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# The One-Caring as Teacher

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Whatever I do in life, whomever I meet, I am first and always one-caring or one cared-for. I do not "assume roles" unless I become an actor. "Mother" is not a role; "teacher" is not a role.[1] When I became a mother, I entered a very special relation – possibly the prototypical caring relation. When I became a teacher, I also entered a very special – and more specialized – caring relation. No enterprise or special function I am called upon to serve can relieve me of my responsibilities as one-caring. Indeed, if an enterprise precludes my meeting the other in a caring relation, I must refuse to participate in that enterprise. Now, of course, an enterprise by its very nature may require me to care for a problem or set of problems. If I am a bus driver, or airline pilot, or air traffic controller, or surgeon, I may properly "care" for the problems and tasks presented. My major responsibilities focus on the other as physical entity and not as whole person. Indeed, as traffic controller, I do not even meet the other whose safety I am employed to protect. In such enterprises I behave responsibly toward others through proficient practice of my craft. But, even in such enterprises, when encounter occurs, I must meet the other as one-caring. It is encounter that is reduced and not my obligation to care. Clearly, in professions where encounter is frequent and where the ethical ideal of the other is necessarily involved, I am first and foremost one-caring and, second, enactor of specialized functions. As teacher, I am, first, one-caring.

The one-caring is engrossed in the cared-for and undergoes a motivational displacement toward the projects of the cared-for. This does not, as we have seen, imply romantic love or the sort of pervasive and compulsive "thinking of the other" that characterizes infatuation. It means, rather, that one-caring receives the other, for the interval of caring, completely and nonselectively. She is present to the other and places her motive power in his service. Now, of course, she does not abandon her own ethical ideal in doing this, but she starts from a position of respect or regard for the projects of the other. In the language of Martin Buber, the cared-for is encountered as "Thou," a subject, and not as "It," an object of analysis. During the encounter, which may be singular and brief or recurrent and prolonged, the cared-for "is Thou and fills the firmament."

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When a teacher asks a question in class and a student responds, she receives not just the "response" but the student. What he says matters, whether it is right or wrong, and she probes gently for clarification, interpretation, contribution. She is not seeking the answer but the involvement of the cared-for. For the brief interval of dialogue that grows around the question, the cared-for indeed "fills the firmament." The student is infinitely more important than the subject matter.

The one-caring as teacher is not necessarily permissive. She does not abstain, as Neill might have, from leading the student, or persuading him, or coaxing him toward an examination of school subjects. But she recognizes that, in the long run, he will learn what he pleases. We may force him to respond in specified ways, but what he will make his own and eventually apply effectively is that which he finds significant for his own life. This recognition does not reduce either the teacher's power or her responsibility. As we saw in our earlier discussion of the cared-for, the teacher may indeed coerce the student into choosing against himself. He may be led to diminish his ethical ideal in the pursuit of achievement goals. The teacher's power is, thus, awesome. It is she who presents the "effective world" to the student.[2] In doing this, she realizes that the student, as ethical agent, will make his own selection from the presented possibilities and so, in a very important sense, she is prepared to put her motive energy in the service of his projects. She has already had a hand in selecting those projects and will continue to guide and inform them, but the objectives themselves must be embraced by the student.

Buber suggests that the role of the teacher is just this: to influence. He says:

> For if the educator of our day has to act consciously he must nevertheless do it "as though he did not." That raising of the finger, that questioning glance, are his genuine doing. Through him the selection of the effective world reaches the pupil. He fails the recipient when he presents this selection to him with a gesture of interference. It must be concentrated in him; and doing out of concentration has the appearance of rest. Interference divides the soul in his care into an obedient part and a rebellious part. But a hidden influence proceeding from his integrity has an integrating force.[3]

When, out of intrinsic interest or trust and admiration for the teacher, the student does embrace an objective, he may need help in attaining it. The teacher, as one-caring, meets the student directly but not equally. Buber says that the teacher is capable of "inclusion," and this term seems to describe accurately what the one-caring does in trying to teach the cared-for. Milton Mayeroff, for example, in his discussion of caring,[4] emphasizes this duality in the one-caring: the "feeling with" that leads the one-caring to act as though for herself, but in the projects of the other and the accompanying realization that this other is independent, a subject. In "inclusion," the teacher receives the student and becomes in effect a duality. This sounds mystical, but it is not. The teacher receives and accepts the student's feeling toward the subject matter; she looks at it and listens to it through his eyes and ears. How else can she interpret the subject matter for him? As she exercises this inclusion, she accepts *his* motives, reaches toward what *he* intends, so long as these motives and intentions do not force an abandonment of her own ethic. Inclusion as practiced by the teacher is a vital gift. As we saw earlier, the student's attempts at inclusion may result in a deterioration of the learning process.

The special gift of the teacher, then, is to receive the student, to look at the subject matter with him. Her commitment is to him, the cared-for, and he is – through that commitment – set free to pursue his legitimate projects.

Again I want to emphasize that this view is not romantic but practical. The teacher works with the student. He becomes her apprentice and gradually assumes greater responsibility in the tasks they undertake. This working together, which produces both joy in the relation and increasing competence in the cared-for, was advocated, we may recall, by Urie Bronfenbrenner in his discussion of cooperative engagement in tasks, and it was also implied by Robert White's discussion of competence as the desired end of "effectance motivation." The child wants to attain competence in his own world of experience. He needs the cooperative guidance of a fully caring adult to accomplish this. The one-caring as teacher, then, has two major tasks: to stretch the student's world by presenting an effective selection of that world with which she is in contact, and to work cooperatively with the student in his struggle toward competence in that world. But her task as one-caring has higher priority than either of these. First and foremost, she must nurture the student's ethical ideal.

The teacher bears a special responsibility for the enhancement of the ethical ideal. She is often in contact with the ideal as it is being initially

constructed and, even with the adult student, she has unique power in contributing to its enhancement or destruction. In dialogue, she can underscore his subjectness – encourage him to stand personally related to what he says and does. He is not just part of the lesson, a response to be recorded as "move 15" or whatever. He is a human being responsible for his words and acts, and the one-caring as teacher meets him thus. Why he thinks what he thinks is as important as what. The domain to which he refers for justification is significant. How he relates to others as he does all this is important.

Besides engaging the student in dialogue, the teacher also provides a model. To support her students as ones-caring, she must show them herself as one-caring. Hence she is not content to enforce rules – and may even refuse occasionally to do so – but she continually refers the rules to their ground in caring. If she confronts a student who is cheating, she may begin by saying, *I know you want to do well*, or, *I know you want to help your friend.* She begins by attributing the best possible motive to him, and she then proceeds to explain – fully, with many of her own reservations expressed freely – why she cannot allow him to cheat. She does not need to resort to punishment, because the rules are not sacred to her. What matters is the student, the cared-for, and how he will approach ethical problems as a result of his relation to her. Will he refer his ethical decisions to an ethic of caring or to rules and the likelihood of apprehension and punishment? Will he ask what his act means in terms of the feelings, needs, and projects of others, or will he be content with a catalog of rules-of-the-game?

A teacher cannot "talk" this ethic. She must live it, and that implies establishing a relation with the student. Besides talking to him and showing him how one cares, she engages in cooperative practice with him. He is learning not just mathematics or social studies; he is also learning how to be one-caring. By conducting education morally, the teacher hopes to induce an enhanced moral sense in the student. This view was held, also, by John Dewey. Sidney Hook describes the relation in Dewey's thinking:

> How, then, does Dewey achieve the transition from what we have called the morality of the task to the task of morality? His answer – original for his time and still largely disregarded – is to teach *all* subjects in such a way as to bring out and make focal their social and personal aspects, stressing how human beings are affected by them, pointing up the responsibilities that flow from their inter-relatedness.[5]

Everything we do, then, as teachers, has moral overtones. Through dialogue, modeling, the provision of practice, and the attribution of best motive, the one-caring as teacher nurtures the ethical ideal. She cannot nurture the student intellectually without regard for the ethical ideal unless she is willing to risk producing a monster, and she cannot nurture the ethical ideal without considering the whole self image of which it is a part. For how he feels about himself in general – as student, as physical being, as friend – contributes to the enhancement or diminution of the ethical ideal. What the teacher reflects to him continually is the best possible picture consonant with reality. She does not reflect fantasy nor conjure up "expectations" as strategies. She meets him as he is and finds something admirable and, as a result, he may find the strength to become even more admirable. He is confirmed.

The sort of relatedness and caring I have been discussing is often dismissed as impossible because of constraints of number, time, and purpose. Richard Hult, in his discussion of "pedagogical caring," notes that such requirements seem to require in turn close personal relationships of the I-Thou sort. He says: "While these may sometimes occur and may be desirable, most pedagogical contexts make such relationships implausible if not undesirable."[6] He concludes that caring as Mayeroff has described it, and as I have described it, "cannot be the kind of caring demanded of teachers." I insist that it is exactly the kind of caring ideally required of teachers.

I think that Hult and others who take this position misunderstand the requirement that Buber has described as an I-Thou encounter; that Marcel has described in terms of "disposability"; that Mayeroff has described as identification-with-recognition-of-independence; that I have described as engrossment and displacement of motivation. I do not need to establish a deep, lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every student. What I must do is to be totally and nonselectively present to the student – to each student – as he addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total.

Further, there are ways to extend contact so that deeper relationships may develop. If I know how my student typically reacts to certain topics and tasks, I am in a better position to guide him both sensitively and economically. Why can we not opt for smaller schools, for teachers and students working together for three years rather than one, for

teachers teaching more than one subject? We are limited in our thinking by too great a deference to what is, and what is today is not very attractive. Our alternative is to change the structure of schools and teaching so that caring can flourish, and the hope is that by doing this we may attain both a higher level of cognitive achievement and a more caring, ethical society.

When we begin our educational planning, we may start with schools as they are, identify their primary functions, and ask how they may best be organized to serve their functions. Or we may start with our picture of caring and education and ask what sort of organization might be compatible with this picture. When James Conant made his influential recommendations concerning the organization of secondary education,[7] he began with the intellectual function of schools and, assuming a national need for high-powered curricula in mathematics and science, suggested that larger schools were required to support such programs. I have begun by identifying the maintenance and enhancement of the ethical ideal as the primary function of any educational community, and so I shall be interested first not in the establishment of programs but in the establishment and evaluation of chains and circles of caring. To establish such chains and circles, we may need to consider smaller schools.

I shall say more about how schools might be organized to support caring and, in particular, we should discuss, in the context of teaching, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. We should remind ourselves, before we leave this initial discussion on the one-caring as teacher, that there is another in the caring relation. The student also contributes to caring. The one form of mutuality that is excluded from the teacher-student relation is an attempt at inclusion on the part of the student. A focus of student attention on the teacher's instructional strategies is fatal to the relationship – and to the student's learning. The student may, however, care for the teacher as a person. He may be fascinated by her and hold her in the highest regard. He may be willing to help her with physical tasks and, indeed, to assist her in teaching other students. Nothing in our discussion was meant to preclude the possibility of the student's caring but, within the teacher-student relation, his caring is different from that of the teacher.

The student has his greatest effect on the relationship as the one cared-for. If he perceives the teacher's caring and responds to it, he is giving the teacher what she needs most to continue to care. As the infant rewards his caring mother with smiles and wriggles, the student rewards his teacher with responsiveness: with questions, effort, comment, and cooperation. There is some initiative required of the cared-for. Just as the one-caring is free to accept or reject the internal "I must" of caring, so the cared-for is free to accept or reject the attitude of caring when he perceives it. If the cared-for perceives the attitude and denies it, then he is in an internal state of untruth.

Many of our schools are in what might be called a crisis of caring. Both students and teachers are brutally attacked verbally and physically. Clearly, the schools are not often places where caring is fulfilled, but it is not always the failure of teachers that causes the lapse in caring. Many urban teachers are suffering symptoms of battle fatigue and "burn-out." No matter what they do, it seems, their efforts are not perceived as caring. They themselves are perceived, instead, as the enemy, as natural targets for resistance.

The cared-for is essential to the relation. What the cared-for contributes to the relation is a responsiveness that completes the caring. This responsiveness need not take the form of gratitude or even of direct acknowledgment. Rather, the cared-for shows either in direct response to the one-caring or in spontaneous delight and happy growth before her eyes that the caring has been received. The caring is completed when the cared-for receives the caring. He may respond by free, vigorous, and happy immersion in his own projects (toward which the one-caring has directed her own energy also), and the one-caring, seeing this, knows that the relation has been completed in the cared-for.

We see another cogent reason for insisting on relation and caring in teaching. Where is the teacher to get the strength to go on giving except from the student? In situations where the student rarely responds, is negative, denies the effort at caring, the teacher's caring quite predictably deteriorates to "cares and burdens." She becomes the needy target of her own caring. In such cases, we should supply special support to maintain the teacher as one-caring. Communities are just barely awakened to this need. But no indirect caring can fully compensate for the natural reward of teaching. This is always found in the responsiveness of the student.

What am I recommending? That students should be more responsive to their teachers? Can we command them to respond? This approach seems

wrong, although parents might reasonably talk to their children about the difficulties of teaching and ways in which students can support and encourage their teachers simply by exhibiting a spontaneous enthusiasm for their own growth. But, realistically, such a recommendation seems unlikely to be productive. What I am recommending is that schools and teaching be redesigned so that caring has a chance to be initiated in the one-caring and completed in the cared-for. Sacrifices in economies of scale and even in programs might be called for. These would be minor if we could unlock our doors and disarm our security guards. Schools as institutions cannot care directly. A school cannot be engrossed in anyone or anything. But a school can be deliberately designed to support caring and caring individuals, and this is what an ethic of caring suggests should be done.

## Notes

1. For the opposite view, see Jessie Bernard, *The Future of Motherhood* (New York: Penguin Books, 1974).
2. Martin Buber discusses the teacher's "selection of the effective world" in "Education," in *Between Man and Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 83–103.
3. Ibid., p. 90.
4. Milton Mayeroff, *On Caring* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 3, 5, 10, and passim.
5. Sidney Hook, Preface to John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), p. xi.
6. Richard E. Hult, Jr., "On Pedagogical Caring," *Educational Theory* (1979), p. 239.
7. See James B. Conant, *The American High School Today* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959); also, *The Comprehensive High School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).