groupwork assessment to interrupt the "set up to not get along."

Candidates repeatedly mentioned the video feedback as caring on my part. As in this survey comment, 83% of candidates mentioned video feedback consistently positively: "There's nothing I've experienced in grading that makes it work as well as the videos. From the beginning you get the feeling that the instructor is thinking with you and that orients you to the ideas." In their coursework at the end of a podcast, one group chatted their video-ed assessment:

Victoria: For me the video took intimidation out of assessment, turned it into dialogue. That she would take time to make the video just for us.

Sara: Yeah, it felt like she cared about it, you know? My heart just drops when I receive feedback in written form. The video felt like so much less pressure.

Nancy: I totally agree. It's like with the tone it lets you breath and know the feeling behind the words is caring, not like you are being judged.

### ***Assessment as an Opportunity for Confirmation***

Reflective of prior case study findings on caring in remote teaching, candidates noted assessment as a site for confirmation (Robison et al, 2019; Velasquez et al, 2013a). Confirmation entails acknowledging the cared-for's underlying best intentions when their actions are less than admirable. "Here is this significant and percipient other who sees through the smallness or meanness of my present behavior a self that is better and a real possibility" (Noddings, 2005, p. 25). Confirmation is particularly important within an interdependent morality. Noddings (2006) associates the neglect of confirmation in moral philosophy with the "traditional unwillingness to recognize

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moral interdependence" (p. 114). Moral interdependence is the idea that I can only be as good as you allow me to be. To confirm, we look beyond the external actions into underlying struggles and structures at play.

While candidates did not mention self-assessment except to grumble about the extra step it required, it would have been difficult if not impossible for me to get to know my teacher-candidates well enough in the remote context to ascertain their "best intentions" or to cultivate the reciprocity this candidate refers to with the "they and you" as opposed to just a teacher here:

I learned that grading can confirm students... by respecting us enough to ask to take our thinking further and help do that. The grade goes up if *they and you* think it should. Through the lens of confirmation, assessment provided an opportunity to relate to candidates' deeper inclinations to learn; this orientation surprised candidates and Serena, like many, said she had to learn to trust it:

Of course, I waited to see if you would dock grades publicly. The grading reflected confirmation in care ethics. If you know you'll get really good feedback you struggle with the difficult concepts because you'll be able to improve.

As Sam put it, "I stopped thinking about the numbers associated with my submission and began to notice how awesome our lesson plan was becoming with all the feedback and everything I was learning."

Candidates also said that confirmation through assessment could support their caring collaborations. Assessment was no longer a "set up to not get along" but a structure that supported a moral ecology. Michael described how downplaying grading in groupwork afforded them the chance to focus on their relationships:

The hugest thing was you putting into perspective not judging each other remembering we do not know what others are going thru, not our role to judge them, but to encourage contribution, we knew we could let you do the communication if it's not working and that helped us to focus on valuing effort.

When candidates didn't have to worry about failing a course due to another's actions - because they were able to explain the situation in self assessments and I was the one chasing after errant members - they were freer to confirm one another's best intentions and interestingly, I had minimal chasing to do. Another candidate described applying her learning about bias and "keeping an open mind" toward her colleagues in groupwork:

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The (course) content addresses acknowledging our biases... the self-discovery work at the beginning so we look at how if we value perfectionism it color show we look at each other, what each person has to offer. That was really important. If you keep an open mind about a person when we don't truly know what's going on with them they surprise you. That happened to me. The statement about remembering when we encourage our colleagues and value their contribution that is us learning, too. That's learning to be a teacher.

With grading a minimal focus and self-assessment accounted for, candidates may have been freer to care-for each other.

### Limitations

These teacher-candidates' orientation toward care ethics - as a program focus - could have led them to value and over-infer caring (Maher, 2005). I articulated my care-focused aims for my pedagogical choices and I was the one conducting the study. I sought to elicit dis-confirming evidence by telling candidates that the purpose of the study was improvement. Also, it is possible that candidates' understanding of care ethics made them less likely to deem any pedagogy caring. Candidates cross-checked my interpretations six times; it was during one critique of my analysis that a candidate drew on the distinction between care's quotidian meaning of "nice" and "actually caring" to critique my introductory activities and lack of continuity.

While candidates did associate specific pedagogies with care, they also expressed the importance of "all the little things altogether." Perceptions of caring accumulated and relied on idiosyncratic scenarios like the following, in Freya's interview:

I don't know if there's anything you could do (to cultivate caring). You asked us how we were, told us how you were, tied this to coursework, had a reassuring demeanor, gave feedback on every revision, emailed us even on the weekend. I got the feeling *over time* that you actually cared about us... Nothing alone would do authenticity. One thing did stick out... when the tech person helped. He apologized for interrupting class. You said something like, 'Are you kidding? We wouldn't get to do anything without your help and your time and thank you.' I was like, okay she cares. It wasn't lost on me that you were a White instructor in a position of power.

Freya shows how a sense of instructor caring developed and how it could be undermined. Stand-alone efforts to care seem saccharin or inauthentic. Each individual perceives things differently; I know that some candidates were annoyed by how

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3 much I emailed them and how many revisions I asked for; in a  
4 survey, one even called this "overkill." Further evidencing the  
5 idiosyncratic nature of our interpretations of caring was how  
6 candidates did not name my solicitation of their feedback for  
7 this study as caring; from my perspective, this was central to  
8 my efforts to care. I wondered if I asked them a semester later  
9 when they were conducting teacher inquiry if they might have  
10 made this connection. Ultimately, I need to continue to  
11 investigate.  
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## Discussion and Conclusion

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15 This study expands the application of care ethics within  
16 the context of the estrangement of remote teaching from the  
17 perspectives of teacher-candidates who were familiar with - and  
18 thus poised to critique my pedagogy from - a care ethics  
19 perspective. Authentic care within care ethics differs from  
20 quotidian niceties and requires responsiveness that the cared-  
21 for perceives as meeting their needs and cultivating reciprocity  
22 and connection. I learned to be explicit in my efforts to model  
23 authentic caring, design opportunities for practicing care and  
24 dialogic pedagogies, and address the teacher-student hierarchy  
25 manifested in solo work and assessment.  
26  
27

28 Self-study methods uncovered my assumptions as a long-time  
29 teacher and researcher in care ethics. Without the systematic,  
30 self-focused, and improvement-aims of self-study, I could have  
31 assumed thin independent coursework was an unavoidable  
32 consequence of restrictions of digitization. I assumed  
33 candidates would perceive me relatively the same as they had  
34 face-to-face. An outgoing and vocal first semester candidate  
35 informed me that I intimidated her online; I can only imagine  
36 how diffident students might experience my remote presence  
37 without my increasingly explicit efforts to model authenticity  
38 and weave opportunities for candidates to do so throughout their  
39 collaborations. Focusing on authenticity helped to transcend  
40 aesthetic caring, a veneer of neutrality and equality; without  
41 these candidates' background in care ethics, they may have been  
42 more liberal in deeming pedagogies as caring and the findings  
43 here might have reflected social presence. Toward practicing  
44 authentic caring, I learned that I needed to explicitly share my  
45 own reflection on my educational experiences as they intersected  
46 with my race, class, and gender and to include relationship-  
47 focused prompts for groupwork so candidates had the impetus to  
48 practice caring.  
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52 In the first few course iterations, I learned that dialogic  
53 collaborative pedagogies in the remote environment led to deeper  
54 thinking and a moral ecology. While fostering caring  
55 collaboration in an online (or any) course may be tied to caring  
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## Care Ethics in Remote Instruction

teacher-student relationships, it is critical for teacher preparation to not overlook cultivating caring collaborations between candidates; teacher education must prepare teachers to create communities of learning and collective efficacy (Goddard et al, 2004). Programs and the courses within in them are always pressed for time, and caring between teacher-candidates is often disregarded in teacher education for care ethics (McHatton & Daniel, 2008; Murawski, 2013; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013; AUTHOR, XXXX). The possibilities that downplaying assessment, focusing on caring, and self-assessing opened for caring collaboration in the online space is promising for preparing teachers who understand the value of professional relationships, can interrupt the isolation associated with high attrition rates (Avila de Lima, 2003; Hargreaves, 2002). As one candidate put it in a survey: "The most important thing I learned in this course was how and why to collaborate with teachers."

Over the course of this three-year study, the most powerful learning for me is the promise of self-study for teachers to live our "values more fully in practice" (Whitehead, 2000, p. 90). Self-study seems critical to practicing care ethics because caring is idiosyncratic and sensitive to the individual across differences of culture, race, age, and all that divides and distinguishes each cared-for in each situation (Valenzuela, 1999; Barnes, 2018; Gay, 2018; Noddings, 1984). The boundaries to caring in the remote context manifest in a multitude of invisible forms in each teaching context; differences of age, culture, experience, race, etc., contribute to discontinuities for care. The unforgiving nature of online interactions clarifies the efforts teachers always need to make to learn what cultivates a caring environment for each individual in each case. Since relational aims like caring are elusive in any realm, it is likely they'll fall by the wayside without self-study practices.

### Appendix A: Interview/Survey Protocol

Introduction: When I refer to the term, care, I am referencing care ethics and I'm seeking brutal honesty to improve my teaching - just like you in your teacher-inquiry Masters projects.

- What gets in the way of caring in the remote environment of this course? What supports caring, if anything does?
- How does caring manifest, or not, in your experience of assessment, curriculum, and teaching?
- Describe your experience with relationships in remote instruction.

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