Show me you care

Denise Calore
Rowan University

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SHOW ME YOU CARE

by

Denise Calore

A Research Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Science in Teaching Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University

June 17, 2008

Approved by

Robin Haskell McBee

Date Approved

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ABSTRACT

Denise Calore
SHOW ME YOU CARE
2007/08
Robin Haskell McBee
Master of Science in Teaching

Although caring in the classroom has been a widely researched topic in education, the impact it has on student behavior is one aspect of caring that has been overlooked, especially at the secondary level. This study's main focus was to investigate if modeling caring behavior can correct negative student behavior, such as being disruptive in class, and reinforce caring behavior amongst classmates. Through observation and various caring activities, I was able to uncover student perspectives of caring, how students define a caring teacher, and a positive impact of my caring actions on student behavior.
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The topic of caring and how it influences student learning has always been an interest to me. I find it curious how perceptions are different among teachers and students on what it means to care. Since showing you care can take many forms, it is a very challenging obstacle that all teachers will face when creating a positive and caring classroom community.

The pushing force for this research project is to put an emphasis on creating caring communities at the high school level. There is very limited research on the effects of caring at the secondary level, and I feel high school students are in more need of a caring environment than any other grade level.

As I reflect on my own educational experiences, I remember the educators who have pushed me to do great things or have been a positive influence in my life. Most of these teachers were my high school and college professors. I have very little experience with creating caring communities, but I have been a student in a caring community, and I plan on using these experiences as a guide when implementing this project.

I believe that students learn best when they are surrounded by positive, caring educators who want what is best for them. I think when students know their teachers care, they will participate more in class, behave in a more respectful manner, and have a willingness to take risks and learn from their mistakes. I also think students, who know their teachers care about their accomplishments, will take a more active role in their learning resulting in a conducive learning environment.
My position as a student teacher gave me a true representation of the challenges all teachers face when trying to create a caring learning environment. I think the one major challenge I faced that influenced this project, was the students’ knowledge that I was a student teacher and that I was temporary. Because of my temporary status, I had to work even harder to build relationships with my students and to get them to buy into the caring community concept. However, I think the strategies that I learned from this project will have a long lasting influence on my teaching philosophy and style. I truly want to be a positive impact in all my students’ lives, and my past experiences, future goals, and current beliefs have built the foundation for this project.

**Problem and Critical Questions**

After observing all my classes for the first two weeks of my placement, I noticed that my 9th period class showed very little respect towards one another and my cooperating teacher. They talked while she gave directions; they shouted across the room and poked fun at each other, and they were very sarcastic. There were also two students in particular who were extremely rude to me and to my cooperating teacher. Their behavior was often disruptive to the point where we would have to stop, address the issue, and then bring the class back together. Not only did this disrupt the flow of the lesson, but it also took away from the other students’ learning experience. My goal was to correct this behavior by modeling caring behavior.

From these observations and my interest in caring, two questions arose for this action research project. The first question, which was the critical question, is what happens when I attempt to show my students I care in my 9th period Keyboarding and
Introduction to Business class? The sub-question was what are student perceptions of a caring teacher? By implementing different caring strategies and activities, I was able to examine if teacher caring impacted student behavior.

Integrated Action

For this action research project, I applied various strategies that promoted a caring environment. My goal was to demonstrate the characteristics of a caring teacher, have my students model my behavior, and ultimately develop a more respectful learning environment. My plan was to have the class determine what it means to show someone you care, what they thought the characteristics of a caring teacher were, and why they thought it was important to care about their classmates. Some strategies that I used throughout this project included asking students about their day, valuing their opinions, rewarding caring behavior, and rewarding students for their accomplishments.

A questionnaire was distributed as a pre-assessment to determine student perceptions on what it means to care, characteristics of a caring teacher, and the ways teachers show they care. The same questionnaire was also used as a post-assessment to track changes in answers.

A series of caring activities took place within the classroom to reinforce caring behavior. The first activity asked the students to brainstorm ideas of how they could show their classmates they cared about them. This activity was done within the first five minutes of class and was collected. The purpose for this activity was to get the students to actively think about caring and to redirect their sarcastic behavior to caring behavior. The second activity acknowledged positive student behavior. I created an award, in the
form of a certificate, for each student in the class, rewarding them for an act of kindness. The third activity again acknowledged student behavior, but instead of a certificate, they received a simple thank you note. The purpose for activities two and three was to reinforce caring behavior and to acknowledge positive student behavior. The final activity was called pass the penny. Students passed a penny around the room saying something nice about one of their classmates. This activity not only reinforced caring behavior; it also showed each student that the others cared about them.

I feel the combination of these activities promoted a caring environment and allowed both students and teachers to show they cared. From my literature review, I learned that students think teachers care when they use their own time to do something for them, making certificates and thank you notes is an example of this. Also, by playing pass the penny, the students had a chance to recognize their classmates for something they did that impacted them. Through this activity, I think the students felt special and appreciated by their classmates and therefore respected each other more.

Context

School and Community

Monarch High School is located in Trentville, NJ. The town of Trentville has a population of 11,812, and families (non-single residences) represent 71.9% of the population. Trentville is currently 84.3% Caucasian, 10.4% African America, 2.9% Latino, and 1.2% other. The median income for families living in Trentville is $54,267, and the median age for residents is 36.8 (Muni Net Guide, 2008). The town of Trentville
is growing rapidly due to new housing developments and retail stores that are being built in the area (M. Peacock, February 13, 2008).

Just as the town is growing, so is Monarch High School. Monarch used to occupy the current middle school building, but in 1998 they moved into a new building, which they have occupied for ten years now. Monarch is a part of Bodina Township, which spans for 49 square miles and makes Bodina Township the second largest township in Superior County. When Monarch first occupied the new building, they had roughly 1300 students enrolled; now there are currently over 1900 students enrolled at Monarch High School (M. Peacock, February 13, 2008).

The demographics for Monarch are consistent with the demographics for the town of Trentville. Of the students enrolled, 76.5% are Caucasian; 18.8% are African American; 3.3% are Latino, and 1.3% are Asian (Muni Net Guide, 2008). There are 524 students enrolled in 9th grade, 434 students in 10th grade, 426 students in 11th grade, and 363 students in 12th grade. The average class size is 23 students, and the student-to-teacher ratio is 13 students to 1 teacher. The school is also well equipped technologically, with a student to computer ratio of 4 students per one computer (School Report Card, 2005). The Science and English classrooms are also equipped with smart boards and LCD projectors.

Monarch’s High School Proficiency Assessment scores were above the proficiency percentages for the state in both Language Arts and Math in 2006 and 63% of the students who took the Scholastic Aptitude Test scored above the 50th percentile in the Math, Verbal, and Essay portions of the test. In 2006, the graduation rate was 92.9%
with 30.8% of the students attending four year colleges and 53.7% students attending two
year colleges. Annually, the seniors have earned over $4 million in scholarships and
other sources of financial aid to help further their educational careers (School Report
Card, 2005).

Monarch offers many unique programs that separate them from other high schools
in the area. More specifically, they offer four academic academies that provide job
opportunities for students in the fields of Science, Mathematics, Computer Technology,
Business, and Law Enforcement. Monarch has formed partnerships with Drexel
University, Rutgers University, and Rowan University where if students meet certain
criteria, they get automatic admissions into these schools. The criteria consist of scoring
a minimum of 1200 on the SAT, ranking in the top 20% of their graduating class and
maintain a B+ grade point average. Monarch also has partnerships with Gloucester
County College and Camden County College so students can earn college credit while
attending high school (School Report Card, 2005).

Classroom and Participants

At Monarch High School, I taught three keyboarding classes, two software
application classes, and one business law class. For this project, I focused on my 9th
period Keyboarding and Introduction to Business students because based on behavior,
they were my most challenging class. I felt this class would give me an accurate
portrayal of how caring impacts behavior and the creation of a positive learning
environment.
This class, which meets during the ninth period, is composed of 21 students, 3 of them being seniors. The other students are primarily freshmen, and one student, who is a freshman, has an IEP. Keyboarding and Introduction to Business is an elective course, so it is considered general education. It focuses on teaching the students proper typing techniques, formatting, and a brief introduction to standard business practices.

Relevant Literature

According to Wilder (1999) the concept of caring is complex and difficult to define, yet it continues to be the single most noticeable factor recognized and sought after by students. In the present paper, the role that caring teachers play in building a classroom community is investigated, as well as how students define caring on the part of a teacher. The following literature reviews support the notion that in order to create a caring classroom community, the teacher must model and demonstrate caring behaviors.

In an article by Caldwell and Sholtis (2008), ways in which teachers show they care were compiled into four themes. These themes were classified as student-oriented, work-oriented, engaging students, and active. A student-oriented teacher shows respect and care through an appreciation of individual uniqueness. Teachers who are student-oriented call students by their first names; do not confuse them with family members, thus giving them an identity; and openly encourage their students through positive feedback and rewards. Work-oriented teachers allow their students opportunities for success by basing their grades on more than just homework and tests. They use a variety of assessments, both formal and informal, and adjust workload when necessary. They also give extra time when needed and recognize and address problems in a timely and
professional manner. By providing a variety of learning experiences, such as field trips, guest speakers and special lessons, teachers are able to draw out a variety of student responses which relays the message that student opinions are valued. By becoming experts in the subject manner being taught, teachers can provide engaging activities for the students. This gives the teacher the power to model expectations and create a friendly learning environment. When teachers are energetic, they exhibit a passion to learn, they greet students between classes and play music between transitions, thus contributing to a positive learning environment.

Findings from a study on what it means to care from the perspective of preservice and experienced school and college teachers (McBee, 2007) supported the themes suggested by Caldwell. This study also recommended that the intentional practice of caring become a curricular component for all future educators. The study surveyed 144 teachers, teacher candidates, and college faculty, asking what caring meant to them and for descriptions of caring behaviors. Offering help, showing compassion, showing interest, caring about the individual, giving time, listening, and getting to know students were the most frequent responses from the survey.

Although there are many common themes between Caldwell’s and McBee’s articles, Ferreira and Bosworth (2001) remind us that the definition of caring depends on an individual’s perception of what caring means. In their study of two urban middle schools, they were seeking to determine students’ definitions of a caring teacher. They uncovered very different definitions when interviewing teachers than when interviewing the students. When asked how they would know when a teacher cared for them, one
student had the following response: “I don’t know if they do or not!... When I was pregnant, they [my teachers] said they would care for me. One of them came to the delivery room... So I knew that one of them cared for me. But the other ones, they just sent me a big ol’ card and some balloons and stuff. (p. 24)

As can be seen, this student perceived caring to be the actual physical presence of the teacher not the tangible gifts. Yet many teachers would state that taking the time to send a card to a student would be a true act of caring. Ferreira and Bosworth remind us that we must pay attention to perspective as well as individual acts. “The investigations into the meaning of caring are not complete by looking solely at individual acts, but at the perspectives of the people involved in the caring relationships in which specific caring acts exist.” (p. 24) Therefore, when creating a classroom community, it is important for teachers to take into account each student’s perception and/or definition of a caring classroom community.

Bruce and Stellern (2005) have developed the Caring Community Model (CCM), which was designed to help educators create meaningful relationships and a safe and supportive learning environment. Bruce and Stellern propose that by using this method teachers can help overcome the personal, family and classroom problems that exist in our classrooms and provide effective teaching, learning, and living to our students. They applied the twelve principles outlined in the CCM in one of their undergraduate teacher education courses. Eight student volunteers were observed and interviewed over a 15-week semester. After reviewing the interviews, observations, and focus group notes, several themes emerged; this included interpersonal skills, belonging, personal awareness
and growth, and connections. Overall the model was considered a success because the eight students reported they felt a sense of belonging in the class, they were more conscious of their body language while others were speaking, and they became emotionally involved in the material. Stellern’s results support the notion that in order to create a caring classroom community, the teacher must model caring behavior and gear his or her instructional episodes with caring principles in mind.

Throughout this literature review, I have learned how students and teacher perceive caring, but how does caring affect student behavior? According to Osher and Fleischman (2005), who have researched the main ways in which urban schools support positive behavior and learning, caring connections promote stronger academics and behavior. They indicate that, “Students who have strong and healthy connections with their teachers are better prepared to learn social and emotional skills, and teachers who model good social and emotional skills can more easily connect with students.” Through use of frequent positive reinforcement, disciplinary problems should reduce and help teachers recover instructional time.

Strahan and Layell (2006) investigated whether or not students would perform better academically in a classroom that shared responsibility, used positive discipline, was learner and knowledge-centered, and utilized student-centered assessment. The teachers attempted to create stronger learning connections in their seventh grade class, which consisted of thirty-six students. During one school year, teachers documented ways in which they created a climate of accomplishment by nurturing a sense of community that promoted respect and responsibility. At the conclusion of this study,
analysis of the achievement tests indicated that students who were in this seventh grade class made more progress in reading and math than the rest of the students in the school.

After Strahan and Layell read letters written by the students regarding their success, they identified two major themes, which were support and structure. The students attributed their success to the caring relationships they built with their teachers and the strategies they used to learn (p.148). Creating a learner-centered environment was one strategy used by the teachers. The teachers noted that in their attempt to get to know their students better, they were able to create more engaging lessons. The following quote is from an end of the year letter, written by a student that reflects on this type of learning climate:

“My teacher taught me how to be more responsible and to be more confident in myself. Before I came to this team I wasn’t responsible or respectful. I would talk back and I used to be a mess. But now they have helped me and they give us something that every student needs – love.” (p. 150)

The teachers attributed their successes to the strategies they implemented, the environment they created, which focused on shared responsibility, team building and positive discipline, and the relationships they built with their students, which were warm and supportive (p. 153).

 Altogether, the results indicate that teachers who care play an important role in creating a caring classroom community. According to Mulcahy & Casella (2005) the subject of caring has been viewed mostly positively by a range of authors who have
described how caring is essential to a peaceful society. Teachers who model caring behavior and allow caring techniques to influence their instructional episodes will build a classroom community that is positive and safe for students to learn and grow. (Stellern, 2005) It can be assumed that teachers who demonstrate the qualities mentioned in this literature review will be successful in creating a caring classroom; however, it would be helpful to have more research conducted at the secondary level, since needs and wants of the students will differ from those in elementary schools.

Method

*Action Research Process*

The methodology and research design for this project is based on the process outlined by Donna Kalmbach Phillips and Kevin Carr (2006). According to Phillips and Carr, “Action research is done by teachers in their own classrooms with the goal of improving simultaneously pedagogy and student learning.” (p. 10) Through my study, I will be able to better understand the affects of caring behavior in a secondary classroom.

I utilized the self-study approach because I wanted to analyze the multiple perspectives that my students had towards caring and caring teachers and incorporate those perspectives into my own teaching philosophy.

*Data Collection*

Throughout my study, I utilized several different types of data collection tools. The first tool was observation, which is to critically or deliberately watch a participant or many participants in the classroom. The second tool was student questionnaires. These questionnaires acted as a pre- and post-assessment on perceptions of caring. The third
tool was artifacts of student work, which included samples of what I distributed to each student during different caring activities and the work students completed on caring behavior (Phillips and Carr, 2006).

Although I feel all these data collection tools are important to my study, I have divided them into primary and secondary data sources. My primary data source was my observations. My observations were field notes I recorded after each activity or class session that gave me an accurate progression of the class' behavior and interactions amongst them and between them and me. I also have kept a researchers journal that acted as a reflection on those observations. My secondary data source was the pre- and post-questionnaires that I distributed to each student to get a better understanding of their perspectives on caring. Although these are important, I feel my observations provide a strong timeline for any change that occurred. The artifacts, such as the certificates and the “do nows”, will also be considered a secondary data source because they were produced by me and my students.

Analysis

My analysis techniques are based on those by Geoffrey Mills. First I identified themes, starting with the big picture and looking for similar themes and connections between the relevant literature and my data collections. I then coded or found meaning within those themes and patterns. This type of analysis allowed me to identify and organize my data in an efficient and meaningful way.
Trustworthiness

To promote accuracy in my research, I used Wolcott’s strategy for validity. Its underlying themes are to ensure validity by reporting all data fully, writing and recording observations accurately, and talking little while listening a lot (Mills, 2007). Since my research is primarily observations and questionnaires, it was very important to write observations directly after each class session to capture what occurred during that time and not what I thought happened. It was also very easy to influence student responses to a question if example answers are given. To decrease the chances of this happening, probing questions were used to explain items on the questionnaire.

Triangulation is also critical for promoting validity. By having varied data sets supporting each set of findings, I have increased the trustworthiness of my study. According to Phillips and Carr (2006), “triangulation is one of the primary ways to make sure research is trustworthy.” (p. 71)

Although the above criteria promote validity, there is potential for bias. Perspectives play a critical role when determining caring behavior. To decrease the potential for my own biases inappropriately influencing my findings, I openly consulted with my cooperating teacher and other colleagues for different points of view and interpretation. I also used student responses to the questionnaires to corroborate my findings from my observations and journal notes.

Since I was a student teacher, placed in a new environment, there were limitations to this study. I feel the most critical limitations of this study were time, my guest status, and an unstructured approach to observation. My time at Monarch was limited to three
full months. During this time, I was to assimilate into the school culture and carry a normal class schedule. With this being said, unforeseen distractions, difficulties and interruptions definitely arose, and the timing for activities changed. For example, I was to distribute the certificates to the students on a Monday but due to a fire drill, I ran out of class time. To make up for this change, I distributed the certificates during the same week but on a different day. My limited time also affects the length of the research study and the amount of data I was able to collect. I feel time was a great limitation in this study because I don't think six weeks was a long enough time to see a profound change in behavior. Also, I would have liked to have done more caring activities and had more discussions on the importance of caring in the classroom, but I did not have time.

It is important to acknowledge that my approach to observations was unstructured. For example, an emergent theme was students raising their hand when answering a question. In some of my daily field notes I recorded each student who did not raise his or her hand while in others I recorded them in one lump statement. This approach affected my frequency table numbers and, therefore, the patterns these generated.

Finally, my guest status provided some limitations to this study. Since my status was temporary, I feel the students may not have taken this study seriously, thus resulting in skewed results. Also, students may not have felt that I was a “real” teacher and may have left the activities or questionnaires incomplete.
Findings and Interpretation

Since this project was designed to investigate the impact of a teacher’s caring behavior on student behavior in a predominately 9th grade class on Keyboarding and Introduction to Business, I thought it was important to first determine what the students felt was caring behavior they wanted to see in their teacher. So in the beginning of my project, I distributed a survey to my students to get their perspectives on what it means to be a caring teacher. Some examples of questions on the survey were: in your own words define caring, how do you show people you care, describe a caring teacher, create a list of words caring teachers say and what images come to mind when you think of caring. Table 1 below shows what behaviors appeared most frequently in those surveys, and I used this to guide the behaviors I modeled in class.

The codes below were based on what responses appeared the most in the surveys. For example, each time the word help appeared in the survey, it was marked as an occurrence. This process was used for each code. Once I had my list of codes, I ranked them from most frequent to least frequent and I modeled my behavior accordingly. For example, I would tell the students every day that I would be there after school if they needed help or if they needed to make up work. I also made myself available during my prep periods as well. After modeling these behaviors and doing reinforcement activities for six weeks, I then looked for any changes in student behavior that may have occurred during my project.
Since my project focused on whether or not caring had an impact on student behavior, I coded my observation notes for negative and positive behaviors. The negative behaviors were based on how I felt it affected my classroom management. For example, if a student was shouting during class or was talking while I was talking, I viewed those as negative behaviors because I had to stop instruction to address the issue. The positive behaviors were based on the caring behavior I modeled in class, such as asking the students if they needed help or telling them to have a nice day.

Tables 2 and 3, below outline the codes used for negative and positive behavior and how frequently they appeared in my observation notes during the first two weeks and the last two weeks of my project. The tables are arranged from the codes that had the highest rate of desired change to those with the lowest rate of desired change.
Table 2: Negative Behavior Codes from Teacher Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Behavior Themes</th>
<th>Frequency and Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rude/Sarcasm</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive/Shouting</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolling around in their chairs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking while I'm talking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying I'll wait</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not raising hand</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walking around</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Positive Behavior Codes from Teacher Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Behavior Themes</th>
<th>Frequency and Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saying have a good day</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying have a great weekend</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement in the hallways (solicited)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement in the hallways (unsolicited)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking me to help</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking me if they could help</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first code in Table 2, which is disruptive or shouting behavior, was chosen as a code because this type of behavior would happen on a daily basis. In my class, shouting and being disruptive is defined as talking while I’m talking, actually shouting across the room, and singing or being noisy to the point where I needed to stop my instruction and address the behavior. In my observation notes, I recorded and counted each student who was disruptive during class and on occasion I recorded groups or pairs of students which were counted as one occurrence. For example, I wrote, “Betty was very loud in class today” and “Maria and Michelle talked the whole time I was talking.” Each of these was recorded as one occurrence.
Saying, “I’ll wait”, was chosen as a code because this would be the phrase I would use to settle the class down. I primarily used this phrase when the entire class was talking, if the bell just rang to start class, or if I had to get their attention to explain directions. Each time this phrase was said in class, I recorded it as an occurrence.

Rolling around in chairs and walking around were both chosen as codes because in a computer lab the students sit in office style chairs, which have wheels. It is very tempting for the students to roll to their neighbor’s computer or to roll to get a tissue, which in return distracts the class. Each time this occurred in class I recorded it. Walking around in class was recorded if the student got up while I was giving directions or during instruction. If the students got up while they were working independently, I did not count it as a negative behavior because I allow my students to do that.

Sarcasm was a problem in this class from the beginning of my student teaching internship. The majority of the sarcasm in this class took the form of jokes at other students’ expense. I felt that although the students were jokingly putting down their classmates, it still had the potential to hurt feelings. With this being said, in situations where I heard sarcastic remarks or jokes, I recorded it as sarcasm. Rudeness to me, my cooperating teacher, and other students was also a problem with this class. Rudeness to me usually took the form of ignoring me if I was talking to them. Rudeness to other students took the form of calling each other stupid. Both forms of rudeness were recorded. For positive behaviors, I looked at behaviors that a caring student would demonstrate, and those became my codes. My first code in Table 3 is good bye salutations. This code would be recorded if a student said to me, “Have a good day” or
“Have a good weekend.” On occasion, I would record this only once even if a group of students said that.

In the beginning of my placement, the students were hesitant to ask me for help. This concerned me greatly because I felt if students could not ask their teacher for help, who could they ask? I would record this every time a student said, “Can you help me?” I did not record this if I was walking around the room checking for understanding or if I was asking the students if they needed help. It had to be unsolicited. The same goes for the last code in Table 3, which is if my students asked if they could help me. I chose this as a code because I think if students view a caring teacher as one who wants to help them, I think the same would go for a caring student.

Acknowledgements in the hallway, both solicited and unsolicited, were chosen as codes because the survey I gave to my students in the beginning of this project revealed that students think caring teachers say hi to their students. Acknowledgments that were solicited by me were recorded if the student responded back with a hello or an equivalent of a hello. Acknowledgments that were unsolicited, meaning the interaction was solicited by the student, were only recorded as such if the student said hello to me first.

Conclusions or New Understandings

After analyzing my data and interpreting my results, I learned many things about caring and the role it plays in the classroom. First and foremost, this study proved to me that caring does have an impact on student behavior. As shown in Table 3, mostly all the positive behaviors increased, and in Table 2, there was a slight decrease in some of the negative behaviors. These changes lead me to believe that students do respond to caring
teachers and will model their caring behavior, but caring alone does not extinguish all negative behavior.

At the high school level, where one student is exposed to eight different teaching styles, behaviors such as not raising a hand or walking around may not be viewed as negative and may be a part of a teacher’s instructional approach. These behaviors are so ingrained in my students that it may take more time to see a profound change. However, my students quickly began to model my positive caring behavior which leads me to think that it is easier for my students to demonstrate and replicate positive behavior that is modeled for them than it is for them to change or break their negative behaviors that have become habitual.

Implications

As I reflect on this project, I realized that it has helped me identify what activities worked and what activities did not. The strategies that worked the best for this project were the student surveys and the certificates and thank you cards I made that acknowledged caring behavior. The student surveys helped me uncover student perspectives of caring that I needed to know in order to model caring behavior as Ferreira and Bosworth (2001) indicate is critical for teachers to recognize. The certificates and thank you notes allowed me to show the students I cared by making something special for each individual student. These acknowledgments for students who demonstrated caring behavior also acted as positive reinforcement for caring behavior which is why I think I saw more of an increase in their positive behavior codes. I do not think there was an activity that did not work for this project; however, I would do some things differently.
First and foremost, I would have taken notes each day in a consistent manner, so my frequencies are more accurate. I would also spend more time conducting my project, possibly across two marking periods. In my opinion, six weeks is hardly enough time to implement a caring plan and to see a noticeable change.

In the beginning of this project, my hope was to learn what strategies work best when integrating caring into my classroom and what the impact of these would be on my students’ behavior. This project has given me insights on how students view caring and how they define a caring teacher. It has also reinforced my opinion that caring does play a critical role in creating a positive learning environment. I know that I will use this information as a guide in creating a caring community in all my future classes.
References


APPENDICES
Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the Master of Science in Teaching program at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Mrs. Jennifer Orzechowski as part of my master’s thesis. The goal of this study is to determine if the use of caring techniques create a caring classroom community.

During the next five weeks, I will model caring behavior, such as asking the students about their day, acknowledging them for their accomplishments and distributing positive feedback whenever possible. Discussions on why caring is important in the classroom and questionnaires about perceptions of caring will also be distributed.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child’s standing in his/her class. At the conclusion of the study a summary of the group results will be made available to all interested parents. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 856-262-8200 ext. 2901. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Denise Calore

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child’s teacher by Feb. 14.

_____ I grant the permission for my child _____________ to participate in this study.

_____ I do not grant permission for my child _____________ to participate in this study.

(Parent/Guardian signature)
I agree to participate in the study that is being conducted by Ms. Denise Calore from Rowan University.

I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty. I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If you have any questions or problems concerning your participation in this study, please contact me at 856-262-8200 ext. 2901. Thank you.

__________________________________________
(Signature of Participant)

__________________________________________
(Signature of Investigator)
APPENDIX B
Student Survey

Show Me You Care

Name: __________________________

1. In your own words, define caring.

2. How do you show your friends and family you care about them?

3. How do you know someone cares about you? (give examples)

4. Describe a caring teacher. Be specific (words and actions).

5. Think of the teachers you have this year, do you think they care about you? Why or why not?

6. Create a list of words caring teachers say. (at least three words)

7. What images come to mind when you think of caring?

8. Think about all your past teachers. Choose a teacher that you think cared about you the most. Explain why you chose this teacher and what they did to show you they cared.
APPENDIX C

Sample of “Do Now” Activity

Name: ________________________________

How would you help a classmate this week?