Chapter 7

Caring in the Inner Circle

Caring, in both its natural and ethical senses, describes a certain kind of relation. It is one in which one person, A, the carer, cares for another, B, and B recognizes that A cares for B. As described earlier, A’s consciousness during the interval of caring is marked by (1) engrossment or nonselective attention, and (2) motivational displacement or the desire to help. A genuinely listens, feels, and responds with honest concern for B’s expressed interests or needs. When we say, “B recognizes,” we mean that B receives A’s caring and reacts in a way that shows it. A relation of caring is complete when B’s recognition becomes part of what A receives in his or her attentiveness. A relation may fall short of caring if either carer or cared-for fails in his or her contribution.

The paragraph above describes the basic caring encounter in all circumstances. But the relationships we are most interested in are those that extend over a considerable period of time. These relationships may be equal or unequal. We expect a mature relationship—one, say, between husband and wife—to be characterized by equal relations; that is, the parties alternate as carers and cared-for. Both stand ready to be carers, and both respond appreciatively as cared-for. Relations between friends, colleagues, and neighbors are other examples of equal relations.

But there are many relations that are unequal by their very nature. In these relations, one person occupies the position of carer most of the time, and the other is necessarily the cared-for. Some familiar examples are parent–child, teacher–student, and professional–client relations. In all of these, there may be occasional reversals—encounters in which the dependent party cares for the more powerful partner—but for the most part, these relations are stable and unequal.

What do we want our children to learn about caring in the inner circle—caring for intimate others and associates? How should our understanding of caring relations guide what we do in schools? Let’s
consider equal relations first. Again, what I suggest here is not a recipe. It is what I would like for our children. What do you want for them?

**EQUAL RELATIONS**

Among the relations we expect to be equal are those involving mates or lovers, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. In all of these, we find something amiss if one party is expected to be the carer while the other assumes it is his or her right to be cared for. As I mentioned earlier, fear of exploitation is a major barrier for some feminists in considering an ethic of caring. They are rightly concerned that women will become stuck in the position of carer. How can we remove that fear without abandoning caring?

**Mates and Lovers**

The urge to find a mate is strong in most of us. It is not only sexual desire that impels us; even more, it is the desire for stable connection. Most of us want someone with whom to share the events of our lives. When something interesting happens in my work day, I often think, “Wait til Jim hears this!” Part of the joy and vigor of life comes from the retelling and, thus, reliving of events that are important precisely because they can be shared.

It seems evident that females and males have different perspectives on intimate relations and different problems with connection (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976). Theories on why this is so range from the biological through the psychological and cultural. Both sexes long for connection—for caring relations—but women have, until recently, found it more culturally acceptable to express their longing. In a deeply touching PBS broadcast, commentator Bill Moyers explored with the poet Robert Bly the suppressed male desire for emotional connection and expression. The need, Bly said, is for a male mother. Young men need the preservative and attentive love of mother, but they grow best when this love comes from one who can also initiate them into manhood. Where in schools do we acknowledge this need? When will the wisdom of Bly become part of teacher education?

The problems of women are different, but no less acute. For centuries women were expected to seek connection—indeed to put marriage and stable human relations above all else. When I was in high school and college, girls were explicitly advised to hide their intelli-
the moment—reading or writing in a sunny study with a cat purring
happily in lap (or, more perversely, on the work at hand), and Mozart
playing softly in the background.

There is, of course, something culturally specific about the
description just given, and I will move beyond it, but before doing so I
want to delve more deeply into the problems of young women in
academe. In talking with undergraduate women all over the country,
I've been dismayed at the depth of their frustration and disappoint-
ment with men. (This is not true of all young women but of a signifi-
cant number.) Many women have simply given up on men. They are
not lesbians, but they have decided to find connection with other
women or to go it alone. Many point to their mothers' lives with pity
and dread. "I can't live that way," they say, and they see no alternative
within the framework of marriage. But, I've asked, aren't men becom-
ing more sensitive, cooperative, egalitarian? The answers to this range
from "Are you kidding?" to "Not enough."

One incident was especially revealing and will help to illustrate
how an ethic of caring can guide our decisions. In a group discussion,
someone pointed out something I mentioned in an earlier chapter—
that the very language men often use in describing their household
participation suggests that housework and child care are the woman's
responsibility. They say such things as, "I took the garbage out for
you," or "I changed the baby for you," or "Can I help with the
dusting?" I remarked that even my feminist husband sometimes talks
this way and that I would not call him on it. What would I do? the
group asked. I'd wait until something of the sort happened on tele-
vision or in a story—some impersonal context—and then I'd point it out
and encourage dialogue.

The group—both women and men—disagreed with my ap-
proach. They found it wishy-washy. How will men ever learn? the
women asked. One young man agreed with the women in criticizing
my approach and insisted that he wanted to know when he was doing
something wrong. They all asserted that we should be open and frank
in our personal relations.

Well, maybe. From the perspective of caring, how we behave
with intimate others depends on the other's needs as well as on our
own. Why would I not tell my husband straight out that his language
bothers me? Put simply, because I love him and have no wish to hurt
him, and that kind of remark from me would hurt him. In caring, we
look beyond the principle that sits in judgment of the language to the
person speaking. It is clear to me that, when he uses language of the
sort under question, my husband really intends to help, and the fact of
the matter is that I have taken major responsibility for certain areas of
household management. Therefore, in an important sense, he is help-
ing, and I am responsible, although it should always be possible to
renegotiate responsibility.

When we live in caring relations, we teach each other gently by
example and by confirmation—not by accusation, confession, forgive-
ness, and penance. There is a possibility that some people—the young
man who agreed with the women, for example—want the treatment
described by accusation, confession, and so forth. A caring mate
would know this, and, if this mode of response were possible for her,
she could use it. It is, of course, an empirical question how many
people really want this treatment. But the important question is con-
crete and individual: Does this much-loved other respond with ap-
preciation and growth to my words? We should not use each other to
promote causes or illustrate great truths, and yet we must take respon-
sibility for each other's moral growth. I will revisit this seeming pa-
радox again and again.

I am more familiar with the problems of women in academic life
than with those in other occupations, but it is obvious that most
women do not spend their mornings in sunny studies, inspired by the
music of Mozart and Chopin. Yet all young women need to understand
how they are pressed by their cultures and subcultures to relate to men
and to seek connection. Sociologists and psychologists have suggested
that many teenagers have babies to fulfill their longing for intimate
connection. A baby represents permanent connection—someone to
whom we will be related forever. If other relations have broken down
and there seems little possibility of establishing an equal relation with a
man, having a baby might very well be a tempting solution. Young
women need help in exploring this temptation in depth. Even this
seemingly irrevocable and permanent relation can be destroyed or
badly damaged by other social and economic factors. Witness how
many children are now brought up by grandparents. Adults need at
least one strong, equal relation. This relation makes it possible to do
the sort of caregiving required in essentially unequal relations such as
parenthood.

In seeking such a relation, all young people need to learn how to
explore some basic questions. One was nicely illustrated in the film
Shenandoah. The character played by Jimmy Stewart was ap-
proached by a young man who wanted Stewart's permission to marry
his daughter. Stewart asked the young man whether he liked his
daughter. "I know you love her," he said, "but do you like her?"
Stewart was pointing to a bit of wisdom that all adults should share
with the young. To build a stable, equal relationship, we have to like each other. If romantic love fades—or even as it fluctuates—liking each other provides the connection we need to keep growing. We do no want to hurt those we like. Further, there is an important test built into Stewart’s question. Generally, we like people who are capable of forms of growth that we admire. We are, in a sense, predisposed to foster their growth because we already see something admirable, likeable about them. This recognition provides a solid base for a truly moral relationship.

Another basic question was illustrated in *The Fiddler on the Roof*. Here the main character, who had been settled for many years in a hard-working marriage, plaintively asks his wife, “But do you love me?” Mystified by the ways of the young who have begun insisting on their own choice of mates, he worries that he has missed something. Do you love me? Do I have that special something that makes your eyes sparkle and your heart sing? Ah, what a topic! Surely this should be a major part of sex education, and it can include biography, fiction, poetry, music, art, and history. Surely this would be the place to read the Brownings, *Romeo and Juliet*, The Scarlet Letter, Wuthering Heights, the story of John and Abigail Adams, of Marie and Pierre Curie; to listen to Berlioz’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, Gershin’s *Porgy and Bess*. My point here is, again, that every topic of great existential interest has intellectual possibilities. But we should let the existential concern drive the intellectual. We should not ordain interest in great intellectual works for their own sakes, although such interest may arise in some students.

Finally, serious dialogue on the search for mates and lovers can contribute inestimably to critical thinking. We should spend time helping young people to distinguish between fantasy and thinking that is a prelude to action. When I was in high school, I read some of Freud (on my own, I hasten to add; the curriculum contained nothing so fascinating). It was tough going, but I learned enough to conclude that repression was bad for one’s emotional life. I decided that I would think whatever I pleased, and I recall firmly deciding that most fantasizing was an end in itself—that it could be delightfully and sometimes gruesomely satisfying in itself. It was not a prelude to action. Indeed I was astonished at the conclusion of my analysis to realize that I would abhor in real life many of the things I enjoyed in fantasy. This part of my fantasy life was just like a cleansing bath for the mind—a hot, soapy shower instead of the much-touted (and repressive) cold shower.

We have to help young people with the problems known as “justing in the heart.” I have already expressed my own opinion on the topic: think what you please, so long as you can separate such thinking from planning for action. But there are other perspectives. I would present those, too, but I’d include lots of examples of the damage done to mental health when people suppose that their thoughts can by themselves hurt others. (Think of all the children who suppose that their anger or hate killed a loved one.) On the other side of worry, we do not want young people to retreat into Walter Mitty–like lives, getting satisfaction only from fantasy. A free and healthy mind should be able to move from fantasy-thinking to action-thinking without confusing the two.

Although I believe the open discussion of fantasy and its role in sexual and mental health is essential, students should not be induced to disclose their own fantasies. On the contrary, teachers should gently discourage such disclosure. It is not the content of fantasies that needs discussion (at least not in a classroom) but the fact of them. Students should be encouraged to evaluate their own fantasy life, and they should be assured that it is common and natural to fantasize. They need information and criteria by which to judge the health of their own fantasies.

At the acme of mental health, it should become possible to employ fantasylike thinking in problem solving. Long habits of keeping the two types separate may actually impede intellectual growth. When it is clear that the domain is one safe for action, fantasy as intellectual intuition can be a powerful tool. It puts the mind to play in an intellectual domain.

In concluding this brief discussion of learning to understand love, I want to reiterate the major points: Nothing is more important to most of us than stable and loving connection; caring for this special person takes precedence over promoting causes and principles; learning to care and be cared for takes place by many avenues and is poorly guided by fixed principles; intellectual life is not at all impeded by a concentration on existential concerns; and in intimate life we have an opportunity to learn a fundamental secret of morality—how to promote each other’s moral growth.

**Friends**

We also find caring relations in friendship. This, too, is a topic that has waxed and waned in philosophical and educational interest, but it has never failed to concern actual human beings in their concrete lives.
Friends are especially important to teenagers, and they need guidance in making and maintaining friendships.

Aristotle is one philosopher who wrote eloquently on friendship, and he assessed it as central in moral life. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle wrote that the main criterion of friendship is that a friend wishes a friend well for his or her own sake. When we befriend others, we want good things for them not because those things may enhance our welfare but because they are good for our friends. Aristotle organized friendships into various categories: those motivated by common business or political purposes, those maintained by common recreational interests, and those created by mutual admiration of the other’s virtue. The last was, for Aristotle, the highest form of friendship and, of course, the one most likely to endure.

Students need to understand, as Aristotle did, that friendship can be genuine and yet depend on mutual interests that may be transient. Some friendships do not extend beyond football season, army service, or common work in the same company. They may still be characterized by wishing the best for one’s friend. The kind of friendship that grows out of mutual admiration and likeability is rare and beautiful and brings with it a special moral obligation. Among the good things we want for our friends is moral growth, an increase in virtue. Although Aristotle did not employ the word virtue in our modern sense, it still makes sense to say that we want our friends to grow both in requisite excellences and in virtue construed as moral virtue. This means that true friends will protect each other not only from external evil but also from evil that arises internally. When we care, as we must about a friend, we continually support the quest for a better self.

How do friendships occur? What draws people together? Here students should have opportunities to see how far Aristotle’s description will carry them. They should hear about Damon and Pythias, of course. But they should also examine some incongruous friendships: Huckleberry Finn and the slave, Jim; Miss Celia and Shug in Alice Walker’s The Color Purple; Lenny and George in Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men; Jane and Maudie in Lessing’s The Diaries of Jane Somers. What do each of these characters give to the friendship? Can friendship be part of a personal quest for fulfillment? When does a personal objective go too far and negate Aristotle’s basic criterion?

Students should be encouraged to examine the concept of loyalty. Is there such a thing as unconditional friendship—staying friends no matter what? One aspect of this question concerns exploitation and requires a careful analysis of equal relations and what makes them equal. As I suggested in the section on mates and lovers, we can rarely browbeat others into carrying their share of obligation, and if caring relations are important to us, we can find better approaches. But we need to attend to this set of problems; we cannot depend on good fortune.

Another aspect is perhaps even more troubling for most of us. When should moral principles outweigh the demands of friendship? The question is often cast this way, even though many of us find the wording misleading. What the questioner wants us to consider is whether we should protect friends who have done something morally wrong. A few years ago there was a terrifying local example of this problem when a teenage boy killed a girl and bragged about it to his friends. His friends, in what they interpreted as an act of loyalty, did not even report the murder.

From the perspective of caring, there is no inherent conflict between moral requirements and friendship, because we have a primary obligation to promote our friends’ moral growth. But lots of concrete conflicts can arise when we have to consider exactly what to do. Instead of juggling principles as we might when we say “Friendship is more important than a little theft” or “Murder is more important than friendship,” we begin by asking ourselves whether our friends have committed caring acts. If they have not, something has to be done. In the case of something as horrible as murder, the act must be reported. But true friends would also go beyond initial judgment and action to ask how they can follow through with appropriate help for the murderer. When we adopt caring as an ethical approach, our moral work just begins where other approaches pronounce Q.E.D. Caring requires staying-with or what Ruddick has called “holding.” We do not let our friends fall if we can help it, and if they do, we hold on and pull them back up.

Friendship, as an equal relation, makes demands on both parties. Young people should understand that it is sometimes necessary to break off a relation in which they are exploited, abused, or pushed to do things they regard as harmful or wrong. Quitting such a relation is not “breaking a friendship” because, in actuality, there is no friendship without mutual acceptance of the main criterion.

Gender differences in friendship patterns should also be discussed. It may be harder for males to reject relations in which they are pushed to do socially unacceptable acts, because those acts are often used as tests of manhood. Females, in contrast, find it more difficult to separate themselves from abusive relations. In both cases, young people have to learn not only to take appropriate responsibility for the moral growth of others but also to insist that others accept responsibil-
ity for their own behavior. It is often a fine line, and because there are no formulas to assist us, we remain vulnerable in all our moral relations.

Colleagues and Neighbors

We work with and live near many people who never become our friends. Do we need a different ethical approach to deal with these people? This is a question raised recently by several philosophers in reaction to an ethic of caring. The problem becomes even more acute as we move beyond face-to-face relations into some form of global association.

It is important to understand that caring does not require us to abandon all other guides to moral behavior. Indeed, if we are to be prepared to care for those we encounter, we must give some respectability to the social customs and principles they accept. If there is no moral reason for rejecting these customs and principles as rough guides to social interaction, we can commit ourselves to act accordingly. This kind of acceptance and conformity makes everyday life smooth and congenial.

A great difficulty arises when people mistakenly suppose that the ordinary rules and maxims of a culture are its morality. In actuality, they are only a reflection of that morality. In problematic situations, they must always be carefully reassessed, or even set aside in favor of a direct meeting designed to create a caring relation. An alternative, preferred by thinkers using a justice perspective, is to reassess important principles and try to decide which should govern the situation, given that the supreme principle is one of justice. This alternative is unsatisfactory for reasons I have already stated. It too often leads moral agents to believe that their moral work is finished when a justifiable decision has been reached.

Some years ago my husband and I were asked by a group of neighbors to sign a petition against another family in the neighborhood. Our neighbors, quite reasonably, wanted this family to clean up their property. It was a mess. Everyone agreed to that. But we were concerned about how the family would feel—accused and coerced by their neighbors. What would happen to neighborhood relations?

We did not know the accused family well, even though we were their nearest neighbors, and we did not care enough to use conscientiously the approach I’ve advocated. Instead we debated whether our aesthetic sensibility or their freedom to do as they pleased with their own property should have priority, and we decided that their freedom was the more important value. We did not sign the petition. We made the same decision we would have made if we had followed up carefully on our initial line of thinking, but because we did not talk to the accused neighbors directly, we never learned how they felt about the events, and they remained isolated from their neighbors, including us. Thus, despite “right” thinking, we failed to accomplish our initial purpose. (So did the petitioning neighbors, for the result was a massive screen of shrubbery, not a change in life-style.)

All students should learn how to reason with principles, assess values, and argue for various positions. But they should also be aware that these activities are only part of moral life, and a part loaded with theoretical and practical difficulties. The biggest part of moral life is living together nonviolently and supportively even in the face of disagreement. This means that we have to ask continually what must be done after crucial decisions have been made. How do we convey our decisions with the least pain? What support do we offer those who need it? How do we go on living and working together?

For students, classmates are colleagues. Besides cordiality and verbal respect, what do classmates owe each other? An exploration of relations among classmates offers an opportunity to analyze the social structures that support or undermine collegial relations. Consider an example that is familiar to all students—competing for grades. Among the issues to be discussed is cheating. Many students deny that cheating is wrong. In part this denial may be a result of teachers and parents saying repeatedly, “When you cheat, you only hurt yourself.” Such a statement is clearly false in a highly competitive system. I suppose adults fell into the habit of talking this way as part of a general retreat from moralistic language. But the statement is not only false, it is hypocritical as well, and it reveals a shocking failure to protect students who are committed to fair competition. It could only be true in a noncompetitive situation where the material to be learned is significant to the student’s well-being. And this is hardly true of contemporary schooling. Thus, when students cheat, we must help them to understand that they have committed an uncaring act.

But a deeper question arises.

Why do we pit students against each other? Some argue that we do this to prepare students for a competitive culture. Does that mean that competition is in itself something valuable? Whether or not we are enthusiastic about a competitive way of life, as teachers we should reflect on the issues and encourage our students to do so. Competition is sometimes induced by natural scarcities, but there is no natural scarcity of A’s and B’s. We introduce this scarcity. Why?
Students should learn something about both the pernicious and efficacious effects of competition. A wonderful book that illustrates both is _A Separate Peace_ (Knowles, 1975). The book's unhappy protagonist, Gene, gets better and better grades as he becomes more and more competitive. Observing (wrongly) that, in relations with his best friend, Finny, "the deadly rivalry was on both sides," Gene recalls:

I became quite a student after that. I had always been a good one, although I wasn't really interested and excited by learning itself, the way that Douglass was. Now I became not only just good but exceptional, with Chet Douglass my only rival in sight. But I began to see that Chet was weakened by the very genuineness of his interest in learning. He got carried away by things; for example, he was so fascinated by the tilting planes of solid geometry that he did almost as badly in trigonometry as I did myself. When we read _Candide_ it opened up a new way of looking at the world to Chet, and he continued hungrily reading Voltaire. . . . He was vulnerable there, because to me they were all pretty much alike . . . and I worked indiscriminately on all of them. (p. 46)

Besides drawing the conclusion that genuine interest in learning is a handicap in school competition, Gene also began to see competition everywhere—even in his best friend, Finny, in whom it was entirely absent as a motive. The disaster that followed was in part a result of jealous and zealous competition. Reminiscing as an adult, Gene realizes that not only the tragedy of Finny but also the larger tragedy of war might be traced to this "ignorance of the human heart" that sees rivals and enemies everywhere. He and his schoolmates were but samples:

All of them, all except Phineas [Finny], constructed at infinite cost to themselves these Maginot Lines against this enemy they thought they saw across the frontier, this enemy who never attacked that way—if he ever attacked at all; if he was indeed the enemy. (p. 196)

Students need to consider when cooperation is more appropriate than competition, and teachers need to ask how competition fits the continuity of purpose we discussed earlier. Does it help to produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people?

Reflecting on the matter, teachers may be tempted to condemn all forms of competition. But this is not necessary. Undergraduates often ask me whether I think all competition is bad. In response I've suggested three tests for healthy competition: Is the enterprise still fun?

Can you take some delight in the victories of your rivals? Are you turning in better performances or products as a result? If the answer to each of these questions is positive, competition may be benign and even useful.

I will close this section by considering a question that will pop up again and again. Do we bear responsibility for the moral growth of colleagues as we do for friends and family members? The answer is yes, but the responsibility takes on a somewhat different form. As with intimate others, we must not push colleagues into behavior they will later deplore; we must be careful not to bring out the worst in them. But, by definition, we do not know these people as well as we know friends and family. Therefore, when we try to confirm them, we risk self-righteousness and emptiness. We may come across as busybodies or do-gooders, as people ready with a platitude and empty gesture. If a moral emergency arises, we have to spend time getting to know a colleague—we have to talk, listen, and stay with this other long enough to construct a likely mode of support. Of course, talking, listening, and staying-with are forms of support, and with them in place we may not need to give specific advice or further aid.

**UNEQUAL RELATIONS**

Whereas students need most to learn about equal relations, teachers need most to analyze and reflect upon unequal relations. Some relations are, by definition, unequal, and one party must of necessity be the main carer. Students, too, have to learn how to care in such relations, but their first contributions are as recipients of care. These contributions, as we have seen, are not negligible. As young people learn how to discern and accept care, they can gradually learn also to care for others. Perhaps the best place to practice is with those even younger.

**Children**

Most of us are naturally protective and tender with children. Even tough male teenagers usually respond to children with gentleness. In some enlightened schools, educators have begun to match potential high school dropouts with elementary school children who need academic help. As these young people help children with schoolwork, they begin to realize their own potential and the value of an education. It doesn't seem to matter too much that they sometimes have to
struggle with the material themselves. What matters is that they know more than the children they are teaching, and that by teaching they, too, are learning. In mathematical circles we have long said that the "best way to learn calculus is to teach it." We do not mean, of course, that people can start right out teaching. They have, first, to be taught. But the material is rarely clear until we ourselves teach it to others. Perhaps the best way to summarize and perfect elementary education is to employ postelementary students as teachers of younger students.

There are many reasons for involving teenagers in the lives of children. First, raising children is one of the most significant tasks any adult undertakes, and it requires adequate preparation. Relying solely on parents to provide that preparation was never a good idea, and today it is disastrous. Second, teenagers need to be confirmed in their budding altruism. They naturally have enormous self-interest, but they also have the capacity to be deeply concerned for others, and schools rarely give them a chance to practice the skills needed to develop this capacity. In schools we talk about concern for others and enforce some rules of polite conduct, but we do not identify the best in students and work actively to bring it out. Third, we need the services of energetic and altruistic teenagers. We should confess this need and urge young people to respond generously to it. Every time I hear young people say there is "nothing to do" in their town, I grieve for them and for the "sandwich generation" of which I am a part—vastly overburdened with the work of caring while another generation complains of nothing to do.

Fourth, involvement with children can be effective as an integral part of the academic education of teenagers. I want to elaborate a bit on this point. Earlier I suggested that teaching younger children might serve as a means to summarize and perfect elementary education. For years students, teachers, and parents have complained about the endless reviews that occupy much of 7th- and 8th-grade education. In many schools, children at this level are still grinding away at material that they failed to master in 5th or 6th grade, and by now they simply hate the stuff. Why not include tutoring as a systematic part of their 7th- and 8th-grade education? I am not suggesting intermittent, hit-or-miss tutoring sessions but, rather, careful planning among teams of teachers and students. A 7th-grade math teacher might instruct students on the material they will teach to, say, 4th graders the following week. Part of every math period would be devoted to planning and evaluating what goes on in their teaching assignments. Students could be assigned to classes at the edge of their own competence; that is, 7th graders who are fair but not really competent at long division could be assigned to help in classes where that is a major focus. Youngsters who have hitherto mastered most material could be assigned either to enrichment classes where they, too, would be challenged intellectually, or to children with special learning difficulties at any level.

A plan of this sort requires restructuring the curriculum and the school day of the 7th and 8th grades. This revision is consistent with the one I recommended for high schools in which part of every day should be directly devoted to centers and themes of care. Here, too, our purposes are multiple. We organize this way because our purpose is to produce caring and competent people, because we recognize the needs of children, because we need the good services of even our youngest citizens, and because we are concerned with academic growth.

The benefits are not only academic. In the teen years, most girls get some experience with children by babysitting. A few boys also do. However, many boys reject such work as unmasculine, and many never get the opportunity because parents are reluctant to entrust their children to male teenagers. In an age in which accusations of sexual abuse are made so frequently, I'm not sure that I would want my sons to risk the usual forms of lonely babysitting. It is far safer for them to get experience with children in publicly supervised situations. But they must have the experience. It is essential to the development of caring adults and to the eventual construction of equal relations with female partners.

A deeper understanding of self is another benefit to be gained from involvement with children. As older children have opportunities to interact with younger children, they should be encouraged to reflect on their own childhood and the special relations that guided their lives. They can also look ahead to the possibility of working closely with children in the future and, perhaps, consider whether children will play a central role in their lives. It should be acceptable for a well-informed older teenager to express preference for a childless future. Such a preference may, of course, change, but in traditional environments most teenagers never get an opportunity to explore their real inclinations. As a result, they may make poor occupational choices and, worse, drift into parenthood even though they are ill suited for it. A responsible adult can support civic concern about children without engaging in the direct care of children, but if one has children of one's own, caring deeply and effectively is a lifelong commitment. We must educate for this commitment.

Girls especially may need help in understanding and rejecting pathological forms of caring—forms characterized by continual self-
denial. No one has described the problem more clearly than Ruddick (1989):

To court self-denial for its own sake perverts rather than expresses attentive love. Mothers are especially prone to this perversion, since they are rewarded for self-sacrifice. They are familiar with the danger of denying their own needs only to find they have projected them onto their children. A person who counts herself as nothing lacks the confidence needed to suspend her own being to receive another’s. [Ruddick is here referring to Simone Weil’s beautiful comment about emptying one’s soul to receive another.] Since her emptiness is involuntary and often frightening, she searches in her child to find the self she has sacrificed. The soul that can empty itself is a soul that already has a known, respected, albeit ever-developing self to return to when the moment of attention has passed. (p. 122)

In this section I have suggested that the study of children should be an important topic in secondary education, and that practice in caring for and teaching younger children should begin in the upper elementary grades. Surely the care of children should be a central topic in the education of all students.

Students

Students are not usually as close to teachers as offspring are to their parents, but the relationship is still, ideally, a close one, and for some students, teachers are more important than parents. A succession of teachers played a central role in my own life, and I cannot imagine what my life would have been like without these people: the 2nd-grade teacher who discovered that I was a good reader and turned me loose to read; the 5th-grade teacher whose youth and vitality encouraged an adventurous spirit (more adventurous than she anticipated); the 7th-grade teacher who made the move to a new community less painful. This teacher, whom I dearly loved, visited me when I had whooping cough and brought a quart of home-canned tomato juice. I had never liked tomato juice, but because it came from her, I loved it. To this day I prefer tomato juice to orange juice. I recall, too, that she came to my high school graduation, and her presence was more important to me than that of anyone else. Then there was my high school mathematics teacher. He was the reason I became a math teacher. In the last months of his life, many years later, I visited him weekly. Losing a parent was not more painful than losing him. And even in graduate school, my advisor was instrumental in my choice of philosophy and the enthusiasm with which I immersed myself in it. As Goethe said, we learn from those we love.

The teacher–student relation is, of necessity, unequal. Teachers have special responsibilities that students cannot assume. Martin Buber (1965) wrote that teachers must practice “inclusion”; teachers must, that is, take on a dual perspective: their own and that of their students. They must try to see the world as their students see it in order to move them from a less to a more satisfactory view. Good teachers do not reject what students see and feel but, rather, work with what is presently seen and felt to build a stronger position for each student. To do this effectively requires the creation and maintenance of a trusting relationship.

Teachers must remain aware that the relation is unequal. In conversation with Carl Rogers, Buber (1964) tried to convey this important notion to the great therapist:

A man coming to you for help . . . The essential difference between your role in this situation and his is obvious. He comes for help to you. You don’t come for help to him. And not only this, but you are able, more or less, to help him. He can do different things to you, but not to help you. And not this alone. You see him, really. I don’t mean that you cannot be mistaken, but you see him, . . . he cannot, by far, cannot see you. (p. 487)

In the same way, teachers can see students and see with them; students, by definition, cannot see in the same way with teachers. Nor should they be expected to. If a teacher–student relation moves in this direction, it becomes one of mature friendship, and the formal relation, the necessary relation, fades away. Students are set free by their teachers’ efforts at inclusion to pursue their own growth, and this is exactly the response good teachers seek. They do not want their students to be constrained by the personal or professional needs of their teachers. The responsibility is clearly enormous.

But students have a responsibility too. As recipients of care, they must respond to their teachers’ efforts. Usually this happens in a seemingly natural way. Children who have been similarly cared for at home will respond to teachers spontaneously. But if teachers behave in unfamiliar ways, students may have difficulty detecting attempts to care. Cross-cultural teacher–student relations often induce such difficulties (Heath, 1983). Then even more time must be given to the establishment of trusting relations. It is not enough simply to under-
stand another culture, and indeed the assumption of such understanding often masks reliance on stereotypes. Children come from cultures, but they are also special individuals, each in need of a particular relation with his or her teacher.

Students may also have difficulty recognizing care if it comes in forms they have already assessed as not-caring. If parents rationalize abusive behavior on the grounds that it is for the child’s own good, a student may well distrust all efforts to improve his or her condition. This puts an even greater burden on teachers to listen, to receive, to respond to what is really there.

One of the greatest tasks of teachers is to help students learn how to be recipients of care. Those who have not learned this by the time they have entered school are at great risk, and their risk is not just academic. Unless they can respond to caring attempts, they will not grow, and they will certainly not learn to care for others. This is the single greatest problem of children born addicted to cocaine. “Response deficit” children cannot react to the normal parental desire to promote their growth. Teachers may need to devote long periods of time to the establishment of caring relations with these children.

All children need to feel safe in their relations with teachers. It must be acceptable to admit error, confusion, or even distaste for the subject at hand. But students must also accept responsibility for communicating their needs to teachers. They must understand that their responses enliven or dampen their teachers’ enthusiasm. Students have tremendous effects on their teachers, and these possibilities should be discussed openly. The contributions of teachers and students are necessarily unequal, but they are nonetheless mutual; the relationship is marked by reciprocity. Students cannot be expected to teach their teachers, but they can be expected to respond with growing sensitivity to attempts to promote their own growth. Too often—even at the collegiate level, but especially at the secondary level—students regard their teachers as enemies to be outwitted or as bumbling authorities to be suffered temporarily (Crozier, 1991). What is lost is not only academic knowledge but a relation that might yield a lifetime of friendship and wisdom.

CONCLUSION

We are participating in a challenging thought experiment: How shall we educate our large heterogeneous family? I would like to ask readers to look back briefly over the last two chapters—caring for self and intimate others. Are there not many opportunities for intellectual engagement and the acquisition of cultural knowledge? Are not the matters discussed vital to all lives? Is there not an enormous demand for critical thinking in the areas discussed? Why, then, do we persist in supposing that learning a set of cultural facts, or even the structure of various disciplines, is the proper goal of schooling?

Professional readers may have started to worry about evaluation. If we make centers of care the focus of universal education, how will we evaluate our efforts? The answer has to be that we should look for the positive signs we see in healthy family life: happy, healthy children; cooperative and considerate behavior; competence in the ordinary affairs of life; intellectual curiosity; openness and willingness to share; a confessed interest in existential questions; and a growing capacity to contribute to and thrive in intimate relationships.