

Lesson Plan: *Dare to Care*
(A documentary by Mike Hawley and Darcy Van Poelgeest, Canada, 2008, 30 min.)

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Plan at a glance

Synopsis

“What kind of young person do we want to produce at the end of a 12-year education?” This is the question that leading experts in both education and philosophy are looking to answer. In a series of interviews with Dr. Wanda Cassidy, Dr. Heesoon Bai and other practising educators, *Dare to Care* takes a critical look at education in the western world. Have we put relationships at the back of the class and made test scores and discipline the focus of our schools? Has a “factory” approach to educating our children created a difficult environment for teachers struggling to keep up with a curriculum-based paradigm? How would an environment based on the ethics of care look and how do we get there? *Dare to Care* explores the many challenges that arise when “care” is introduced into the school environment and encourages educators to think more deeply about the meaning of care. This documentary asks thought-provoking questions that encourage the audience to explore these issues.

Levels of education

- College
- University

Objectives

- Reflect on the aims of education
- Reflect on the notion of care in education
- Consider different educational approaches, values and teaching methods
- Reflect on orienting teaching and learning around caring relations
- Consider the complexities of school and classroom environments
- Identify ways of creating a more caring school environment

Subjects

- Education
- Philosophy of education
- Human development
- Curriculum and instruction
- Social sciences

Suggested Activities

You may choose to do one or any combination of these activities. Each activity may be assigned as a class discussion, a research project or an interactive group assignment.

Activity 1: Experiences of care

Activity 2: Schools under the industrial model

Activity 3: Natural caring and ethical caring

Activity 4: What is the role of education?

Activity 5: The institution and the classroom

Activity 6: Toward change

Activity 7: Values and challenges

NOTE

Some of the speakers' comments in the video have been paraphrased in this lesson plan.

Activity 1: Experiences of care

Think, pair and share activity

1. Reflect on your memories of caring actions, thoughts and instances when you have received and given care.
2. Share one of these experiences with a partner. In your discussion with your partner, synthesize what you identify as “caring” and “not-caring.”
3. Share your insights with the rest of the class.
4. In a wider discussion with classmates, discuss what makes these good examples of caring relations.
5. Discuss why care is important in school settings.

Activity 2: Schools under the industrial model

Excerpts from the documentary:

As illustrated in the documentary's opening featuring an old movie, education used to be, and still largely is, based on an industrial model. We hear the following ideas:

“Education is the basis of wealth... the foundation of good business.”

“Students will become workers and shoppers, productive people.”

“Educationally, the community gets what it pays for.”

“Schools were designed for the industrial revolution, to prepare people to be factory workers. In those days, they worked for society, but they have never changed.”

“Furthermore, our schools have become the reflection of the politics of our western world. If we measure success based on economics, our schools are doing a good job. But what is success?”

“It's as if we are assisting to a re-colonization process of the mind and of who people want to be.”

Questions for discussion and assignments

1. Which of the above statements resonated with you? Why?
2. In your opinion, are today's schools still largely based on the industrial model? In what ways?
3. How does the ethic of care offer a different approach to education?
4. What do you think would be necessary to reform the industrial model of today's schools?

Activity 3: Natural caring and ethical caring

Excerpts from the documentary:

“We must begin with schools and use role modelling to demonstrate that there’s still a need for relationships and caring about other people, and that life is not just about defining your own needs and setting out to fulfill them.”

“For me, the ethics of care is a basis for focusing on others – a person or a group of people you have a relationship with. Caring means being conscious of other peoples’ needs.”

“It’s the ethics of self, sure, but also of others, and of others we may not even know. It’s about going beyond oneself.”

“I’m interested in how our natural ability to care gets disrupted.”

Questions for discussion and assignments

1. Discuss the meaning of the above quotes. Do you agree or disagree? How come?
2. Do you think we are “programmed” to be individualistic – to be more concerned about ourselves than we are for others? What factors influence us to be this way?
3. Do you believe students can be “taught” to care for others, including people in faraway places?
4. What changes do you think would be necessary for schools to become more caring places?
5. In your opinion, is there a difference between caring for those who are nearby (such as our family and friends) and caring for those who are removed from our daily lives (such as people in faraway countries)?

Activity 4: What is the role of education?

Excerpts from the documentary:

“Education has a much broader role than simply creating future workers. It has a role in social change, in creating individuals who will participate in democracy and shape society’s future. People need to understand the needs of others, to show compassion. We have an obligation, as educators, to work towards these important goals. Students will forget much of what they learn in school, but they can’t forget who they’ll become.”

“What kind of person do we want to graduate from Grade 12? Not just someone who knows math, history and science, who can read and write; we want somebody who’s compassionate, who’s committed to making this world a better place. These are the intrinsic qualities we ultimately want to teach.”

Questions for discussion and assignments

1. How do you feel about the above quotes: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree? Find someone in the class who holds the same opinion as you, discuss the reasons for your choice and then share your views in a wider class discussion. Debate the perspectives.
2. In your opinion, what are the primary goals of today's schools?
3. In your opinion, what do you think the primary goals *should* be?
4. Do you believe a paradigm shift toward a more relational approach to school is possible?
5. What changes would have to happen in school and in society for schools to be more attentive to issues of care?

Excerpts from the documentary:

“We often hear that it’s not the educational institutions that care but the people inside. However, I find that institutions, with their rules, influence the people who attend them.”

“Schools could be different but should have a common goal: building relationships, community, etc. Of course, there are factors that make this difficult: stress due to accountability, standardized tests and improving test scores, etc. Teachers feel torn between improving performance and raising the child as a whole.”

We even have to be careful about how we “package” care. If we take bullying as an example, we know that some programs - for instance showing a video and expecting the kids to put the lessons into practice - often don’t work. Some research even shows that it often actually increases bullying. And there’s the idea that if a school has a bullying program, it must be dealing with the problem. So we have to be careful with “packaging”.

“Creating an environment where students feel safe and respected will help and results might improve.”

“Things such as accepting others’ points of view in a non-judgemental way are important lessons.”

“Many of our schools are in poverty. They welcome many different students, refugees for example, which results in many complications. There was once a case of violence in a schoolyard involving a child who had seen his father being tortured and killed. He was protecting his sister in the schoolyard, because he had received clear instructions from his mother to protect her. We took the two children and explained the situation, and they both got a better understanding of what happened. Dealing with such situations with care is very important. Using punishment and discipline would only have resulted in resentment. A school of care isn’t run by rules but by principles. It conveys the idea that we’re not going to get rid of the children but that we’re going to take care of them and teach them.”

Questions for discussion and assignments

1. Which of the quotes resonates most strongly with you? Why?
2. How do schools' complexities and bureaucracies make it difficult for teachers to care for their students?
3. What might a school look like if it was attentive to enacting the ethics of care throughout the school?
4. If you were a student in a "caring" school, what would you be experiencing?
5. What could you do as a teacher to practise the ethics of care?
6. In what ways could you encourage students to be more caring towards others?

Activity 6: Toward change

Excerpts from the documentary:

“Professionals wanting to practise an ethic of care – if they’re really serious about it – are going to encounter so many difficulties.”

“It takes moral courage to do things that challenge norms, processes, procedures and rules. Some people don’t want those challenged; they find comfort in things as they are.”

“You can start small. Then small things can make a huge difference.”

“I have one-on-one moments with children. That way, I know something about their hopes and ideas. I need to have conversations with kids. It’s one relationship at a time.”

“We would like to care about the other person, but we’ve been so programmed to think only about ourselves that we’ve lost something about community and relationships. I can’t see that the opposite can’t happen.”

Questions for discussion and assignments

1. Divide the class into five groups, with each group discussing one of the quotes in above. What is meant by the quote? What is their response to the quote? Ask each group to share their thoughts with the class as a whole.
2. As an educator, what kind of support would you need to embrace an ethic of care?
3. Do you believe teachers who want to change their school environment into a caring environment will experience certain challenges? If so, what are they?
4. Do you think small steps and one-on-one moments can make a difference to a student’s education experience? To the system as a whole?

Activity 7: Values and challenges

Questions for discussion and assignments

1. In your opinion, what are some of the core values expressed in our society?
How important is “care” compared to other values?
2. What values seem to be promoted in the media, by the public and in schools?
3. If care is important, then how could it be made more central to an educator’s work?
4. What changes do educators have to make to model and practise care more consistently and deliberately?
5. If care were imbued in the “very pores of your school,” what might the following look like:
 - The curriculum
 - Disciplinary practices
 - Staff relationships
 - Student-teacher-parent relationships
 - Teaching strategies
 - Community engagement
6. In what way has this documentary challenged you to think differently about education?
7. What is one idea that you will think about more deeply and/or consider implementing in your practice in the coming weeks?