

# **THE ETHICS OF TEACHER CARING AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL: HOW DOES IT AFFECT BEGINNING TEACHER WORK ENJOYMENT?**

Xiofang Zeng, PhD Student, Curriculum & Instruction, TTU  
College of Education

## **Abstract**

This study examined how teacher caring contributed to teacher work enjoyment compared with good student behaviors and competence in student behavioral management. While teacher caring has unique importance in terms of educational ethics and student educational outcomes, little research has been done on how teacher caring benefits the psychological well-being of teachers themselves. In contrast to what is found in the literature, which considers the emotional aspect of teacher caring costs, our findings indicate that teacher caring contributes significantly to teacher work enjoyment. Research indicates that student behaviors and competence in managing student behaviors are strong predictors of teacher job satisfaction, this study showed that teacher caring contributed significantly more to teacher positive emotion compared with the model that combines both good student behaviors and competence in student behavioral management.

## **Introduction**

Work enjoyment is a very important part of a teacher's professional life (Bredmar, 2013; Sargent & Hunnum, 2005). Negative emotions have a negative effect on teacher job commitment. Teachers leave their jobs because of emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). However, little research has been conducted on teacher work enjoyment. Even less research has been conducted on beginning teacher job satisfaction. Beginning teachers experience more emotional exhaustion and stress in teaching (Lina, 2017), and attrition is especially high for beginning teachers (Smith, & Ingersoll, 2004). It is important to examine what contributes to beginning teacher work enjoyment.

Considering that student misbehaviors cause stress to teachers (e.g., Buchanan, 2010), teaching can be more enjoyable and satisfying when students help to create a pleasant learning environment and when students are more attentive and less disruptive. Related to student behaviors is the construct of teacher classroom behavioral management, the competence in controlling disruptive behaviors, such as getting students to follow rules or calming a student who is

disruptive or noisy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). If teachers have better classroom management skills, they may enjoy the work more. Research shows that classroom management affects teacher well-being and teacher job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Teacher competence in classroom management should improve student behaviors in classrooms. Therefore, student behaviors, behavior management, and teacher work enjoyment are correlated.

On the other hand, caring is an essential part of teacher professional ethics (Nodding, 1984; Perez, 2000). If teacher caring requires extra effort for emotional management (Yuu, 2010), teacher caring could be stressful for teachers. While much research examines how caring is important for students to learn (e.g., Teven & McCrosky, 1997), little research has been done to examine how the important teacher ethics or caring, influences teacher work enjoyment. This study intends to examine how teacher caring is related to student behaviors and classroom management respectively and compares the contribution of teacher caring to teacher enjoyment with the contribution of student behaviors and classroom management together. This study intends to examine the following 2 questions.

*Question 1, How are student behaviors, teacher behavior management, and teacher work enjoyment related?*

*Question 2, which of the two models, the model with teacher caring alone and the model with both student behaviors and teacher classroom behavior management, explains significantly more of the outcome variable, beginning teacher enjoyment?*

## **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

The theoretical conceptualization that frames this study is the assumption of caring by Noddings (1984). The basic assumption of Noddings' caring theory is the differentiation between the people who care for and the people who are being cared for. In an educational setting, the teacher is in the position for caring for students while the students are in the position of being cared for. In this relationship of caring and being cared for, the teacher needs to have a sense of responsibility for forming the caring ethic. According to Noddings (1992), teachers who recognize an ethic of care in their practice view themselves as the ones responsible for establishing good relationship with their students, respecting students and empowering students. The caring ethic suggests that teachers

perform caring for students independently of whether student behaviors are disruptive or respectful. Based on this conceptualization, teacher caring is not only a voluntary humanistic concern (e.g., Yuun 2010), but also a professional and ethical obligation independent of whether student behaviors are disruptive or respectful. Teacher caring, student behaviors, and classroom management are not overlapping but distinctive constructs. This study will examine how teacher caring, student behaviors, and classroom management are correlated. If teacher caring is a professional ethics, it is important to examine whether teacher caring contributes to teacher work enjoyment because if the teacher's ethics of caring does not contribute to teacher work enjoyment, the ethics of caring will alienate the teacher from the teaching job, and the job will be inherently dissatisfying.

## **Methods**

Items were selected from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) to assess the variables, teaching satisfaction, teacher caring, student behaviors, and teacher efficacy in managing classroom behaviors. The TALIS survey was administered to teachers in 34 countries by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2013 to assess the following 6 areas: learning environment, appraisal and feedback, teaching practices and classroom environment, development and support, school leadership, and self-efficacy and teacher job satisfaction (OECD, 2013). The items selected for this study are in Figure 1. The scores for each variable are the total scores on each of the items assessing the variable. Participants were randomly selected with the teaching experience less than 5 years from the international data set using the TALIS survey.

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Teacher work enjoyment             | Item TT2G46E, I enjoy working at this school.<br>Item TT2G46G, I would recommend my school as a good place to work.<br>Item TT2G46L, I am satisfied with my performance in this school.   |
| Student Behaviors                  | Item TT2G41A, When the lesson begins, I have to wait quite a long time for students to quiet down.<br>Item TT2G41B, Students in this class take care to create a pleasant learning atmosphere<br>Item TT2G41C, I lose quite a lot of time because of students interrupting the lesson.<br>Item TT2G41D, There is much disruptive noise in this classroom. |
| Classroom Management Abilities     | Item TT2G34D, I am able to control disruptive behavior in the classroom.<br>Item TT2G34H, I am able to get students to follow rules.<br>Item TT2G34I, I am able to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy.   |
| Teacher Caring at the School Level | Item TT2G45A, In this school, teachers and students usually get on well with each other.<br>Item TT2G45B, Most teachers in this school believe that the students' well-being is important.<br>Item TT2G45C, Most teachers in this school are interested in what students have to say.   |

Figure 1. Items used to assess the variables.

## Results

To address the first question, correlation analyses were conducted. There was a significant correlation between student behavior and classroom management,  $r = .33, p < .001$ . There was a significant correlation between student behaviors and teacher caring,  $r = .09, p < .01$ . There was a significant correlation between classroom management and caring,  $r = .09, p < .01$ . Teacher satisfaction is significantly related with student behaviors,  $r = .23, p < .001$ , with classroom management,  $r = .17, p < .001$ , with caring,  $r = .50, p < .001$ . The correlations between student behaviors, classroom management and teacher caring are in the lower range, supporting the conclusion that they are not overlapping, but belong to different constructs.

Table 1

*Correlations of Student Classroom Behaviors, Classroom Management Ability, Teacher Caring and Teacher Satisfaction.*

|                         | 1      | 2      | 3     | 4  | Mean | Standard |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|-------|----|------|----------|
| Deviation               |        |        |       |    |      |          |
| 1. Student Behaviors    |        |        |       |    | 2.76 | .64      |
| 2. Classroom Management | .33**  | --     | --    | -- | 3.25 | .59      |
| 3. Teacher Caring       | .09**  | .09**  | --    | -- | 3.41 | .48      |
| 4. Teacher Enjoyment    | .23*** | .17*** | .50** | -- | 3.32 | .50      |

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

To address the second question, which of the two models, the model with caring alone or the model with both student behaviors and teacher classroom behavior management explains significantly more of the outcome variable of teacher work enjoyment, the two reduced models were compared using the Z-test for non-independent correlations (Meng, Rosenthal, & Rubin, 1992). The model with Caring only ( $R^2 = .24$ ,  $F(1, 1134) = 352.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ) accounted for significantly more variance in teacher satisfaction than the model including the student good behaviors and teacher efficacy in managing behaviors ( $R^2 = .06$ ,  $F(2, 923) = 28.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ), ( $Z = 6.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## Discussions

The study intends to examine how teacher caring, student behaviors and classroom management are related and compare the contribution of teacher caring with the contribution of student behaviors and classroom management to teacher work enjoyment. The findings indicate that the correlations are in the low range, suggesting that teacher caring, student behaviors and classroom management are not overlapping. Research indicates that student behaviors and teacher competence in managing student behaviors are strong predictors of teacher satisfaction (Klassen, & Chiu, 2010), this study shows teacher caring contributes significantly more to teacher work enjoyment compared with the model that combines both good student behaviors and competence in student behavioral management.

Yuu (2010) indicates that caring for students requires extra emotional expenditure by teachers, which led to stress, and stress has negative effect on job satisfaction (Klassen, & Chiu, 2010). Our findings indicate that caring for students could benefit teachers psychologically. Teacher caring for students in schools is important

for an enjoyable teaching experience. Previous research indicates that teacher caring for students is essential for student learning (Lumpkin, 2007; Teven & McCrosky, 1997). This research indicates that teacher caring also contributes to teacher positive emotions. This research expands the understanding that "Caring is the very bedrock of all successful education." (Noddings, 1992, p 27)

## References

- Buchanan, J. (2010). May I be excused? Why teachers leave the profession. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 30, 199-211.
- Bredmar, A. (2013). Teachers experiences of enjoyment of work as a subtle atmosphere: An empirical lifeworld phenomenological analysis. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 13, 1-16.
- Klassen, R. M., & Chiu, M. M. (2010). Effects on teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction: Teacher gender, years of experience and job stress. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(3), 741-756.
- Lanas M. (2017). Giving up the lottery ticket: Finnish beginning teacher turnover as a question of discursive boundaries." *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 68: 68-76.
- Lumpkin, A. (2007). Caring teachers -- The key to student learning. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 43(4), 158-160.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics & moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools: an alternative approach to education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Perez, S. A. (2000). An ethic of caring in teaching culturally diverse students. *Education*, 121, 102-106.
- Sargent, T., & Hunnum, E. (2005). Keeping teachers happy: Job satisfaction among primary school teachers in rural northwest China, *Comparative Education Review*, 49(2), 173-204.
- Skaalvik, & Skaalvik (2011). Teacher job satisfaction and motivation to leave the teaching profession: Relations with school context, feeling of belonging, and emotional exhaustion. *Teaching and teacher education*, 27, 1029-1038.
- Teven, J. J., & McCroskey, J. C. (1997). The relationship of perceived teacher caring with student learning and teacher evaluation. *Communication Education*, 46, 167-177.