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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Stories of Caring School Leadership*. In this excerpt, a story about the power coaching with care is told.

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52. Coaching With Care

—Told by a partner of an education leadership development organization

My work involves training school leaders to coach teachers through the process of building a positive and productive classroom as well as a school culture of high expectations, support, and care. A session early in my career as a coach stands out as an example of the urgency of developing these environments early in young students' academic careers.

As part of her coaching training, a beginning principal and I were observing a first-grade teacher during her morning routine. The teacher had given her students an assignment, and we were paying close attention to her actions and interactions as she made her way through the classroom, checking in on students as they worked. Although caring and attentive, she dedicated a disproportionately low amount of attention to one of the students, a non-neurotypical child of color. As I observed her, she seemed to avoid him, taking little time to connect or acknowledge his work, or even his presence as a member of this class. It became quickly clear that the teacher, who surely would have been genuinely disturbed and shocked to have it brought to her attention, did not see this student's potential and was allowing her low expectations of him to become a rationale to avoid any kind of meaningful engagement.

Much of the coaching we do involves putting an earpiece on the teacher and coaching through a walkie-talkie. This helps teachers be aware of and address challenges as they occur. Later in the morning, after taking note of this particular teacher-student relationship, we observed the math lesson for the day. The teacher had gathered her students onto the carpet and was posing problems. "What is three more than nine? Two less than seven?" And so on. She would call on different students to answer. The student we had observed earlier as receiving lower-than-average teacher attention sat on the carpet among his peers. His lack of eye contact, poor posture, and constant hand movements signaled engagement

different from the other students. Looking closely, however, his hand movements suggested counting and attention to the math problems being posed. The teacher, in selecting students to answer her questions, repeatedly avoided calling on him despite being in her line of sight and his atypical engagement with the material.

"What is three more than five?" the teacher asked. I quickly told the principal, who was on the walkie-talkie connected to the teacher's earpiece, to instruct the teacher to call on the child. The principal looked at me with doubt, so I repeated myself. She instructed the teacher, who, stunned, shook her head no as a baseball pitcher might shake off a catcher's call for a particular pitch. We cued the teacher again. The teacher took a deep breath, paused, asked the question again, and called on the student to answer. Every single child in the class turned their bodies toward the student, their surprise and interest evident. The student began mumbling and moving his fingers. After a few seconds, he answered, "Eight." The entire class erupted in cheers. The student beamed. The principal and teacher burst into tears.

The drama of this story indicates the importance of actively caring for students, even in the smallest ways. I have absolutely no doubt that this teacher *cared about* this student. And I have no doubt that this beginning principal cared deeply about this student and this teacher. But caring about a student or a teacher merely requires feeling for them. It's a passive emotion. Being *caring for* a student or a teacher requires an action and follow-through. It can also take challenging and pushing. In *caring for* others you're demonstrating care by taking concrete steps to convince them of their potential for brilliance, the power of their voice, and their worth. Students will spend their entire school day around adults who *care about* them. Adults actively *caring for* them will turn compassionate feelings into action. They will lead students to realize their full potential.