

APPENDIX G. CONTEXT OF CARE

The **context of care** is a concern for the well being of others that is motivated by an intention to render assistance. While it is responsive to rules, regulations, and principles of equity, it allows individual needs and the circumstances of the situation to guide action.

The context of care is composed of eight characteristics. They are **relational, responsive, situational, particularized, feeling, confirmatory, constancy, and justice**. This context, like the administrative context, is a set of conditions under which the **administrative strategy** is executed.

Relational

The three principals in this study view themselves as critical members of their school organization immersed in interconnected relationships with staff, students, district officials, the community, and in some cases state and national organizations. This relational network is symbolized by a series of concentric circles that show rings of influence. Influence radiates out from the principal as well as converges in to her. See Figure G.1 Concentric Circles of Influence.

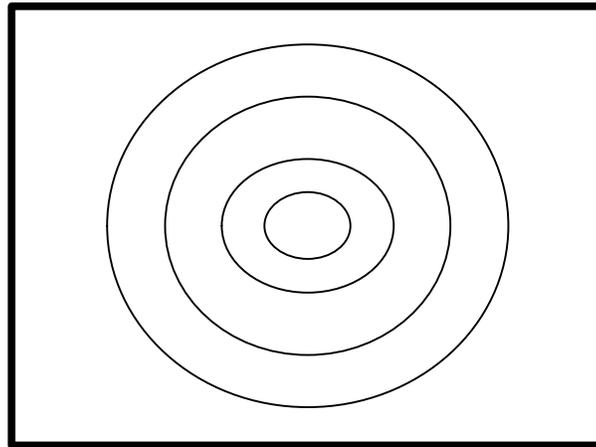


Figure G.1 Concentric Circles of Influence

Although Patricia and Gayle knew their communities before assuming the high school principalship, having previously served as middle school principals, Connie is the exemplar of community "connectedness". Confirming her longevity in the school, her assistant principal comments, "There is not another person in the world who knows this community like Connie".

Each of the principals exhibited a unique presentation of self [**presenting the persona, rendering presence, emanating eminence**] which was authentic and matched to their administrative strategy. Although all three dressed in a manner appropriate to their position, it was the professional principal, Patricia, who seemed to embody the "the walk and the talk" of

the administrative professional. Each principal establishes, through this presentation of self, a relationship with her respective school community.

An analysis of the [relational transactions](#) revealed that the principals' managed themselves in such a way that connection was always preserved in conversation. This was also true of conversations involving decisions.

The outcomes of [relational](#) and [decisional transactions](#) concluded "satisfactorily", even when the principal and her conversational participant disagreed. Patricia's meeting with the community fundraiser representative ended in disagreement on the issues but in agreement on maintaining a positive relationship (Appendix C). The fundraiser representative did not get his way, but he expressed his admiration for Patricia and provided support to the school under her conditions.

It was the intent of the principals to gather people together to support the school. Patricia is especially skillful at getting people involved. She is concerned that no one be left out who can contribute to the well being of Hillside: "Now, we don't want to leave anyone out who can help us". Connie saw sports as a way of bringing people together and constantly promoted participation and support of the athletic teams.

Through personal [affiliation](#) and [assembling](#) people in various ways, the principals worked tirelessly to bring meaning, commitment, and synergy to not only the goals of the school, but also to the participants themselves.

[Decision-making](#) was a process orchestrated within the context of these connections, not distinct and aside from it. Gayle was perhaps the most skilled of the principals in building consensus, particularly among large groups of people. She managed a school site council whose function was to involve members of the school community in decision-making. The [symbol](#) associated with this process was a [table](#). Gayle used a large table in her conference room and a small coffee table in her office around which to hold meetings. One of her favorite and often-used expressions was an invitation to connect: "Let's bring it to the table".

In order to strengthen interdependence and instill the value of reciprocity, the principals modeled and facilitated creating and maintaining connections with others as indicated by the processes of [creating connections](#), [building community](#), and [creating community](#). They all enjoyed bringing people together around common goals. Patricia referred to this process saying once, "I love the coalition building".

As the principals interacted with students, a [maternal](#) process emerged, perhaps motivated by their own experience as wives and mothers and their view of the school organization as their "school-family". Each of the principals would refer to students' mothers, sometimes in a cajoling manner. Gayle teased one girl about her behavior last year at the prom saying, "I am not going to be your mother until 3:00 a.m. like last year [at the prom]".

Because of her longevity in the community and work as a guidance counselor, Connie knew generations of families at Greenland. She felt very close to the students and was the only principal who assigned herself a specific disciplinary role in the school. She managed all of the

discipline for the senior girls. On one occasion, the police questioned two senior girls about roaming the streets during the early hours of the morning. Connie rebuked them in a maternal manner cautioning them about safety and encouraging the use of good common sense.

Strong relationships and ties to the community existed for all of the principals. One graduate student typified the feelings people had for these principals as she reports about Connie: "Mrs. Conrad was an inspiration to me throughout my high school experience. She was my cheerleading sponsor, counselor, second mother, and is now my friend".

Responsive

Within relationship, each of the principals maintained a responsive stance to the needs of the school community. Gilligan (1982) explains that the basic moral command is "an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the real and recognizable trouble of this world".

Knowledge of their school communities served the principals well in being appropriately responsive. Gayle began her tenure as a high school principal responding to her superintendent's request that she transfer from the middle school to the high school. Gayle was asked "to bring calm to chaos" at Ethan Allen High School. As principal of the middle school, she was well aware of the situation at Ethan Allen. Since assuming the principalship, she has opened the channels of communication and responded to the staff's request for a safe and orderly learning environment for students.

At Greenland High School, staff members view Connie as a responsive and responsible problem-solver. One staff member reported, "This lady is solution-oriented. This is what has made her an outstanding principal and caused the morale of the faculty to stay up". As the school grows in enrollment, Connie is actively responding. Greenland's athletic director reports that "She is constantly searching for solutions". The addition of a new wing to the school was due to Connie's response to an ever-growing student population. Blueprints symbolize Connie's responsiveness. They represent the planning and organizing needed to be appropriately responsive. Connie is currently lobbying now for a new field house complex for the school.

Processes demonstrating the principals' responsiveness include those categories associated with "taking action": [advancing goals](#), [maintaining operations](#), [safeguarding operations](#), [troubleshooting](#), [advancing productivity](#), and [improving operations](#).

In responding to the needs of their schools, the principals viewed themselves in a role of service, almost as an educational steward for the community. Gayle referred to her role as an educator as "serving the clientele". After reading her horoscope one morning: "A wave of new inspiration sends your spirits into orbit today. Innovative ideas in the field of service", Connie commented, "I live a life of service every day". As an active member in the local women's group ["Never miss a meeting!"] as well as her church, she is indeed a steward.

Patricia explains her view of the principal's role in service:

P: Well, that is right [responsibility of a leader is to be a teacher]. People who choose the teaching profession, if you were doing a profile, they like to help and share and show others better ways of doing things.

If one were doing a profile of people who choose the teaching profession-- it is one of the helping professions, service-oriented.

Situational

Each of the principals viewed the transactions and circumstances in which they engaged as distinctly important. They behaved in a manner appropriate to each occasion, as opposed to behaving in a manner characterized as following a prescribed set of procedures. Their actions were an "appropriate response" (Gilligan, 1982) as they also applied standards consistent with the ethos of their school culture. Behaving in this manner mitigates against subjectivity.

Throughout their work with their respective school communities, the principals viewed each issue or problem singularly. That is, each took the time to investigate a situation thoroughly in order to respond appropriately. Patricia knew her guidance director often "waved a red flag of crisis"; however, each time Patricia would prioritize the time conference with her and assess the situation in order that together they could resolve it.

Although there were rules about student discipline at Greenland, Connie would often take into account the family circumstances as well as the needs of a student before determining severe consequences such as suspension. For example, she made an in-school and out-of-school suspension of five days each concurrent because of a family hardship situation. On another occasion, she allowed one student to determine the day and time for his detention because in addition to being a full-time student, he held a job.

Gayle never knew exactly what would come out of many of the situations she managed because she allowed the facts and circumstances, as well as the feelings among all participants, to guide the outcome. She worked creatively to craft solutions that were satisfactory to everyone involved. In one instance a student felt shamed by her English teacher. Gayle went to great lengths to remedy the situation by setting up a meeting for the girl and her family. She involved the English teacher and the English department chairperson as well. The teacher offered an explanation and an apology to the girl, and Gayle arranged tutoring for her in order to support her writing efforts.

Particularized

The focal point of the situations managed by the principals was the people involved. The principals viewed people as individuals, and they

honored their "otherness". The school communities honored their principals and respected their decisions. The principals knew this and reciprocated through attention to individual needs and concerns.

Patricia is truly masterful at managing dialogue in a way that makes participants feel important and the conversational situations meaningful. Through the process of *extending*, she is able to adapt her presentation to meet the needs of people. Her chameleon-like ability is remarkable in its versatility to support the shifts her role, as principal, requires across different people and different events during the day. Her meeting with the math department chairperson, described in the narrative located in Appendix C, offers an insightful view of this complex relational strategy.

Connie feels an enormous amount of responsibility and allegiance to the people at Greenland High School. "There is a lot of longevity associated with the staff" she reminds people, and the members of the school community are as much Connie's friends as they are her staff. So, it is not surprising that she gives a great deal of thought to significant decision-making events soliciting input in various ways governed by the situation and the people the decision affects.

Creating the master schedule and assigning supervision duties are significant decisional events, which Connie has been in charge of since her role as a counselor. She speaks to the consideration given in making teachers' assignments:

P: Their assignments, even to the time of day, are very, very important. Every teacher is actually evaluated, one by one, for the best teaching situation. And when the situation is going to be the least bit detrimental, it is talked over with them.

Like Patricia, Gayle also possesses the ability to make people feel special and their issues important during conversational exchanges. Like Connie, she worked as a counselor before entering administration and was highly aware of the importance of what she calls "the public relations" aspect of being a principal.

When Gayle arrived at Ethan Allen High School, she knew from the newspapers and her colleagues that there was enormous unrest on campus. Allegedly, the former principal had been inaccessible and used his position in powerfully unproductive and demeaning ways. Gayle explains her assessment of the situation in the passage below.

G: And, this school needed a people-to-people kind of relationship. The rapport with the people business seemed to be an issue. People did not feel that they had been treated fairly. Faculty members were pitted against one another.

So, it was the people skills, the communication skills that helped me survive for the first year as principal at this high school.

Gayle responded to the needs of the school. She organized a retreat for the staff during that first year so they could become acquainted as individuals and establish common goals. To ensure continued open communication, staff members were trained to be *communicators* in order to facilitate and manage the flow of feelings and opinions about organizational life at Ethan Allen.

Conversational engagements were a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation (Noddings, 1984). The principals left themselves "open" during the dialogue process allowing decisions to emerge from the discussion. In addition to listening, they used questions as well as appropriate mirroring in order to solidify conversational connections, which facilitated decision-making and problem solving.

Patricia's skill in rapport building facilitated her conversational connections while Gayle easily built consensus by identifying common ground among the parties. Connie held problem-solving conversations during faculty meetings; and because of the importance of equity in the culture at Greenland, voting often dictated decisions.

Rather than a universally applied ethic, the principals allowed the welfare of the individuals and the prevailing situational circumstances to guide their actions. All three principals would agree with Connie when she says, "We are here to serve the students and the parents".

Feeling

Feeling is viewed as a legitimate and integral part of the relational process. "Feeling is not all that is involved in caring, but it is essentially involved" (Noddings, 1984). All of the principals acknowledge and value emotional responsiveness.

Patricia is a very optimistic person who exhibits exuberance about her job as a principal. It is an infectious quality and a significant ingredient in her administrative style. Whenever she wants to reinforce something, she smiles, her face lights up, and she makes a comment about how she just loves to see "such and such" going on. At the same time, she can easily modify her mood adjusting it to the feelings required by the situation. For example, one morning a community member called to "just talk". She was feeling depressed about her husband's recent diagnosis of cancer. Patricia honored her feelings and offered her words of encouragement.

Connie is quite a Greenland enthusiast; some people claim that her blood runs green, the school color. She loves sports and her excitement about winning is infectious, which is a significant factor in building school spirit. Upon winning an important football game, she fervently announced to the students:

C: The game Friday night: not only did we beat them, we whopped them! It was a terrific game, one of the most exciting

ones I have ever attended. A terrific job on the part of everyone!

Connie also has a very sympathetic heart, which shows itself when she is unable to provide everything people would like to have, like sports clothes and equipment. Connie, true to her constructive label, works concertedly to identify ways to obtain things for people. She is unmatched in her ability to make deals for the school. Concerned about the loss of some trees during the new wing construction, Connie bargained with the maintenance men to move them to the front of the school. "Cost you a steak dinner" proposed one of the maintenance men; "You got it!" replied Connie excitedly, "And, you name the restaurant!"

Although a caring context is distinguished by its properties of trust and warm acceptance, all emotion that presents in an exchange is accepted. The principals seem to understand this as they often find themselves dealing with those who are "unhappy" as Gayle understatedly describes it. Gayle is skillful in acknowledging people's feelings while simultaneously dealing with the facts of a matter [[managing feelings](#) and [managing information](#)]. She believes you have to "fix" both before an issue is truly resolved.

Confirming

Martin Buber (1965) best describes the process of confirming as an act of affirming and encouraging the best in others. In contrast to accusation and confession, confirmation is accomplished by acknowledging the "best self" recognizing that people really want to do the right thing, even as they err.

The principals often attempt to identify the positive, if not admirable, qualities of the people with whom they work. In this way, they encourage a quality in order to strengthen it, while simultaneously tempering its shadow aspect, opposition. Patricia enjoys complimenting her staff during faculty meetings. She uses compliments as a [marketing](#) technique to encourage other staff to join in.

P: I just want to tell you how much I appreciate all of the hard work that each of you has put forth in getting the school year started. As I have been around in all of the classrooms, I can't tell you, your classrooms look so inviting. I know that you have brought plants from home, you have gone out and bought plants, you have put pictures and some of them I know must have come from your homes because some of them are just beautiful. You have just made your classrooms a very inviting place for not only yourselves but your students.

I think your working environment needs to be a comfortable one for us as well as students because we

spend too much of our time here.
And when you are comfortable,
you just do a better job.

Patricia and Connie both have teachers working under what Connie refers to as "handicapping" conditions. Some teachers do not have an assigned classroom and travel from classroom to classroom using an instructional cart while other teachers work in a trailer, which is also an inconvenience. The principals all seem to make a point of complimenting and commending these teachers who work ungrudgingly under hardship conditions. In the following passage, Connie praises Brenda.

C: Brenda is a Spanish teacher. An excellent Spanish teacher I should say.

B: Thank you.

C: And, she is operating under a handicap. She is in the trailer.

B: Oh, I love it out there. It is not much of a handicap.

Confirmation can be a powerful ingredient in sustaining relationships, particularly when one party feels injured or harmed. The principals abide by an unspoken agreement with others to avoid hostile conflict and, thus, preserve relationships.

Patricia uses confirmation as she mentors people. Notice her words of encouragement as she speaks to her first year Spanish teacher about a recent classroom observation.

P: I want you to know right up front that was a real strong model.

I thought you did an excellent job, and I was very proud of that! Your kids are learning Spanish!

Gayle uses confirmation to acknowledge the professionalism in people. She compliments people for using good communication strategies ["I appreciate your being a communicator"] and reminds others about the need to approach some things in a "professional and cautious way".

G: The one thing that I do require is that they be professional about whatever issue they want to talk about; and they be respectful of one another.

That it was not a time to bash out at each other if they have disagreement; but, that, we can work through it and try to deal with issues and programs rather than people.

It is, I guess most of all,
creating a climate to talk about
whatever is on their mind in a
professional manner.

The [apple](#) symbolizes confirmation. When the custodian did a particularly nice job of preparing the school for back-to-school night, Patricia summoned him to the office. Once there, she congratulated him and gave him a large, shiny red apple to thank him for his contribution to making Hillside High School the best.

Constancy

Constancy is long persistence (unwavering) and genuine application. Determination, action, and vitality characterize constancy. In working with their respective communities, each of the principals is constant in purpose and application. Their [visibility](#) and [active participation](#) in school and community events demonstrates their commitment and constancy of purpose in their roles as principals.

Indicative of this mindset is the fact that the principals do not give up on situations. They may pace their involvement and participation, but they do not give up. Connie works with her staff constantly to see how to improve things. She explains that she is not a quitter:

C: I do not operate like that.
I will go on working on it,
bad situations all of the time.

Each of their administrative styles indicates constancy. Patricia [markets](#) excellence, and Connie [proffers](#) provisions to enhance instruction. It is Gayle, however, who demonstrates persistence par excellence' in patiently and persistently [shepherding](#) three significant organizational changes since her appointment as principal five years ago.

Justice

The ethic of justice is based on abstract, impersonal principles like fairness, equality, objectivity, reciprocity, rationality, and authority. It is often viewed as impersonal and impartial because it holds universal principles of right action above individual needs.

Justice is sometimes referred to as "masculine" in nature because of its emphasis on individual rights and autonomy, which are traditional masculine ethics. Rules, regulations, and universal abstract principles guide decision-making as situations and people are treated equally under the law. The assumption is that fairness and justice is best secured through detachment and disinterest, and actions are intrinsically right or wrong. The spirit of justice is captured in its symbol, Justice Blindfolded.

A caring context is not unconcerned with justice--individual rights or rules and regulations; however, it de-emphasizes these concepts as universal and inflexible recasting them in service to care instead of in place of care. In this study, justice acts as a filter through which the principals exhibit caring behavior. As Noddings (1984) asserts, logic is not to be discarded or ignored, rather it is to employed.

An ethic of care does not eschew logic and reasoning (Noddings, 1999, 1995; see also Katz, Noddings, & Strike, 1999). Rather it is to be used in service to competence which is achieved through the use of reasoning employed to decide what is best and how best to do it. Reason alone does not provide the motivation for care but rather a genuine feeling with and for the other that moves an individual to care (naturally).

All of the principals were rightly concerned with the issue of justice. Processes such as [monitoring](#) and [controlling](#), [upholding policy](#) and [procedure](#), [managing information](#), [regulating](#), [disciplining](#), [adjudicating](#) and [adjudging](#) evidence this attention to providing organizational [structure](#) and [stability](#). Their attention to [justice](#) is often directed at the safety and well being of the school.

As head of the administrative team, one of the things the principals want to ensure is that policies and procedures are administered with consistency, although they know individual circumstances may alter enforcement. In fact, the principals hold regular meetings with their assistants to discuss new policies, new concerns, and consistency in application of the rules.

For example, when Patricia discussed the dress code with her assistant principals, they talked about how to prevent students from wearing clothing that contained promotional messages about drugs and alcohol. In a responsive, yet caring manner, they decided that students would be asked to change T-shirts advertising things like alcohol and drugs, which are prohibited in school. However, if a student refused, his parents would be contacted. As a last resort, the student would be assigned to detention.

At Ethan Allen, Gayle uses her influence within a context of care regulated by justice in guiding the work of the site council. It is her responsibility to inform the council about school board policy.

G: We have a site based council which is the organization which our school system has gone to site based management.

And, we are into a lot of issues right now about power.

What do we have the authority and the legal, I guess authority, to delegate or give someone else that power.

And those are issues that we are still debating.

If it is school board policy, we know that the site will not have any decisions that should over-ride that.

In response to growing concerns with children's welfare in school, Gayle presented Ethan Allen with a plan to restructure. Gayle placed a great deal of emphasis on collecting and presenting the research backing this proposal. She conducted department meetings in a methodical and open manner allowing people to vent their frustration and their personal opinions about radically changing the school day. Gayle, in essence, acted as a "receptacle" for the facts and feelings that surfaced during the dialogue process. She called for reform as she reminded the staff that children were suffering from the inadequacies under the current school day plan and, indeed, they were at risk. We surely do not want "dead kids" she reminds the Social Studies department. Gayle creatively used emotion and cognition to shepherd people toward acceptance of the new plan.

It was within a context of care that Connie also administered at Greenland. She demonstrated the strongest ethic of justice most likely because it was strong part of their school culture. Connie would often review policies and procedures during faculty meetings and work closely with her administrative team in determining consequences for student infractions that were in keeping with district policy. However, when it came to application, Connie was one to consider the individual circumstances and adjust the policy accordingly. For example, because of his family circumstances and his superior performance during the year, the custodian's extended leave request each fall to go hunting is not questioned.

Managing athletic budget allocations is an important process at Greenland as each coach petitions and lobbies for his or her sports' needs for the following year. It is common knowledge that the gate receipts from football fund a large portion of the athletic budget. Working with the athletic director, Connie has established an equitable practice of favoring different sports during different years on an alternating basis. This is Connie's way of ensuring that larger sums of money are available to finance more costly needs, like a high-jump pit or track uniforms. The Greenland community seems satisfied with this system because they seem to understand that it is fair and equitable. They seem to understand that Connie is working on everyone's "dream" and theirs will come true eventually.

As is demonstrated through this analysis, to care is not to act by fixed rule. It is to act by variation, which is governed by affection and regard not only for the people involved but also for the situation. In each of the situations, the three principals act from a desire to render assistance with compassion governed by logic and justice.