The Ethics of Caring
THE ETHICS OF CARING

Caring is more than emotions and education is more than tests and grades. Violence, poverty, injustice and other sorts of atrocities can be diminished with astute humanist education that emphasizes the ethics of inclusive caring in any aspect of life. This book argues that the purpose of education is to primarily lay inclusive caring solid foundations in the hearts and minds of young people in order to advance humanity’s welfare and humanist civilization, and to diminish violence and injustice in all aspects of life. Teaching through the ethics of caring, can potentially enhance the cultivation of inclusively caring and nurturing human beings as individuals, men and women and as critical self-reflective learners, scholars and leaders in the private and public spheres. The author followed five 3-5-grade teachers (two male and three female), who were identified as caring teachers, in three different schools (two public and one private) in Greater Los Angeles. Their diverse definitions of caring and education were explored along with the pragmatic challenges they had faced in their efforts to embed their philosophy in their pedagogies; in bridging pedagogy of caring and utopia. In addition, the author included the teachers’ students’ perspective on caring teachers and expectations. While some may argue that the ethics of caring are utopia, findings however suggest that there is space for pragmatic visions as well, through a pedagogy of caring. The following disciplines are included: philosophy, ethnography and gender theories.
Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity—youth identity in particular--the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to
help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some "touchy-feely" educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.
The Ethics of Caring
Bridging Pedagogy and Utopia

By:
Tammy A. Shel

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Education is like perfume - the same fragrance smells differently on each person.

To my entire family, my friends, and the benevolence in this universe.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tammy Shel received her Ph.D. in philosophy of education from UCLA. Some of her previous publications include: The Horse that Wondered (1996); On Marcuse and Caring in Education (2006). She grew up in Tel-Aviv, Israel. She focuses on how caring can diminish violence and injustice by linking the private and the public spheres.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I was a child, my parents did not know how to keep me in school. Now, they don’t know how to get me out of school. It took me many years to realize I was privileged to even have the opportunity to dislike school, because there are many invisible children behind the fences, who cry to attend such institutions.

I was fortunate to grow up with the gifts of love and giving. Throughout my life, many kind and generous human beings taught me the value of these gifts. My parents, Matilda and Jacob Aboody, always gave me love and any support I needed; my entire family, Orly, Zeevik, and my precious nieces, Maya and Noa, filled my heart with so much love.

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I am sure that my journey as a scholar will never end and I will try to prove myself worthy of the trust and love you all invested in me.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realize them!

(Anne Frank, July 15, 1944, age 15)

Caring is more than emotions. It is an approach to life. This book is about optimism and the potential kindness, benevolence, and generosity rooted in human beings as well as the power of education to enhance such traits through the ethics of caring. The emphasis on the ethics of inclusive caring in any vision and pedagogy of education is the bastion for human kindness and, thus, for promoting a more humanist civilization in all spheres of life: micro and macro, private and public, female and male, and individuals and societies.

Although, on the one hand, humanity’s history is a testimony to a lack of tolerance and respect for life, it is, on the other hand, a testimony of benevolence and kind deeds. As much as human beings have a tendency to be hierarchical and obsessed with power, whether at home or in public, there are also those who yearn to share and to care. Nonetheless, focusing primarily on satisfying the lust for power can lead to a denial of the rights of others to fulfill their humanity. Suffice to mention the hierarchy at home between both sexes. bell hooks (1995) contended that the key to a more just and egalitarian society lies in the family structure between husband and wife as well as between parents and children; thus, the key is in the private sphere. However, even though it may seem that I portray humanity as polarized, for example, black and white or private and public, most of my musings encompass the gray areas and aspire to emphasize the compassionate and loving potential that both individuals and societies possess. I believe that a good and caring leader can be found within each human being and brought to light with an appropriate humanist, inclusive, caring education. There are many great people who had the courage to purposefully share their power and to aim towards promoting peace and tolerance at home, in public, and internationally.

The Iroquois tribe used to make decisions based on how it would affect their descendents seven generations into the future. Such thought requires a utopian vision of a cross-generational education in which a long-term vision guides us. Such vision requires a great emphasis on humanist education for a good quality of life. Hence, such a vision requires emphasis on inclusive caring, and less on an ideology of quantitative profit and power. The greediness of power can poison our minds and our acts. In typical, modern schools, however, quality is translated into grades and academic achievements, which is essentially a short-term agenda. The
focus is not primarily on humanist education for society’s welfare for generations to come, but it is business-oriented with expectations to gain profit and, thus, to possess as much power as possible, spatially, physically, and emotionally.

Nonetheless, in order to promote an agenda of inclusive caring, which I use interchangeably with “humanist education,” there is a need for compassionate and caring educators and, thus, for leaders with an optimistic vision. Education, if used appropriately, is humanity’s hope to increase progress toward a humanist civilization, that is, toward a more caring and compassionate, humane, cosmopolitan society, in which loving, caring, and sharing are more dominant than violence and tyranny in every aspect of life. Following women’s progress over the course of human history, things can change for the better. However, unlike in the business world, those in education need to be prepared not to see immediate yields because education, as Rousseau (1762/1998) and Dewey (1959 and 1916/1997) wrote, is a lifetime process. Therefore, patience within time and space constraints is a great but essential challenge for both education today and in future generations.

My dedication to humanist education began while growing up in Israel. In a region marred by violence and intolerance, I became acquainted and involved with international human rights organizations as well as with individuals who demonstrated caring leadership in their daily interactions with other human beings and made a difference in individual lives, in particular in the lives of women who were subject to domestic violence and sexual abuse and of underprivileged and abused children. I believe that it is essential to understand how different individuals and societies understand love, caring, leaders, masculinity, and femininity. This understanding provides a key to finding a common ground that can be utilized for educational purposes. Such understanding will facilitate a better means to bridge the differences among individuals, men and women, societies, and, subsequently, nations, because violence stems from an individual’s distress and from her basic understanding of survival within society. Through this interconnected ripple effect, any individual can eventually have a universal impact on the welfare of beings everywhere. Therefore, one of my main goals is investigating how to promote loving, inclusive caring by cultivating caring and loving human beings as leaders and, as a result of this new, caring leadership, to diminish violence and malicious intolerance. I think that each human being has a direct or indirect impact on the entire world. In formal education, a teacher is a leader who raises the next generation of leaders; parents play a very similar role. Therefore, I believe that caring leadership in all of life’s arenas is a vital key to cultivating caring and nurturing human beings.

Since many of the violent acts (at least acts of physical violence) that receive public exposure are conducted by men, the social construction of gender has been my main research interest. I conducted my past studies in both Israel and in Los Angeles, California, using the following disciplines: philosophy, anthropology, gender theories, and comparative education. The main goal of these studies was to bridge theory and practice as well as utopia and pragmatism by developing an educational agenda that promotes caring and sharing, and to seek practical and influential implementations of the ethics of inclusive caring.
In my earlier studies, I examined Carol Gilligan’s (*In a Different Voice*, 1982) theory about the socialization of boys and girls. According to Gilligan, girls are socialized to be dependent and caring, while boys are socialized to be independent and oriented toward justice. Taking this theory as a springboard, I focused on the societal interpretations of masculinity and femininity through examining the covert socialization inherent in various cultural symbols (e.g., expectations for both sexes, color of baby clothes, room decorations, names, sexual stereotypes, etc.). For that purpose, I interviewed first-time pregnant mothers in Israel who already knew the sex of their baby, and mothers of young children, girls and boys, in Los Angeles, and examined the cultural symbols they utilized as a means to socialize their children.

My findings revealed that boys’ socialization was more demanding and restrictive than that of girls. That is, I found that there are more social and emotional restrictions on boys than on girls. While girls are encouraged to adopt certain social norms of boys and at the same time can still choose to retain the social norms of girls, boys are less encouraged to adopt (and frequently discouraged from adopting) the components of girls’ socialization. For example, girls can wear both blue and pink clothes, while boys are discouraged from wearing pink (at least when they are young) because it is associated with fragility and femininity, which does not translate into success in the public sphere. My conclusions are, nonetheless, specific to my studies’ participants. Likewise, from a scholarly entomological perspective, I reviewed literature on caring and dug for any association with the word. It seems that associating caring with girls’ socialization marginalizes other forms of caring that can be associated with that of boys’, e.g., being the primary breadwinner in their family. As a result, caring often remains mainly in the private sphere, carrying associations with femininity and, even more so, with maternity. However, caring, I argue, is *unisex*. In fact, caring stems from each individual’s life experience and character. Both sexes can be similarly caring and non-caring. Therefore, when setting up the present study I made sure to include male teachers - who were identified as caring by their principals - even though the schools had a larger percentage of female teachers.

My study included five case-studies of teachers, two male and three female, from three different schools in Los Angeles County (two were public and one was private) with diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, who demonstrated an inclusive caring and nurturing leadership in their classrooms. I investigated the significance of creating a caring environment within their classrooms and schools as well as the potential influence that caring has on children’s moral, emotional, social, and intellectual growth. I took into account the gender similarities and differences of these teachers. I also investigated how the private sphere, as a representation of the social construction of femininity, could positively influence the public sphere, as a representation of the social construction of masculinity. In addition, it is essential to note that although none of the five teachers was categorized as a white person, I did not make that choice intentionally. Therefore, this study has the potential to apply to any teacher regardless of ethnicity, religion, culture, gender, nationality, socioeconomic status, and the like.
CHAPTER ONE

In this study, I show that education is primarily about the moral, emotional, social, and intellectual growth (MESIG) of us as individuals and as a society. Likewise, I link the private, the micro (e.g., the manner in which individuals, men, women, parents, and children socialize and behave), to the public, the macro (e.g., politicians and national ideologies). Therefore, although many studies focus on caring and humanist education, I approach things in a different manner by employing a cosmopolitan vision and a balance between quantity and quality, utopia and pragmatism, and the private and public spheres.

During my study, I uncovered several categories of caring, including: inclusive, selective, adaptive, resistant, and cultural. I do not claim to have uncovered all possible types of caring, but these categories were the most prevalent in my study. While I encountered many types of caring, I chose to focus on inclusive caring, that which stems from love for and respect of humanity and life generally. However, schools rarely receive incentives to focus on such caring for it seldom appears on the agenda of people in power. That lack of support causes a conflict in the way that teachers and those in power view education. For example, while teachers may aim to primarily focus on students’ MESIG, policy-makers may demand that schools focus instead on academic achievements, i.e., test scores and grades. Likewise, as much as academic institutions and schools may focus on racism and multiculturalism, there is scant regard, if any, to sexism. Occasionally, the focus on racism without sufficient regard to sexism, both marginalizes and legitimates sexism.

Last, but not least, one of the major differences between the public and private schools I studied is the issue of trust. The former tend to be very structured and organized in their system and modes of thinking in order to control the masses, teach them to be obedient, and discipline them as one would soldiers in the army; thus, public schools establish codes that are based on punishment and control rather than trusting students and reasoning with them. It may sound extreme, but these are the basic, formal tenets of many of the low-income, high-minority public schools I visited. It does not mean, however, that such generalizations apply to all public schools and to the daily practices within those schools. However, this is the system in which the caring teachers I focused on worked on a daily basis. All teachers and students face the challenges of constrained time and space, both emotionally and physically. Nevertheless, a caring teacher/leader will struggle to find a way to mitigate the effects of the system and to empower his or her students.

RESEARCH SITE LOCATIONS

Being an Israeli secular Jew, when I talk about caring, peace, violence, and intolerance, people occasionally associate my interest with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the other hand, when I discuss gender, they associate it with domestic violence. It often takes a long time to explain that I perceive domestic violence, street crimes, rapes, sex slavery and trafficking, child abuse, wars, and all other sorts of violence as related to the individual’s or a group of individuals’ decision. The difference is that wars, for example, are a decision of leaders/rulers, who send