

# The Basics of Caring Research

Satu Uusiautti and  
Kaarina Määttä (Eds.)



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## **The Basics of Caring Research**

# Bold Visions in Educational Research

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# **The Basics of Caring Research**

*Edited by*

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## PREFACE

As the demands and challenges in the academic world seem to increase all the time, it is necessary to stop and think how to approach well-being in science? Is there such a thing as caring research?

The *Basics of Caring Research* is based on a conference that we organized at the University of Lapland in October 2014. The name of the conference was “Gaining Strength from Caring Research” and it was a huge success. In the context of the conference, we developed the concept of caring research. First of all, caring research means research that aims to promote well-being. It is focused on a good quality of life where people’s mutual caring lays the foundation for the well-being of individuals and communities. Caring research is based on human strengths and socially active life.

However, caring research does not only mean the promotion of the research target’s well-being. People who do caring research share the passion and enthusiasm to influence positively and collaborate. Caring research includes the opportunity and joy of working and researching together. Thus, caring research is manifested in the relationships between researchers, supervisors, students, and other experts, and their mutual open and respectful interaction.

The book defines what caring research is and analyzes how and why to do it. The structure of the book is as follows: While Part 1 defines the core purposes and concepts of caring research in a two-dimensional manner, Parts 2 and 3 provide research examples of these two dimensions. Finally, Part 4 summarizes and continues developing the concept and concludes the book by giving ideas of the usability of caring research now and in the future. In other words, the book has four main chapters. In Part 1, the editors of the book, Satu Uusiautti and Kaarina Määttä describe the connection of caring research with research on well-being. The chapters in Part 2 introduce possible targets and themes of caring research across human lifespans and the importance of caring research in positive development and support of resources and human strengths. Taina Rantala et al. describe how joy in teaching can lead to better learning outcomes and well-being in teachers and students. Satu Uusiautti and Kaarina Määttä then discuss the importance of engagement and hope in work. The chapter is based on numerous studies about success and positive development at work. The part continues by introducing the significance of love in later phases of life, based on research by Kaarina Määttä. Finally, the part is complemented by yet another perspective on positive emotions and development as the foundation of caring research, namely that of flourishing in various cultural contexts. Satu Uusiautti discusses the possibility of positive indigenous psychology especially from the viewpoint of education. The four core positive resources are important for human well-being, but there are many others, too, such as happiness,

## PREFACE

satisfaction, gratitude, or other positive strengths. These themes were selected in the book to provide a glance at the wide spectrum of possible positive strengths, resources, and emotions, that can enhance positive development in various contexts and in various areas of life.

Part 3 describes the elements of how to do caring research. Caring research covers the academic community, supervision, students, and research publication. Based on her long and successful career as a supervisor of PhD students, Kaarina Määttä reveals ten facts of caring supervision. She answers questions such as what constitutes a good supervision relationship, how to support PhD students' progress, and what makes a caring supervisor. In addition to supervisors and professors, students make an important—the most important part—of a caring research community. Määttä, Uusiautti, and Marju Määttä illustrate an ideal study process based on student data collected at the University of Lapland.

There is no research without publishing it, and therefore, collaboration in scientific publishing is an inseparable part of research work. Satu Uusiautti contemplates the possibility of caring collaboration in many levels (incl. writing, reviewing, publishing) of scientific publishing. Part 3 ends with a viewpoint on indigenous research. Pigga Keskitalo and Erika Sarivaara introduce a new concept of mediating Sámi research. They remind how important it is to develop suitable research methods that are applicable in indigenous contexts.

Part 4 concludes the book by discussing the future challenges and opportunities of caring research.

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We hope that this book will function as a guide to the world of well-being research. It also illustrates how a multidimensional phenomenon caring research fundamentally is. The book serves as a text book in, for example, research studies in psychology and educational and behavioral sciences, and as a useful tool to develop supervision of various academic theses. The idea of caring research contributes new viewpoints to research and its quality in Finland and abroad.

*The Basics of Caring Research* is based on academic research conducted in Finland and all chapters included have gone through international, scientific peer-review processes. Therefore, they are of extremely high quality. Together they form an entity that contributes to the scientific discussion and supports research and teaching in higher education.

We want to thank all contributors for their inspiring collaboration when compiling this book. No doubt our research teams are examples of caring research community! We also wish to thank Dr. Tanja Äärelä for her expertise, insightful advice and help during the internal review of the book and coordinator Paula Niemelä for her help with the formatting of this book.

**PART 1**

**TIME FOR CARING RESEARCH, TIME FOR  
WELL-BEING**

## 1. WHAT IS CARING RESEARCH?

### ABSTRACT

Caring research is a new concept that is discussed and defined from two supplementary perspectives: (1) as research aiming at promoting well-being and (2) as a caring research community that cares for the researcher well-being and reciprocal relationships between colleagues and between supervisors and students. The caring research ideology contributes a comprehensive viewpoint to the world of academic research because it also pays attention to the actual research process within the research community. This well-being focused approach can serve as a means to flourish within the ever-increasing demands of the academic world.

**Keywords:** caring research, positive psychology, researcher well-being, supervision, well-being at work

Many of us involved in research have faced the current tendency in the academic world: competition for research funding between universities and individual researchers and research groups, prompt graduation and study processes among university students, and demands on high-quality yet the-faster-the-better publication of research results among graduates and researchers are characteristics that seem to determine the way research is conducted in these days.

Indeed, high pressures for measurable results have been described, for example, by Roth (2002) who used the term “publish or perish” when referring to professors’ careers. Publishing should be international, too, because these “seafarers” produce much more funding to universities than “islanders” who prefer working within the borders of their own nation (Kubiatko, 2013). Likewise, reading and citing readings in grant proposals or reports are considered crucial (Tenopir, Mays, & Wu, 2011). At the same time, universities compete for talented applicants and many universities have to think about methods to increase their attractiveness in the eyes of students, their future researchers in order to stay competitive (Määttä, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014). How to do that if the message mainly delivered tells about tightening pressures, competitive atmosphere, and pure self-interest among researchers?

Likewise, new kinds of expectations are targeted to research, too. Today’s societal changes, globalization, and uncertainty about the future shake the well-being of people and communities (Diener, 2009). Research should provide answers to how to face the future without people losing trust in their own abilities to survive and

solve threats of well-being (e.g., Cohn & Fredrickson, 2010). People have always looked for happiness and success in their lives, and this goal has not become any less significant in the lives of modern people.

The aforementioned two current challenges made us think about the concept of caring research. The concept was born based on (1) the authors' research work after being involved in positive psychological research for several years and (2) collaboration in the authors' research team: the mutual support, encouragement, and productivity even within a current competition situation stirred interest in us and we decided to analyze it further. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss: what is caring research and how to define it?

In the authors' researcher team, many researchers had to choose research themes that pursue enhancing good quality of life humanly and socially; in other words, themes illustrating mutual care and concern that provide the foundation for well-being in individual people and communities. Wish to influence positively and trust in human strengths also reflected on the interaction within the research group. The researchers showed that feeling positive emotions toward work produced not only a quantitative improvement by increasing efficiency, but also a qualitative one by making a better outcome that results from the virtue of pride, belief, and commitment to one's job. How to reach satisfaction and optimal performances and quality research by enhancing positive feelings and states at universities (see also Isen & Reeve, 2006; Winter & Sarros, 2002) is the question viewed through the concept of caring research.

## CARING RESEARCH

### *Positive Psychology as the Basis of Caring Research*

Caring research is viewed here based on the ideas of positive psychology. Gable and Haidt (2005) briefly define positive psychology in the following terms: "Positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (p. 104). The aim of positive psychology is to study the reasons why people feel joy, show altruism, and create healthy families and institutions.

Research themes such as well-being, happiness, quality of life, and positive feelings have been introduced by positive psychology, which has provided research concerning not only positive characteristics and feelings, but also the institutions that enhance the discovery of positive feelings and strengths (Seligman et al., 2005). The branch of positive psychology is concerned with facilitating good lives and enabling people to be at their best (see, e.g., Achor, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; Linley, Willars, & Biswas-Diener, 2009; also Uusiautti & Määttä, 2015)—research that aim at positive influence (see also Beveridge, 2005; Seligman, 2009).

In addition to its positive purposes, caring research can be defined as a positively-perceived research process constituting of supportive and trustful interaction and

## WHAT IS CARING RESEARCH?

relationships, illustrating positive organizational behaviors (e.g., Luthans, 2002; Rego, Ribeiro, Pina, & Jesuino, 2011; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013a). These dimensions will be defined next.

### *Dimensions of Caring Research*

What is caring research, then? It is possible to understand the concept as follows: (1) caring research as research aiming at promoting well-being and (2) caring research as research work manifested by mutual support, encouragement, and collaboration between researchers. The former focuses on themes promoting a good quality of life and well-being. This kind of research is interested in, for example, discovering elements of reciprocal care and help among human beings, structures of positive development, and opportunities to use human strengths and draws from positive resources, as well as the bases of flourishing communities and societies.

However, as the latter element suggests, caring research is not just about caring about the research target. As we see it, caring research is conducted by researchers who share the interest in and enthusiasm about positive influencing and mutual care. Thus, caring research appears as the joy and opportunity to do research together in an open and supportive academic environment. Caring research comes true in respectful collaboration between researchers, supervisors, students, and other experts at every phase of research work. When the aforementioned two viewpoints are put together, the caring research approach covers all aspects of a research process. Next, we will discuss in detail what these dimensions of caring research entail. We will present examples of caring research themes as well as of caring research community.

## CARING RESEARCH THEMES

Caring research wants to promote the well-being of people and communities. This interest can be further discussed as several research themes. Next, some important well-being-focused themes are discussed, such as resources in the human lifespan and positive development, positive emotions as the source of well-being, well-being after crises and adversities, as well as resources in work and professional development, and organizational well-being. The following themes are based on our studies and interests in the field of positive psychological research.

### *Resources as the Foundation of Positive Development and Achievements*

Lifespans of people who could be considered positive examples from whom we could learn and benefit others (e.g., Magnusson & Mahoney, 2006). It is, therefore, relevant to analyze whether the lifespans of positively acting people differ from those of others, and, if they do, to find out how (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2015). This kind of research pursues determine the elements of positive development along human beings' lifespans.

For example, child research can be defined (see Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013b) as research about, with, and by children (see Alderson, 2001; Mayall, 2008), and especially, for children (Prout, 2005). Questions of how to enhance children's growth and development, and for example, their discovery and use of signature strengths (Seligman, 2011) illustrate approaches in which researchers' interests are in positively-focused research for children. Actually, the need for such research is recognized and well-justified: according to Seligman (2009), it would function not only as a buffer against malaise and depression but also increase life satisfaction and well-being, promote learning quality, academic success, and creative thinking, enhance the emergence of supportive adult-child and peer relationships, and increase tolerance of diversity (see also Huebner et al., 2009; Schreiner, Hulme, Hetzel, & Lopez, 2009; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004).

This approach as caring research and well-being promoting research is to study how people can reach achievements and succeed by using positive resources. Some examples of positive strategies and courses of lives in individuals are introduced by studies about straight-A students' lives (Salmela & Uusiautti, 2013), female leaders' career developments (Hyvärinen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2015), long-lasting marriages (Määttä, Anglé, & Uusiautti, 2014), awarded top workers' lifespans (Uusiautti, 2008; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2015), and in lifelong learning (Purtilo-Nieminen & Määttä, 2011).

#### *Positive Emotions as the Source of Well-being*

Positive emotions also make an important research theme and connect caring research with well-being. "Moods and emotions, which together are labeled affect, represent people's on-line evaluations of the events that occur in their lives" (Diener et al., 1999, p. 277). For example, Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build model of positive emotions explains why the propensity to experience positive emotions has evolved into a ubiquitous feature of human nature and how positive emotions might be tapped to promote individual and collective well-being and health. According to Isen (2003; see also Isen & Reeve, 2006), positive feelings sustain intrinsic motivation and help with successfully performing pleasing work tasks and new challenges as well as enjoying them. Positive emotions serve as markers of flourishing or optimal well-being (Fredrickson, 2001), and research on experiences can be useful for measuring well-being (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Kahneman et al., 2004).

In educational contexts, joy of learning (see, e.g., Lähteenmäki, 2013; Rantala & Määttä, 2011) has been a topical research theme. Similarly, in Finland (Keskitalo, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2013; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2014) and abroad (e.g., Craven & Bodkin-Andrews, 2006; Purdie et al., 2000; Sandage, Seminary, Hill, & Vang, 2003) positive psychological approaches have been used for finding means to enhance indigenous peoples' well-being and flourishing. Our perspective is bound to educational and psychological research paradigms. However, we believe that

whatever the paradigm, genuine aspirations to conduct ethically sustainable and positively-toned research naturally aim at benefitting the research target or phenomenon.

#### *Well-being after Crises and Adversities*

Caring research does not close eyes from difficulties, hardships, or crises. Instead, it is relevant to study how people can overcome these kinds of challenging situations and crises and what the role of positive strategies and strengths are in these events and processes (see e.g., Ryff & Singer, 2003). Special topics can be named with quite a wide range: surviving with various states such as anorexia (Savukoski, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2014), narcolepsy (Karjalainen, Nyrhilä, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2013), or other illnesses and health problems (e.g., Aspinwall & Tedeschi, 2010; Tugade, Fredrickson, & Feldman Barrett, 2004); surviving with various developmental disorders, such as autism (Kangas, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2012) or reading difficulties (Vanninen & Määttä, 2013); and surviving with various events and situations in life, such as bullying at school (Hoisko, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014), grief and death (e.g., Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Stein, Trabasso, Folkman, & Richards, 1997), war (e.g., Ai, Tice, Whitsett, Ishisaka, & Chim, 2007; Hobfoll et al., 1991), and crimes (Davis, Hoffman, & Quigley, 1988; Jiang & Winfree, 2006; Äärelä, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014).

#### *Organizational Well-being and Professional Development*

Work forms a major part of most people's daily lives, and therefore, it is important to study flourishing at work and opportunities to develop professionally so that work could become a source of satisfaction and self-fulfillment in life. Examples of such positive studies related to work are analyses of awarded Finnish top workers and their positive development (Uusiautti, 2008) and the success of enterprises (Uusiautti, 2015) as well as continuing education among the unemployed (Pietilä-Litendahl & Uusiautti, 2014). We have also studied the professional development of vocational teachers (Koski-Heikkinen, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2014), early childhood education teachers (Happo, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2012), elementary education teachers (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013c, 2013d), and special education teachers (Lakkala, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014; Sipilä & Määttä, 2011).

At an institutional level, it is equally important to study how institutions can enhance human beings' positive behaviors and development, and well-being by caring. Organizational psychological constructs can either increase or impede the experiences of positive emotions and subjective well-being (e.g., Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2009). Numerous studies focus on finding out positive organizational behaviors, leadership processes, and well-being promoting activities and work arrangements (e.g., Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007; Syväjärvi et al., 2014; Uusiautti, 2013).