

Why context matters: understanding the material conditions of school-based caring in Zambia

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This study utilized in-depth interviewing, participant observation, and student diaries completed by participants to examine the quality of teacher–student relationships at a low-cost private school in the townships of Ndola, Zambia. Amidst economic decline and the HIV/AIDS epidemic facing Zambia today, teachers and students developed strong relationships that differed from those found in government secondary schools and were shaped by the economic and social realities in the larger society. These caring relationships were facilitated by official school policy, deliberative spaces created for caring such as longer school hours and smaller class sizes, and strict oversight of teachers by the school administration. Teachers' efforts to provide students advice and resources related to the economic and health crises affecting their community resulted in the development of caring relationships that students noted were unique given their experiences in and exposure to government secondary schools. The findings of this study suggest that scholars of caring in the US and internationally should consider the material conditions of both students' and teachers' lives beyond the school environment in order to understand how caring relationships are structured, limited, and enabled in distinct moments by larger socioeconomic and political realities.

Keywords: educational caring; African education; comparative and international education

Over the past two decades, educational studies in the US have explored teacher caring (Noddings 1984), with recent attention on the need for cultural relevance in school-based caring (de Jesus and Gonzalez 2006; Thompson 1998; Valenzuela 1999). These studies, while often acknowledging the international origins of students, have largely focused on student achievement in the US educational context and educational innovations, such as smaller community schools, within it (de Jesus and Gonzalez 2006). This study seeks to explore school-based caring in an alternative secondary school in Ndola, Zambia, and suggests that the social and economic contexts of students' lives strongly inform the ways in which caring relationships are formed and understood.

This article draws on research from an alternative non-governmental school operating in a township, or marginalized area, of Ndola, Zambia, that served low-income youth. The rise of private and community schooling in Zambia over the past two decades has been a response to *declining* enrollment rates which are related to the

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adverse impacts of economic decline,¹ high unemployment, and increasing rates of HIV infection (17% of all adults).² Caring is defined in educational settings as a relational process in which both parties offer and receive something to/from the relationship. In the Zambian setting, caring is similarly seen as interactional, but goes beyond being simply a moral practice and involves teachers taking an active role in students' lives given the exigencies of the context – specifically economic insecurity and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. While proponents of caring theory have acknowledged and highlighted the role of context in contributing to caring relationships (Noddings 1992; Webb et al. 1993), application of the theory to international settings suggests that socioeconomic realities greatly structure and define the nature, content, and dimensions of such relationships between teachers and students.³

In particular, this study found that the small alternative school (Umutende)⁴ fostered what Valenzuela (1999) refers to as 'authentic caring' by creating strong reciprocal bonds between teachers and students. In this school, teachers were encouraged to provide caring through regular discussions about the danger of HIV and mitigating some of the adverse effects of economic austerity. These attempts resulted not only in student achievement evidenced by students' persistence in school in an educational setting where just 30% of eligible students attend secondary schools (UNESCO 2005), but also students' recognition that their school offered them stability when much of the rest of their lives remained uncertain. The caring relationships at the Umutende School that are discussed in this article disrupted students' notions of entrenched social inequality, which was frequently reproduced in Zambian government schools (Bajaj 2005). Teachers' and administrators' attention to the material conditions of their students' lives created an environment in which students could continue with schooling despite their low socioeconomic status.

Importantly, the unique forms of caring demonstrated by teachers reflect the institutional setting in which official school policy and practice facilitated these distinctive forms of interaction. Through the school's explicit focus on 'care' as a core principle, its monthly in-service trainings for teachers (which were not common in government schools), and through the school's structure, teachers played meaningful roles in students' lives beyond the classroom and the school gates. Many students noted visiting teachers at their homes and that these relationships were more like those found 'in a family.' For students struggling to stay in school and, in some cases, struggling to survive amidst rapidly changing household structures due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and widespread economic decline, material assistance provided by teachers could prove to be a critical intervention that greatly influenced their academic pursuits.

This article seeks to explore how caring relationships were formed at the Umutende School in Zambia, the nature and social context of such relationships, and the role of school policy in facilitating them. I argue that school policy communicated through frequent in-service trainings at the school, the deliberative space created through longer school hours and smaller class sizes that allowed for caring relationships to emerge, and strict oversight of teachers distinguished the Umutende School from nearby government secondary schools and explained why caring relationships were forged between students and teachers at this particular school.

Caring in educational research

In order to further explore the nature and dynamics of caring relationships at the Umutende School, it is important to first explore the origins of the concept of

school-based caring and its relevance for schools outside of the US. In the US, literature on caring and education emerged in the early 1980s (Gilligan 1982; Noddings 1984). Gilligan (1982) argued that the moral development of girls was rooted in an ethic of care rather than an ethic of rights or justice (Kohlberg and Kramer 1969) and advocated for attention to 'gendered moralities,' particularly with regard to schooling (Gilligan 1982). Noddings (1984) addressed the need for educators to engage students, families, and communities in a larger moral project based on trust and continuities between homes and schools. Offering a window into the ethical dimensions of schooling, Noddings (1988) further elaborates four components of caring in educational settings: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Through these four areas, teachers and students can create strong relationships, akin to parental ones, that exhibit the principles of empathy, caring, and trust.

Analyses of socioeconomic context have typically not been read alongside the literature on caring. Though Noddings (1992) does suggest that caring acts may be situational, and that the cared-for contributes to caring relationships, this literature has emphasized instead the relationship of caregiver to receiver. Based on their work in an urban American school, Webb et al. argue that when caring is decontextualized, or when situation is not considered, 'each group [parents, teachers, children, community] defines acting in the best interests of others without consideration of the others' perspectives and circumstances' (1993, 44). The sometimes misdirected efforts of well-intentioned teachers point to the need for culturally relevant caring approaches.

Contributing to the literature on caring and providing important insights for racially and linguistically diverse educational environments, several scholars have critiqued the absence of caring in American schools and how this neglects the needs of African-American (Thompson 1998), Latino/a (Valenzuela 1999), and Asian-American students (Lew 2004). Importantly, Thompson (1998) problematizes the assertion that the home is an idyllic environment to be modeled in school and argues that in addition to equipping young students of color with the ability to care, they also need the skills required to survive in a society still plagued by racism.⁵ Valenzuela (1999) highlights the detrimental impact of schooling that fails to recognize the cultural resources that students bring to the classroom and suggests engaging those resources to create greater continuity between home and school for Latino/a youth. Lew's (2004) work on Korean American high school students identifies the inadequate attention to students' needs and the absence of culturally competent caring from teachers in preventing their decision to drop out of school. The lack of culturally relevant caring and its impact on student achievement continues to be noted by scholars whose research examines low-income schools and communities, comprising primarily students of color, in the US.

Recent scholarship has also examined school-based caring in practice, and attempted to define different forms of caring in order to unmask 'pity' (de Jesus and Gonzalez 2006) and 'friendship' (Bartlett 2005) when disguised as caring. Differentiating between the types of caring relationships between young people and adults in schools, de Jesus and Gonzalez examine two small schools that serve low-income Puerto Rican students and conceptualize a theory of 'critical care' (2006, 409). According to the authors, critical caring prioritizes hard caring, or 'a form of caring characterized by supportive instrumental relationships and high academic expectations,' over soft caring, which lowers teachers' expectations of students based on a sense of pity for the learners' socio-economic condition (de Jesus and Gonzalez 2006, 413). Soft caring is similar to what Bartlett in her study

of Brazilian education terms a ‘friendship strategy,’ which temporarily equalized power relationships between teachers and students within the classroom, but failed to include the ‘critical dialogue envisioned in Freire’s democratic educational philosophy’ (2005, 355). The diversity of perspectives and contributions to theories of caring reflect the usefulness of the concept for educational settings in the US and beyond, and the need for further conceptualization of its multiple dimensions across settings.

American literature on caring offers a framework for understanding the quality of student–teacher relationships and how that quality impacts student achievement and student self-conception vis-à-vis their role in society. While recent scholarship has addressed the need for attention to the background of teachers and students, this article will discuss context as a determinant of the nature and dimensions of school-based caring. I posit that, by examining caring in an international setting characterized by extreme poverty and high HIV/AIDS rates, the social and economic dimensions of students’ and teachers’ decisions to engage in caring relationships become a salient area of inquiry. This expansion of caring is ultimately useful for the US and various international settings because it shows that such studies need to consider the material conditions of teachers and students in order to understand how caring is constructed and carried out in different places.⁶

Furthermore, this study attempts to weave together a study of school experiences, informed by the work of scholars of caring in schools (de Jesus and Gonzalez 2006; Noddings 1984; Thompson 1998; Valenzuela 1999), with an explicit framing of socioeconomic context, specifically economic decline and the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zambia. I argue that HIV/AIDS and economic decline significantly structure social exclusion in much the same way that race, class, and linguistic background do in the US (despite obvious differences in ascribed versus achieved characteristics). HIV/AIDS and economic status in Zambia – like race, class, or language in the US – do not offer an exhaustive list of determinative variables for their respective societies, but are historically and currently powerful forces in shaping social relations.

It is important to mention at the outset that in many studies of US educational contexts, the different ethnic and economic backgrounds of teachers versus students are often highlighted in debates on caring. In the case of the Umutende School in Zambia, students and teachers came from similar ethnic and not vastly different socioeconomic backgrounds (similar to Bartlett’s study in Brazil). Despite these differences, investigation into the nature of caring in distinctive settings can be useful since caring is a concept that could hardly be confined to one cultural setting, though it may assume different material manifestations in different locations and different moments in time, as the findings that follow will explore.

In this article, I contribute to the few studies of caring in international educational settings (Bartlett 2005; Katz 2005), by exploring an alternative donor-funded school that seeks to foster strong reciprocal relationships. The data presented in this article are grouped in two categories in terms of identifying how caring was manifested: (1) provision of information about HIV/AIDS, and (2) the material conditions of caring, both of which reflect the economic and health crises that shape lived reality in Zambia today. The exploration of the type of relationships fostered at the Umutende School, located on the very margins of the global capitalist system, offers educational scholars interested in caring insights into its contextual and situated nature.

Methods

In order to juxtapose a study of caring with a reading of the social and economic context, the methods utilized in this study sought to uncover the meaning that participants made of student–teacher relationships in one Zambian school vis-à-vis government schools. The data presented emerge from a larger study of alternative and government schools in Ndola, Zambia, conducted from 2003–04. Employing a primarily qualitative approach, this study utilized observations, interviews, focus groups, participant observation, student diaries, and surveys with over 500 respondents, including administrators, teachers, parents, students, and alumni of government secondary schools and the Umutende private school. During the 10 months of fieldwork from July 2003 to August 2004, I lived in the teachers' housing compound at the Umutende School and served as a volunteer teacher in the primary school. As a member of the school community, I was able to observe daily assemblies, special events, and build rapport with parents, teachers, students, and alumni of the school. The findings presented here mainly emerge from observations of and interviews with students, teachers, and alumni of the Umutende School, and student diaries completed by Umutende and government school students.

Student diaries offered some of the richest data on caring at the Umutende School and the lack of it at government schools. Pairs of siblings in secondary school, where one attended the Umutende School and the other a government secondary school, were selected to participate in a three-month diary-interview process. Eleven pairs of siblings completed the diaries, which consisted of nine structured assignments and five 'free-writes' where students could choose the topic, and each participant was interviewed midway in the three-month period.

An inductive data analysis and interpretation strategy that was rooted in grounded theory was utilized (Strauss and Corbin 1990). I regularly reviewed interviews, observations, written texts produced by respondents, and documents in order to identify themes emerging from the data and begin to identify categories for open coding. I maintained thorough fieldnotes and every three months, I reviewed all the data collected in order to draw preliminary conclusions, which I submitted to tests of validity such as member-checking and triangulation (Lincoln and Guba 2000; Stake 1995). Those themes that were found to be significant and representative are presented in this article, with excerpts from data offered to elucidate these themes. Comparative data between government secondary schools and the Umutende School, while minimizing socioeconomic differences by controlling for household factors, suggested that the alternative private school did indeed offer a unique environment for students characterized, in part, by high-quality caring relationships between students and teachers.

Zambian education

Kolala High School is believed to be the best public or government high school in Ndola with its massive two-story layout where some 2000 pupils attend daily. I'm told by one student that, during colonial times, when schooling was segregated, Kolala was built for the children of white colonial officers, and he says that is why the school campus was built so well. Walking further into the school, nearly all the classroom windows are broken, pieces of desks lay scattered throughout classrooms, and slogans such as 'save water, drink beer' are written in marker on the walls.

Continuing down the main road and then turning left at the military barracks, one passes the Ndola prison and immediately next to the prison is Chilemba High School. There is a bus stop on the side of the road between the prison and the high school; those who take the bus there call their stop 'prisons.' Several youths are congregating at the gate of the high school, also a 2000-pupil-plus school or 'super grade one school' as one teacher tells me schools with more than 1000 pupils are classified as by the government. The car slows down as a schoolgirl crosses the street in front of us; there are no designated crosswalks anywhere in sight.

Chilemba is a large high school with lots of open space. On a visit there, the deputy head of the school shows me the industrial arts area where students are doing carpentry and metal work. He also shows me the art rooms, which have the words 'men' and 'women' written above two doorways and stalls inside. He explains that this is because they used to be bathrooms for the staff. One huge classroom has nearly a hundred students in it and it is an outdoor-type arrangement with just a roof covering. He says these classrooms are temporary until brick ones are built for the excess students. The deputy head teacher also shows me the library from the outside since there is a large padlock on the door prohibiting entry; he says there are hardly any books, which is echoed at Kolala, where a teacher there told me that when students are sent to the library to do research, the books that are there are nearly 40 or 50 years old.

Senior teacher Mr. Simwanza later introduces me to a twelfth-grade class that he says is 'seriously over enrolled.' There are 86 pupils in the classroom and there is no space to even walk except a couple of feet of distance between the first row of desks and the blackboard. The students seem to be virtually sitting on top of each other. A group of loud boys in the back are yelling things as I walk in and the teacher has trouble quieting them. In the newspaper, I see further evidence of the need for more high schools; an article reports that of the 75,000 grade nine students who passed their exams this year, which constituted half of those who took the exam, only about 36,000 were offered places in government senior secondary schools due to limited capacity.

After the meeting with students, I go to Mr. Simwanza's office, a tiny room with just enough space for two chairs and a desk and that also doubles as the careers office. Mr. Simwanza is in his mid-30s and has been teaching for about 10 years. He notes the meager wages that teachers earn and even retrieves his pay slip from his pocket to show me that after taxes, each month he earns 711,000 kwacha (approximately US\$145). (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 15 May 2004)

In order to better situate the data on school-based caring at an unusual private school, it is important to understand the current state of public education in Zambia today. Some of the major barriers to educational expansion in Zambia over the past four decades, as indicated in the excerpt from my fieldnotes above, have been the government's inability to expand secondary schooling to meet the demand, under- and inconsistently paid teachers, and the unequal nature of education through a system in which the majority of students cannot complete secondary schooling due to the limited capacity of schools and competitive entrance exams (Serpell 1993).

Since the mid-1980s, the Zambian government has reduced its spending on social services, including education. Government secondary schools in Zambia, once fully funded under the socialist policies of the Kaunda regime (1964–91), reflect neglect related to the economic decline of the past two decades, which in turn are related to the deleterious effects of structural adjustment policies and drastic reductions in social spending. Once accounting for 6.2% of a much larger national budget in 1975 (AED 2007), educational expenditures now comprise just 2.3% of Zambia's Gross National Product (Ogawa 2004). Secondary students now must pay 'user fees' to attend public schools and poor oversight of these schools has led to noted

corruption by teachers and administrators, resulting in declining educational standards (Carmody 2004).

Once a high-status and well-remunerated profession, Zambian teachers, in order to provide for their families, now often must supplement their income in licit and sometimes illicit ways (Radio Icengelo 2004). Examples often given by respondents of teachers supplementing their income included school-related activities such as charging students for lessons after school (and sometimes not covering the required material during classtime to encourage students to attend these extra lessons), and out-of-school activities, such as taking on additional jobs that may result in their absence. Poor oversight in government schools and lengthy processes for dismissing teachers provided job security for those teachers who decided to engage in such practices that diminished educational quality in government schools. Aside from financial advantage sought from students, reports of teachers engaging in sexual relationships with secondary school students have also been cited as common in Zambia (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2002) as well as in other sub-Saharan African settings (Bledsoe and Gage 1994; Vavrus 2003). Perhaps as a result, Zambian teachers have also been hard hit by HIV/AIDS; in the year 2003 alone, 1400 teachers died of AIDS-related illnesses, leaving government schools understaffed while the economic downturn has prevented the hiring of new teachers despite the fact that many trained teachers are currently unemployed (Zambian Ministry of Education [ZMOE] 2003).

Amidst this backdrop, the notion of school-based caring and creating high-quality relationships between teachers and students was largely absent in large, overcrowded government secondary schools in Zambia (Bajaj 2005). These public institutions were characterized by absentee teachers, overcrowded and decrepit classrooms, and frequent corruption in admissions and advancement (Carmody 2004). Many respondents noted the prevalence of corruption in secondary schools where students with lower scores on national exams could bribe a headmaster to secure a spot in a school (displacing a student with a higher score) given the competitive nature of admissions in a system where state institutions can accommodate just half of the students who pass their exams. Despite the localized ability of headmasters to make enrollment decisions, other instances of corruption were related to the centralized nature of school administration as mentioned earlier wherein negligent or corrupt teachers could not be dismissed without lengthy investigation from officials based in the country's capital.

With a localized administration on-site, the Umutende School had stricter oversight of teachers and administrators. Hence, the caring relationships at Umutende School described in the remainder of this article represent a significant departure from the practices at Zambian government secondary schools and represent a choice by Umutende teachers – facilitated by the deliberate environment created by the school – among a range of possible behaviors, some of which may have been more lucrative and financially beneficial than working at the alternative school.

Contextualized caring: a case study of the Umutende School

To get to the Umutende School, we turn right onto a bumpy road, which seems to signal entry into a more marginalized part of town. The houses closely lining the sides of the road, which I am told were built by the government for low-income families, are brightly colored and some have wooden planks constructed to cover the front façade of the house. Small children are playing in the dirt path that divides the road from the

houses and there are many people on both sides of the road walking, carrying or selling items such as vegetables and second-hand clothes. As we pass, a traffic officer is examining a pair of sneakers from an array of shoes laid out by the proprietor on a large cloth next to the road; he holds a pair up in the sunlight, checking the size and quality of his potential purchase.

We turn right and continue past a large, gated utility company office on the right and maize fields as far as the eye can see on the left. We turn right onto an unnamed road and at the corner is a large, dilapidated warehouse that I'm told used to be a supermarket, but was shut down in 1996 and the building has yet to be reopened or sold. Down the road, there are several new looking buildings on the left side and their signs indicate that one is the Salvation Army community center offering sewing and other vocational courses, and others are Christian churches of different denominations. Outside of one building, choir members are rehearsing songs. A barefoot child runs across the road rolling a tire to the other side where there are several houses and unpaved dirt roads leading further into the township.

The entrance to the Umutende School appears on the right, with a sign nearly hidden by the flowering purple bougainvilleas that adorn the gates. The primary and secondary school for boys is located within these gates. Continuing past another speed bump one can see in front that the paved road ends and turns into a dirt road that leads into the 'downtown' area of the township, constituted by a few nightclubs (that are paradoxically open all day), liquor stores, a butchery, and an outdoor market. Before the end of the paved road on the left-hand side is the pedestrian entrance to the teachers' residences and the girls' school campus. (Excerpt from fieldnotes, 17 August 2003)

Founded in 1992, the Umutende School seeks to provide high-quality and low-cost schooling for impoverished students in Ndola, Zambia. The school offers the nationally mandated syllabus along with additional periods for community service, agricultural production, interfaith prayers, and instruction in various values espoused by the school, such as peace, non-violence, cooperation, teamwork, integrity, compassion, social justice, and caring. New teachers participated in a one-time course that met weekly for six months that reviewed elements of the school's mission and philosophy. Teachers were also given assignments for them to consider ways to incorporate the school's values into their lessons, classrooms, and practices. Additionally, day-long monthly in-service trainings were held to refresh teachers' knowledge of and commitment to the school's values (Bajaj 2005). These courses and trainings were not required at any government school studied. Table 1 demonstrates some of the differences in both content and structure that existed between the Umutende School and government schools.

In addition to the components of the Umutende School highlighted in Table 1, the school's structure facilitated certain elements that advocates of caring in schools suggest: small school and class size, continuity of teachers throughout grades, one transition from primary to secondary school, and teacher involvement in students' lives outside school (Noddings 1984).

The family structure of students is one crucial component of understanding why caring relationships were so important for students at the Umutende School. The uncertainty experienced by Zambian youth largely related to the frequent death of family members given the high infection rate of HIV/AIDS and the economic hardship often caused by these deaths. In Zambia, more than 300 people die per day due to HIV/AIDS-related illnesses (BBC 2003) and the average life expectancy rate has dropped from 54 years to 37 years based on high mortality rates nationwide (UNAIDS 2004). Additionally, 17% of Zambian children under the age of 15 have

Table 1. Differences in Ndola secondary schools.

	Ndola secondary schools (public)	Umutende School (private)
Curricular content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National curriculum • Twice-monthly assemblies with announcements • Occasional teacher in-service trainings • Teacher qualifications: national teacher certificate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National + values curriculum • Daily assemblies on leadership and values • Monthly one-day teacher in-service trainings • Teacher qualifications: national teacher certificate plus six-month course at Umutende School
Structure of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government funding • Grades 8–12 • Coeducational schools • Admission exams • School size: 1000–2000 • Class size: 50–100 • School day: 8 am–1 pm or 12:30–5 pm, Monday–Friday • High teacher absenteeism – authorities based in capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor funding • Grades 1–12 • Single sex education • Admission interviews • School size: 500 • Class size: 20–40 • School day: 6:30 am–5 pm, Monday–Saturday • Low teacher absenteeism – strict local oversight

Note: This table is a modified version of the one found in Bajaj (2008).

lost one or both parents and this adversely affects school enrollment rates (World Bank 2004).

While not singular, students' household realities were colored by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and economic decline in Zambia. The information about family composition from diaries, interviews, and surveys revealed an increasingly common phenomenon among Zambian families: the presence of orphaned children. According to Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa, 44% of Zambian households have taken in orphans in recent years (cited in HRW 2002). Many young people and adults in this study cited the responsibility their family has assumed for caring for cousins or extended family members when parents are sick with AIDS or have died from the disease. At the Umutende School, 71% of students had between six and 14 members living in their household, and 29% had five or fewer individuals living in their home on a regular basis. In terms of household composition, 27% reported not living with their father, 11% reported not living with their mother, and 9% lived with neither parent. Instead, these students lived with their grandparents, aunts, uncles, or elder siblings.

While I have discussed the unique aspects of this school elsewhere (Bajaj 2005, 2008), for the purposes of this article, I will highlight two primary ways in which caring was manifested: HIV/AIDS-related advice, and caring as related to the material realities of students' lives. The household realities of students shaped their lives and teachers' willingness to go beyond the classroom to address the hardships (through advice and material assistance) occurring outside the school was identified as a primary way that caring was manifested at the school. Both avenues for 'caring' demonstrated by teachers at the Umutende School responded to specific school policies and the conditions of Zambian society and resulted in a school environment that, to some degree, sheltered students from the uncertainties in their lives.

Advice for HIV/AIDS prevention

Caring was manifested by teachers and administrators of the Umutende School through the provision of advice on a regular basis, as a matter of formal school policy, on topics related to academics as well as living in a setting characterized by high HIV infection rates and extreme poverty. In this section, I will focus on HIV/AIDS prevention advice since it represented important information that students rarely got elsewhere and which was often absent in large government schools. In daily assemblies and in classes, the notion of giving advice to students was paramount. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, students were given a speech by one of the administrators that provided students with advice on topics ranging from relationships to family life to their futures.

For the young women, there was distinct gender-specific advice on a variety of topics that related in seemingly straightforward ways to the nature of the public health and economic crises in Zambia at the time. For example, in Ndola, some 20% of young women aged 15–19 and some 40% of young women aged 20–24 are estimated to be HIV positive (Lagarde et al. 2001). HIV rates were generally linked to cross-generational relationships between young women and older men, often fueled by the former's economic insecurity. Perhaps obviously, the areas of instruction ranged from the need for girls to stay in school and to not being swayed by pressure to enter into dependent relationships with men that often resulted in HIV contraction. The following excerpt from a school assembly offers a glimpse of the advice related to HIV/AIDS that was regularly given to young girls at the Umutende School and which was conspicuously absent at government schools:

You are growing up young ladies. ... Without you having a good education, you become a pawn, you fall into the hands of a man, and you become a toy. Without education, [young women] depend on men to give them five or ten thousand kwacha (US\$1–2), even selling [their] body. ... Men come and go; they see [women] as cheap objects. ... So young ladies, be careful. Don't take money from anybody other than your parents, your relatives, or friends of the family. The more young women take the money, the more their appetite for money increases and they are willing to sleep with anyone for money and you know the problems that arise. I want to give you this message because ... many young women today [are being destroyed] in Zambia, in Africa, because there are no jobs. (22 June 2004)

These speeches offered students strong advice on issues of social importance and demonstrated an ethic of caring by teachers and administrators. This advice on topics related to cross-generational relationships was noted by respondents as particularly absent in the home environment for reasons relating to social taboos involving discussions about sex and HIV/AIDS. Discussions of HIV/AIDS were often stifled in homes, churches, and other institutions by the heavy stigma around the disease (BBC 2004). These talks were also notably absent in government schools, although individual teachers might take on advising on an ad hoc basis in their classrooms.

The deliberate space in the school day which the Umutende School created for giving advice related to larger issues, such as HIV/AIDS, did not exist to the same extent in government schools. Restricted by their large numbers and shorter hours, government schools in Ndola generally had assemblies weekly or twice monthly. For example, a student at Kolala government high school mentioned the assemblies and their biblical focus without any link to students' daily lives:

Assembly is ... twice in a month, or if we are lucky maybe three or four times. They just give us instructions for the week [and] ask us to behave well. We have a sermon on Wednesday, like a reading, a prayer from any member of staff. We pray, sing the national anthem, then read some psalms from the scriptures; the head makes announcements, and then we go to class.⁷ (Interview, 3 April 2004)

While the lectures at Umutende took on a sermon-like quality and scriptures from different traditions were sometimes referenced similar to government school assemblies, they regularly addressed practical issues, such as alcohol consumption or sexual relationships as related to HIV/AIDS that students said would neither be addressed by parents nor by pastors.

By complementing the role of parents, and perhaps adding to it by discussing topics considered taboo in parent-child relationships, teachers at Umutende were able to offer important advice related to students' awareness of HIV/AIDS pandemic. One ninth-grade student noted the impact of HIV/AIDS on young people and how teachers tried to incorporate information about the disease regularly into their lessons:

Teachers at our school tell us about the dangers of [HIV/AIDS]. Before every lesson, they tell us what's happening. In other schools, they just come, teach and go, not even sparing a few minutes to tell the children about what's happening to make them aware. (Interview with Alex, 30 June 2004)

The HIV/AIDS advice was often linked to future goals and to safeguarding oneself against the disease. Students were encouraged to develop goals and were given advice on how to reach them, steering away from activities that increased the risk of contracting HIV. In addition to counseling students about confronting the health crises in society, teachers and administrators advised students about life in an uncertain economy. Practical advice related to money management for young women sought to keep them from entering relationships with 'sugar daddies' and risking HIV infection.

Sugar daddies, while usually wealthier business men in town, were also found among male teachers in government secondary schools who enticed young women with money or educational advantages in exchange for sex. Student respondents reported instances of male teachers (since most secondary school teachers in Zambia are male) approaching young women and little disciplinary action taken against teachers in the case of such advances or resulting relationships. For example, a twelfth-grade student at Chilemba government high school related the following process by which teachers and pupils become involved and the risk of acquiring AIDS when this happens: 'The teachers mingle with pupils. When I was in grade 10, they found this biology teacher - he even died last year - he was caught with a grade eight girl in his office having sex' (Bajaj 2009, 133).

Sexual relationships between students and teachers, whatever their cause, include power asymmetries that increased the risk involved in such encounters since teachers are one of the groups hardest hit by HIV/AIDS in Zambia as discussed earlier in this article. In government schools, the absence of explicit information about the disease, which an estimated 17% of Zambians are infected with (UNAIDS 2004), and risky activities that may occur *within* schools without strict adherence to guidelines by officials, suggest that the caring bonds developed at Umutende are indeed unique and related to both the content (lectures, advice-giving, values-focus) and structure (small class/school size, close monitoring of teacher conduct, external funding) of the private school.

Student responses to advice

In addition to lectures, advice was also given in class before or after lessons at Umutende, and students and alumni highlighted in their responses that both types of advisement helped them in their lives in school and beyond. Students reported favorable responses to the lectures and general advice-giving of teachers and administrators at the Umutende School because of the focus on practical issues, such as HIV/AIDS. In a focus group discussion with graduates of Umutende, alumni commented that the advice they received from teachers was among the things they liked best about the school. For example, Joseph, now a university student, made the following observation:

Teachers could advise me on anything; you could ask them for any advice apart from schoolwork, they would give it. They also gave the feeling that you could even feel good when coming to school; that these are people who care for me. They would give advice on HIV/AIDS, about planning the future, about what courses to do – that kind of advice. (Alumni focus group, 25 April 2004)

Many students felt that giving advice expressed their teachers' concern for them. The close relationship fostered by school policy, content, and structure, they noted, created opportunities formally and informally for teachers to give such advice and differed from government schools.

The regular advice given in assemblies and in class often related to life outside of school and dealt with equipping students with information that would facilitate their coping with the health and economic crises in society. Students generally viewed this as an expression of caring on the part of their teachers and, whether or not they put this advice into practice, they recognized it as a distinctive feature of the Umutende School. Advice-giving that related to the social and economic contexts of students' lives facilitated what many respondents designated a caring and home-like atmosphere at the school.

Material conditions of caring

By examining caring from the perspective of social relationships rather than from a psychological or emotional perspective, the economic conditions of students' lives become an important factor in student–teacher relationships (Bartlett 2007). Caring can still be seen as an emotional and moral process, but one that is intimately linked to students' material realities because the nature and practices involved in these reciprocal relationships go beyond the emotional so that teachers play an important role in students' lives outside of the classroom. Students cited Umutende teachers' willingness to not just impart knowledge, but also become actively involved in students' lives. This, they believed, further reflected the school's emphasis on the value of caring. HIV/AIDS advice, as mentioned above, was one component of getting involved in students' lives, but offering material support and resources to students to facilitate their persistence in school was also often mentioned by respondents. The roles discussed included those associated with the caring one expects in the home, but does not usually find in large Zambian government high schools today.

The differences in caring manifested by teachers at Umutende as compared with teacher practices in government secondary schools were marked. Student respondents from government schools consistently highlighted the lack of care they experienced at

their schools, in large part due to the crowded nature and noted corruption prevalent therein. A common theme that emerged from the data was the opportunism of government teachers, facilitated through the limited ability of headmasters to dismiss erring teachers and motivated by low salaries and poor working conditions. Students repeatedly discussed the impact of this situation on their learning experience, and the following quote highlights this theme:

[In government schools], teachers don't care. They only like money. They are just there to teach, and then they go just like that. They don't care that, 'let me teach this person so that he can understand and he can write properly in the exam.' No, they don't even care. I can even say, ... he doesn't care what he is doing unless he's just being paid. The other day, our teacher was saying that education is for the rich people. We said, 'Sir, how can you say that education is just for the rich people?' That's when I knew that these people just like money. (Bridget, grade 12 pupil at Kolala High School, individual interview, 6 May 2004)

The passage above highlights a common feature in Zambian government schools as discussed earlier wherein teachers encourage students to attend fee-based extra lessons after school to learn the required material for exams. This practice supplements teachers' low salaries and disadvantages those students who cannot afford these extra lessons on top of the school fees that are required even for public schooling (approximately US\$60 per year as noted in Table 1). At the time of this research, the government had not enforced any policy to stop teachers from offering these fee-based private lessons after school. At Umutende School, however, administrators strictly prohibited teachers from offering extra lessons and a policy pinned up in the administration office noted that both teachers offering such lessons and students soliciting them would be punished with expulsion from the school.

There were numerous ways in which Umutende students reported teachers demonstrating concern for them, and these instances emerged consistently in the data. Many of these examples included teachers acting to mitigate the economic hardships that students may be facing rather than exacerbating them through corrupt practices. For example, a 12-year-old seventh-grader, Abraham, felt that teachers cared about him as a parent would because of their generosity toward students:

I remember one time, I lost my money. I told my teacher and he gave me some money from his own pocket. One day, my friend did not come [to school] with food. So the teacher asked if we could give him some. We each gave him [some food] and the teacher also contributed. (Interview, 3 April 2004)

The willingness of teachers to assist with students' problems related to money and food demonstrated the type of caring that the Umutende School encouraged as evidenced in monthly in-service trainings where teachers were encouraged to get involved in students' lives and go out of their way to care for them. Annie, a 12-year-old also in seventh grade, noted a similar experience that she believed demonstrated caring among her teachers at Umutende:

I have to cook food for myself since I'm told I'm a big girl. I can't expect my aunt and my mother to cook for me. One day, I woke up late and I just came to school without having my breakfast and without anything to carry [for lunch], just transport money. It was on Wednesday when we were writing a test. So Mosa went and told Ms. Phiri that I was hungry and she told her, 'Tell her to go to my place at break and she should ask my sister to give her any food that she has cooked.' I went with Mosa to Ms. Phiri's

place. There I told her sister and she gave me food. So I was very happy. (Interview, 29 April 2004)

The household realities of students, as indicated by Annie, often necessitate that children look after their own needs related to cooking and packing lunch at a young age.

In the case of orphans who may go to live in large, extended family households, their needs may be even greater if biological children are given preference over nieces or nephews amidst scarce household resources. For example, seventh-grader Gladys was 10 years old when she was orphaned, reportedly because both of her parents died from AIDS in 2003.⁸ She commented in an interview:

When my mom was in the hospital, I told my teacher. She listened to me. When my mom passed, my aunty came to get me and my sister at school and we went home. When we came back, sometimes when I did not have food, the [teachers] used to assist me. (Interview, 29 April 2004)

While sharing food or money was cited by students as a demonstration of caring by their teachers at Umutende, older students mentioned other expressions of caring, such as inquiring about absences and taking care of sick students. Teachers were encouraged at teacher meetings and in-service trainings to develop and sustain strong relationships with students and to check in with them in the case of absences. One 10th-grader, Robert, noted, 'When you are absent from school, they will come and find out why you were absent. They are always asking if we've got any problems at home' (interview, 24 June 2004).

This contrasts with the experiences of current and former government school students, who believe that teachers at these schools do not care about their pupils. As one former government school student argued, 'government schools are just too open. There are too many in class, so it's easy for somebody to [skip class]. And some teachers don't even know the pupils' names' (interview with Owen, 23 June 2004). A former Kolala High School student shared a similar belief, saying:

Somebody can miss school for one month and no one will say anything. If you don't like the subject or the teacher, you can just walk out and after he has taught, you can come back in. The teacher won't do anything. (Interview, 28 June 2004)

For students, keeping track of pupils and finding out why they are not attending school was considered an aspect of caring that was only demonstrated at the Umutende School. The contrast between the student-teacher relationships at Umutende and nearby government schools is stark and can be attributed to the better working conditions provided to teachers, smaller class sizes, and other structural elements of the school.

One factor facilitating teacher performance and adherence to the school's policies and values was strict oversight. The administration of the small private school was located on-site in comparison to government schools where headmasters lack control over personnel changes and district and national officials were located hundreds of miles away. The effect of closer supervision at Umutende was that teachers were unable to 'relax,' as noted by a teacher Mr. Kantanshi, and had to perform in order to keep their jobs. This feature of the Umutende School was noted as positive by both parents and students though it made for a long and intense work day for teachers. In a parent discussion group, Mr. Chilanshi mentioned this point saying that:

During [school] hours, the teacher is busy teaching. He is not allowed to go outside and have a chat with somebody. At a government school, I can come to you [and] you leave the class for at least one hour. That one hour that you are staying is a period [in] which you are supposed to teach something. In this school, they don't allow [that]. (Umutende parent focus group, 17 April 2004)

In my own observations at government schools, I noticed one day that during a class period of 45 minutes, the teacher attended to four different interruptions at the door, and he may have even minimized the number of interruptions due to my presence as an observer. At the same school, I observed another teacher who went to the door three times during a class period. In contrast, at the Umutende School, visitors were not allowed to enter the premise of the Umutende School unless they had proper approval; a large sign at the entrance gate read, 'In the interest of educational efficiency, members of the public are disallowed from entering classrooms and corridors and conducting business of any kind with staff during working hours without the principal's prior permission.' The intentional practice of reducing interruptions contributed to teachers' continuous presence in the classroom during their lessons at Umutende. Concomitantly, the ability to 'care' for students' needs was facilitated by this constant presence.

Umutende alumni

Alumni of the school also cited the caring relationships with teachers and administrators as a memorable feature of their schooling experience and one that, in some cases, lasted beyond their years at the school. One graduate of the school who was studying at the University of Zambia in Lusaka, Geoffrey, discussed how caring was manifested for both students and for their own families at home:

Another incident I can point out was when my father was very sick and he was supposed to be taken to the hospital. [An administrator] noticed something in me and she asked me why I wasn't looking fine. I explained. So she helped me to take my father to the hospital. This also demonstrates that parental care and it shows that teachers at Umutende School try by all means to extend whatever they can offer even to that level. [They do] not only offer academics, but they also get into our own lives. They try by all means to become part of us. ... This demonstrates a relationship with parental care. Even though they are not my biological parents, there is still that care. (Interview, 23 July 2004)

The additional effort required to 'notice' students' problems and offer some type of material assistance required that teachers be involved in students' lives. The creation of a close-knit social setting where students and teachers had strong bonds based on caring rather than on financial exploitation appears to have a strong impact on students' lives and visions for their futures. Geoffrey, for example, studied education and returned to teach at the Umutende School in 2007.

Much of the assistance provided by Umutende teachers indicated that they had greater access to resources in order to be able to provide food, money, or transportation to students in need. In interviewing teachers at government secondary schools and at Umutende, however, salaries were found to be comparable – the main difference being the consistency with which Umutende teachers were paid versus the many instances of frozen or delayed salaries in government schools due to national budget crises (UNESCO 2005). Aside from regular payment of salaries, the Umutende

School also provided teachers with subsidized housing, small plots for subsistence farming and tuition waivers for teachers' children. As a result, teachers were better able to provide assistance to students in need. Government school teachers, with larger class sizes and no deliberate emphasis placed on forging caring relationships, for reasons that can be inferred, chose not to engage voluntarily and in any consistent manner with students' lives outside of school.

The curricular and structural elements communicated through school policy facilitated caring relationships in the Umutende School and the absence of those elements appeared to limit the same in government schools. While some government school respondents mentioned occasional positive experiences with teachers, such as one student who was chosen to attend a UNICEF meeting in the capital, Lusaka, with a sympathetic teacher, the majority of interview and diary responses painted a picture of opportunism and a lack of care by teachers. This may, in part, be due to this study's explicit focus on students from lower income backgrounds. Had middle- or higher class students been interviewed, especially those who could access extra lessons or other financially related advantages, perhaps a different image of teacher caring in government schools would have emerged.

Discussion: 'hard hearts' and how to understand the provision of caring

Traditional community structures have weakened in the face of structural adjustment, economic retrenchment, and reduced social spending – particularly through the elimination of government subsidies for health, education, or basic foodstuffs – at a time when the HIV/AIDS epidemic is leaving an increasing number of children orphaned (Kayizzi-Mugerwa 2001; Kelly 1999; Saasa 2002; Wade 2004). One respondent in this study noted, 'I think the many problems which people are going through are making their hearts very hard.' The growing inequalities in society were found to manifest themselves in government secondary schools where corrupt and unequal practices were rampant (Bajaj 2005). On the other hand, the caring provided at the Umutende School, facilitated by the school's unique content and structure and its emphasis on fostering caring relationships, contributed to the persistence of students in school and offered them a sense of stability (whether real or perceived).

Literature on caring developed largely in US settings, should, perhaps obviously, be applied with care to Zambian realities. Though arguably, the US has experienced significant income polarization and stagnation of real wage growth for major sections of the population in recent decades (Pollin 2003), Zambia experienced significant economic contraction and a public health crisis of HIV that has lowered the average life expectancy of Zambians to under 40 years (UNDP 2007). In this setting, school-based caring practices that went beyond the duties commonly associated with most teachers included advice and material assistance to cope with the daily exigencies of survival and were even more striking given teachers' limited resources to provide such care. Teachers came from similar ethnic backgrounds as their students and the cultural mismatch, as discussed in US literature on school-based caring for students of color, was not a significant issue. Instead, the economic differential, albeit slight, when coupled with deliberate messages by the school to offer material assistance and advice, proved to be a salient difference between teachers and students. Of course, the American literature on caring, as I have argued above, is most relevant in modeling the explanatory power of exploring student–teacher relationships and the influence that caring, when contextually appropriate, can have on students' persistence in school and achievement.

While the utility of schooling, much less school-based caring, amidst larger crises of HIV/AIDS and extreme poverty may be questioned, it is important to note that regardless of its actual value, formal education still holds tremendous symbolic value for Zambians who were long denied and limited access under British colonial rule (Carmody 2004). As such, many youth continue to seek out educational opportunities and their experiences in schools offer them an understanding of social structures, institutions, and relationships. It is questionable whether the caring practices utilized by teachers will mitigate the adverse impacts of Zambia's marginalized position in the global capitalist economy. However, students who experience authentic school-based caring seem better equipped to face their uncertain futures with models of social relationships not based on corruption and exploitation as their counterparts in government schools are socialized into. In the case study of an alternative school presented here, teachers and administrators deliberately sought to develop a community where interactions were characterized by 'authentic caring.'

Schools in the US and internationally may also face similar conditions as those described in Zambia, suggesting the relevance of structure and setting for further studies of school-based caring. As Thompson (1998) critiqued previous literature on caring as colorblind and advocated greater attention to race and ethnicity in schools, I similarly argue that many studies of caring have been 'context-blind' and that consideration of the larger social, economic, and political structures that surround schools are important to understanding what happens within them. At the Umutende School in Zambia, caring relationships consisted of the provision of information related to HIV and attention to students' material needs through assistance with food, money, or support often in the absence of parents' or guardians' ability to provide such.

By looking beyond examples and debates of caring in US schools, we see that caring practices may vary radically by setting. Accordingly, it becomes necessary to avoid categorizing caring as solely an emotional process, and situate it instead as a social interaction that is intrinsically linked to the material realities of both students and teachers (Bartlett 2007). Repositioning caring from emotional or psychological work to examining the larger social and economic conditions which structure, limit, and enable caring relationships between teachers and students shifts the focus from universalizing and essentializing caring experiences to a more sophisticated analysis of the possibilities for diverse and contextualized forms of school-based caring.

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Notes

1. Although once considered a middle-income country (1960s and 1970s), according to recent reports (UNDP 2004), 65% of Zambia's 11 million residents now live on less than US\$1 per day.
2. UNAIDS (2004) reports that Zambia's HIV infection rate is 17% of the adult population.
3. It is important to clarify my use of 'context' in this article. A robust debate exists in the field of anthropology about the term. Anthropologists, such as Malinowski (1923/1938)

and later Firth (1957), used the terms ‘context of culture’ and ‘context of situation,’ respectively to discuss how meaning was made through language based on cultural and situational factors in the settings under study. More recently, Dilley has highlighted the politics of defining context and argues that instead of a fixed definition of context, ‘we must never lose sight of the fact that a claim about context is precisely that – an articulation concerning a set of connections and disconnections thought to be relevant to a specific agent that is socially and historically situated, and to a particular purpose’ (2002, 454). The interdisciplinary nature of this research project and my disciplinary training led me to foreground frames of historical and political development understood in dynamic relationship to the social, cultural, and economic realities of the respondents. No doubt, as suggested by Dilley, the definition and description of ‘context’ offered here is fluid and open to differential interpretations.

4. All schools and respondents in this study have been assigned pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.
5. Similar to Thompson (1998), I found that the home environments of Umutende students were often far from supportive, safe, and nurturing. Hence, I acknowledge that some homes and families of the students in this study had authoritarian structures and violence, but refer to the aspect of the home or family environment cultivated in the Umutende School that focused more on safety, connectedness, and protection as provided by teachers and administrators.
6. Caring literature, while elaborated primarily in the US schooling context, provides information about schooling dynamics that are common to formal schools, but also leaves room for specificity. As such, caring theorists do not limit their claims to American schools and argue for attention to context. This study attempts to show how applying the theory to a Zambian school can shed light on the differentiated ways that teacher–student relationships develop when located on the very periphery of the world system (Wallerstein 1984).
7. Former Zambian President Frederick Chiluba declared Zambia a ‘Christian country’ in 1991. Government schools often reflect this integration of religion into public institutions by having readings from Christian religious texts. While Christians are a religious majority in Zambia, there is a substantial Muslim minority and groups that practice traditional African religious often syncretized with Christian beliefs (Phiri 2003).
8. Many children are orphaned by AIDS-related deaths in Zambia. The Zambian Ministry of Education has placed the current figure of AIDS orphans under age 17 at 800,000 (ZMOE 2003).

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