Paths to Promote the Sustainability of Kindergarten Teachers’ Caring: Teachers’ Perspectives

Jiawei Liu 1, Yong Jiang 1,*, Beibei Zhang 1,2, Xingjian Zhu 1 and Tianyan Sha 1

Abstract: Caring is a crucial aspect of early childhood education (ECE) and is an essential attribute possessed by kindergarten teachers. The sustainable development of ECE in aging China calls for the sustainable development of teachers’ caring. However, research into teachers’ caring in education for sustainable development in ECE has been scarce. This paper aims to emphasize a concern for the theme of caring in the sustainability of ECE and to provide a Chinese perspective on this topic. This study explored the path to promote the sustainability of teachers’ caring from the perspective of Chinese kindergarten teachers, based on an analytical framework of cognition, emotion, will, and behavior. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 Chinese kindergarten teachers. The data were analyzed using MAXQDA, qualitative data analysis software, and the descriptive analysis technique. Main themes were generated and then the views were aligned under the themes. Research shows that reading, leisure and art activities, cultural immersion, and mentoring practice can bring many benefits to the promotion of teachers’ caring. Continuous reading can awaken teachers’ caring conscience and promote the sustainability of caring cognition while sufficient leisure and art activities can generate their caring emotions and promote their sustainability. Cultural immersion can cultivate teachers’ caring beliefs and promote the sustainability of caring will while mentoring practice can shape teachers’ caring behaviors and promote their sustainability. The four paths cited above successfully helped teachers overcome the obstacles to caring that they faced and promoted their caring abilities. This study provides systematic paths for promoting the sustainability of kindergarten teachers’ caring and emphasizes their self-care as critical to ensuring teachers’ caring. The necessity of providing effective institutional and policy support to promote the sustainable development of teachers’ caring is suggested.

Keywords: caring; teacher’s caring; early childhood education; education for sustainable development; sustainability

1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is an important factor for sustainable development (SD) and has gained increasing attention in matters related to sustainability education [1,2]. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of high-quality education and care in the early years of development, as well as the role of well-educated staff in ECE settings [3]. The sustainable development of early childhood teachers constitutes the core proposition of ECE sustainable development in aging China. Previous studies have primarily addressed the sustainability of teachers in ECE by analyzing a variety of their abilities in sustainable education, such as their views, beliefs, conceptions, and competencies in relation to education for sustainable development (ESD) [4,5]. These studies focus on how teachers understand ESD, and how ESD can be implemented in ECE practice. Attention has primarily been
paid to the professional development of teachers, continuous updating of their professional knowledge, and professional skills training. Few studies have focused on their caring in the context of ESD in ECE.

However, it is important to note that caring is assumed to be a crucial aspect of ECE and is essential for children’s physical and emotional well-being [6]. Teachers’ caring has long been an issue of great concern to scholars and practitioners worldwide. Specifically, while teachers’ deep caring for each child has been shown to be critical in ESD teaching, most studies on teachers’ caring have primarily been concerned with theoretical elaborations, focusing on interpretations of the concept itself and its importance to child development. Less attention has been given to teachers’ self-care and its relation to sustainability, and little is known about caring for teachers themselves. Further, the existing research on the promotion path of teachers’ caring has also been fragmented and unsystematic, and neglectful of the path’s sustainability. We argue that greater attention to teachers’ caring in the context of the sustainability of ECE, along with a focus on teachers’ self-care, may generate new possibilities for supporting ECE sustainability, especially in aging China. As China officially announced its “three-child policy” (encouraging each family to have three children) in 2021, the increased number of young children will require an increased supply of ECE services, including more caring teachers. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the systematic paths to promoting the sustainability of kindergarten teachers’ caring, informed by teacher perspectives in the Chinese ECE context. Due to the special focus on promoting teachers’ caring in aging China, this study yields valuable findings for ECE policymakers to strengthen kindergarten teachers’ ethical construction, enabling a more caring and sustainable form of ECE.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Education for Sustainable Development in ECE

Sustainable development (SD) has become a widely recognized goal for human society and a fundamental strategy for guiding the world’s social and economic transformation [7], which will have a crucial impact on solving regional and global problems [8]. In modern times, countries worldwide are paying increased attention to SD in the economic, energy, and ecological environment fields [9–11], covering many experiences and strategies conducive to the SD of a country [12]. The role of education in supporting SD is central and indispensable [13]. Further, ECE has a major role to play in achieving SD [14] and has increasingly been recognized as a valuable arena for sustainability education [2]. In particular, how teachers understand ESD in ECE and how ESD can be implemented in ECE have been the two main topics of ESD in ECE. In terms of teachers’ comprehension of ESD, studies have highlighted three major types of understanding: teaching children facts about the environment, manipulating student behavior, and developing children’s critical thinking skills [4].

It is clear that these three types of understanding originate from the perspective of children’s learning and development, that is, the education of children to act for a sustainable future. As for teachers, the focus has been on their knowledge, abilities, and beliefs in the implementation of ESD, among others.

The idea that teacher education pays attention to sustainability is not new, and the importance of teachers’ sustainability has also been previously recognized. UNESCO has released guidelines and recommendations to reorient teacher education to address sustainability [15]. In general, previous studies have addressed the importance of teachers’ sustainability of ESD in ECE, but the focus has chiefly been on teachers’ professional development, such as the knowledge, understanding, skills, and values required to enable the inclusion of sustainability education in teaching and learning practices. Most importantly, however, little is known about teachers’ caring in ESD in ECE.

It is important to note that caring is a crucial aspect of ECE, and a caring teacher can positively impact children’s learning outcomes, motivation, and social and moral development [16] (p. 163). Promoting social sustainability in preschool develops a caring,
equal, and inclusive form of education [17]. Additionally, caring can be seen as a method of positive, pedagogical leadership aimed at sustainability in the work community [18]. Undoubtedly, we must recognize the importance of teachers’ caring in the SD of ECE.

2.2. Teachers’ Caring in ECE

Preschool serves as a community of care with norms and values for caring [17]. Specifically, caring has been considered as a positive foundation for reinforcing teacher–student relationships, which involve meaningful connections that allow teachers to fulfill students’ needs sensitively and with empathy, affection, and concern [19]. Caring can support healthy development and learning; engender trust and love; convey compassion, understanding, respect, and interest [20]; and reduce children’s risk of exhibiting violent behaviors [21]. Teachers’ caring is also crucial for students’ success in an environment with high expectations [22]. In ECE, care constitutes a crucial part of educators’ responsibilities, as it contributes to children’s well-being, which is a pre-condition for their learning and development [23]. Additionally, it is a fundamental personal attribute for teachers [24], and one of the most important components of building secure and effective teacher–student relationships [25].

A caring relationship is vital for promoting social sustainability, particularly in ECE settings [26]. Previous research on teachers’ caring in the ECE context has shown teachers’ caring to be an important issue, and a caring teacher can positively impact children’s learning and development. Clearly, studies in this area have been rooted in the context of caring for children and discussed the importance of teachers’ caring for children’s development. However, little attention has been paid to the importance of caring for teachers themselves and the promotion of their caring abilities in ECE. Well-being and self-care are crucial aspects of teachers’ sustainability, as teacher well-being is pivotal for achieving a well-sustained social transformation [27].

According to the viewpoint of self-care in SD theory, a fundamental component of sustainable behavior is self-caring behavior. People must care for themselves before they can care for others [28]. In particular, self-care is essential for both caring for others as well as for peaceful coexistence among people [29]. It consists of a series of measures adopted by individuals to seek personal well-being in its corporeal, mental, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions [30]. Self-care implies an individual dimension of sustainable behavior driven by an eco-centric view of the way in which one perceives oneself as a part of an open and interconnected system [28]. In this regard, to promote teachers’ caring, caring for teachers themselves should not be invisible or neglected. We must first care about teachers themselves and create a more sustainable caring environment for their self-care.

2.3. Strategies to Promote Teachers’ Caring

Previous studies have proposed different strategies and methods to improve teachers’ caring. In particular, teachers can improve their caring behaviors through their own efforts by building good teacher–student relationships [31], reflecting on their teaching practice [31–34], and enhancing the sense of meaning or purpose they find in their work [19,25]. Further, the school environment can provide training and support for teachers. In the pre-service education stage, schools can instruct teacher candidates in caring theories [34] to improve their focus on and understanding of caring [32]. Through collaborative co-teaching mentorships [34], student teachers can be guided in the development of emotions [35] and interpersonal relationships within their practice [36–38], and feedback can be provided on the quality of their caring behaviors [34]. School support for in-service teachers mainly includes cooperation among teachers [39], especially involving the guidance provided by experienced teachers to novice teachers [33], teacher development training and daily meetings [25,39,40], caring leadership [40], and the creation of a caring atmosphere [39,41].

We found that only a few studies have been based on teachers’ own perspectives on caring; most have been based on the concept of improving teachers’ ability to care for children. Further, there is a lack of systematic and sustainable path construction.
According to Niu [42], SD emphasizes the connotation of “integrity,” “endogenous,” and “comprehensive.” This suggests that while constructing a path to promote teachers’ caring, we should fully consider the overall coordination of internal and external factors, integrate the influence of all of these factors, and pay attention to the exertion of teachers’ internal strength. Consequently, the promotion of teachers’ caring should be human-oriented, based on the concept of self-care, caring for teachers themselves, comprehensively considering various influencing factors (such as the internal and external environment, and current and future development), and systematically constructing a sustainable development.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This research uses Noddings’ theory of caring and pastoral care of teachers as its theoretical framework. Noddings [43] regarded caring as a desirable attribute in the relationship between caregivers and those being cared for. In this relationship, the caring teacher would feel an obligation to establish caring ethics [44]. In particular, Noddings identified two types of caring: (1) natural caring, reflecting a natural response and instinctive need, which Noddings calls the “I must,” and (2) ethical caring, which is based on natural caring [45]. Noddings [43] believed that moral education includes four main components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. These methods are also applicable to both teacher education and caring education. Moreover, Noddings [46] attached great importance to the role of emotions and argued that rationality should serve emotions. She further proposed the idea of “self-care,” which includes caring for one’s own physical health, spiritual and professional life, and leisure life [47]. Similarly, the term “pastoral care” is commonly used to describe caring work in the context of education [48]. According to Carrol [49], teachers’ pastoral care should go beyond uniform, legislative industrial requirements and general professional support, and should be concerned with personal and individual recognition, needs, and welfare. It aims to promote “the welfare of the person as an individual.” Sustainable pastoral care in education begins with teacher self-care [50] and caring for others serves as a means of gaining care for oneself [51]. As these points suggest, while teachers’ caring for students has to be emphasized, we cannot neglect caring for teachers themselves. This is consistent with the concept of human development and human needs in SD theory [42], that is, we should pay attention to the needs and well-being of teachers themselves.

2.5. Analytical Framework: Cognition, Emotion, Will, and Behavior

Cognition, emotion, will, and behavior are part of the long-term and unremitting psychological development of human beings [52]. According to the application of this analytical framework by Chinese scholars [53–55], we conclude as follows:

Cognition is the unity of thinking ability and cognitive learning, and the reflection of the human brain on the objective world. It is a process of long-term accumulation, including the understanding, deconstruction, and reconstruction of information. Emotion is an attitude experience of people toward objective things and the unity of aesthetic ability and emotional experience. Will is the unity of ideal beliefs and will-tempering. It refers to the psychological process in which people consciously determine a purpose and control their actions in order to achieve that predetermined purpose. This is expressed as a sense of identity and responsibility for the mainstream culture of society. The foothold of cognition, emotion, and will is behavior.

Together, these aspects constitute a harmonious and unified whole, and any aspect can be used as a starting point. It is comprehensive and does not follow a fixed pattern, so that all factors can cooperate and coordinate with each other, and fulfill their overall function [56]. This is consistent with the comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development concept stated in the SD theory. Accordingly, this study explores the promotion path of Chinese kindergarten teachers’ caring based on this analytical framework in the cultural context of Chinese ECE. Although these aspects are divided into four stages and unfold in sequence, they penetrate and complement each other, forming a cyclical upward spiral system [53]. In this way, through continuous learning of caring knowledge,
cultivating caring emotions, internalizing caring beliefs, and transforming them into caring behaviors, there is an organic unity that follows the principle of SD (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. An analytical framework of teachers’ caring based on cognition, emotion, will, and behavior.](image)

In sum, this study seeks to promote the sustainability of teachers’ caring in Chinese ECE. It takes teachers’ self-care as the basic position, comprehensively analyzes Noddings’ caring theory and the pastoral care of teachers, and based on the analytical framework of cognition, emotion, will, and behavior, it explores the sustainable promotion path of Chinese kindergarten teachers’ caring. The following questions guided this research:

1. What paths can promote the sustainability of teachers’ caring from the perspective of kindergarten teachers? What are the forms/techniques of these paths?
2. What path can be used to promote the sustainability of teachers’ caring in the cognitive, emotional, will, and behavioral dimensions? What are the impacts on this path?

Specifically, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**Hypothesis (H1).** The promotion path of kindergarten teachers’ caring is multi-dimensional.

**Hypothesis (H2).** The promotion path of kindergarten teachers’ caring includes four dimensions: cognition, emotion, will, and behavior.

### 3. Method

Qualitative methods such as interviews are commonly used in studies on teacher ethics [57]. Therefore, we adopted semi-structured interviews with kindergarten teachers as the main data collection strategy to explore the paths for promoting teachers’ caring based on the perspective of kindergarten teachers.

**3.1. Data Collection**

Data were collected from semi-structured interviews. Due to the impact of COVID-19, and in consideration of China’s epidemic prevention regulations and special protection for kindergartens, we could not conduct face-to-face interviews with every teacher. Therefore, data were collected through both telephone and face-to-face interviews. Three researchers conducted 7 face-to-face and 10 telephone interviews with a total of 17 kindergarten teachers. To ensure the quality of telephone interviews as far as possible, we informed the interviewees in advance of the expected time of the interview and prepared the recording equipment in advance. The interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed for analysis. In the transcription process, if anything was unclear, the teacher was recontacted to fully ensure the quality of the telephone interview data. The interviews lasted 40–60 min. At the end of each interview, the participants received 200 yuan in cash as a reward for participating.

**3.2. Participants**

Purposeful sampling was applied to represent a large population and provide sufficient variation in the specific paths. This sampling process was “used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information” [58] (p. 317) and was
a way of identifying and selecting cases that would use the limited research resources effectively [59]. Purposive sampling also allows for better matching of the sample to the research objectives. Thus, following a review of the existing literature on teachers’ caring, we adopted the following seven exemplifiers of recommended pedagogical caring behaviors: (1) listen to students, (2) show empathy, (3) support students, (4) be active in the in-class learning process, (5) give appropriate and encouraging feedback and praise, (6) apply high work and behavior standards, and (7) show an active concern for students’ personal lives. These caring exemplifiers were chosen because they have been used to vet nominated caring teachers in previous research during attempts to identify potential informants [60]. Principals and financial officers who work in kindergartens, but are not educators, were excluded from the study.

Ethical procedures were followed throughout the research process. The study was approved by the ethical review board of the first author’s university with approval number “HR 027-2019” before data collection. Consent was obtained from the educational administrators of the participating kindergartens, and after the screening process, the authors sent a detailed invitation email to potential candidates, describing the purpose of the research and inviting them to participate. The teachers were briefed about the study via an introduction at the beginning of each interview and agreed to participate after reading this introduction, which was considered to represent their consent. Based on the seven exemplifiers mentioned above and the principle of convenience and voluntary sampling, after the release of recruitment information, a total of 25 kindergarten teachers were recruited. However, as some were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, 17 teachers who met the requirements were finally confirmed to participate. The reason for including front-line kindergarten teachers (those who interact directly with children) and excluding administrative teachers, is that front-line teachers are the class leaders in China, who directly participate in all aspects of children’s activities, directly interact with children, and have more caring practices, which is more in line with the research needs of this study. Before the interviews, the participants were asked about their gender, age, years of teaching experience, and daily working hours, which is set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants’ characteristics (kindergarten teachers, N = 17).

| Demographic Characteristics | N  | %   |
|----------------------------|----|-----|
| Gender                     |   |     |
| Female                     | 15 | 88.24|
| Male                       | 2  | 11.76|
| Age (in years)             |   |     |
| ≤30                        | 12 | 70.59|
| >30                        | 5  | 29.40|
| Teaching years             |   |     |
| ≤10                        | 12 | 70.59|
| >10                        | 5  | 29.40|
| Daily working hours        |   |     |
| Eight hours                | 8  | 47.10|
| Over eight hours           | 9  | 52.90|

3.3. Interview Structure

Based on the above theoretical elaboration, the interview outline focused on the paths in general and the four dimensions to promote the sustainability of kindergarten teachers’ caring. The interviewees answered the semi-structured interview questions based on their own kindergarten teaching practice and academic background. The interviewer began by asking teachers about their general views on improving kindergarten teachers’ caring. Thereafter, the researchers asked the participants about their experience with, attitude toward, and evaluation of the four dimension paths. There were 3–10 different problem items for each path (see Appendix A for detailed information).
3.4. Data Analysis

Data coding procedures were applied to identify themes by scrutinizing participants’ interview transcripts, self-reflective pieces, and supporting materials, as well as the researchers’ notes [61]. Repeated and salient words, phrases, and sentences were coded by comparing and contrasting their meanings within the themes of participants’ narratives, centered around the four-dimensional paths to promote teachers’ caring. A pilot phase was conducted ahead of the formal content analysis. Three researchers (the first, fourth, and fifth authors) coded the interview text independently and individually checked coding consistency. Segmentation criteria were confirmed, and the coding frame was adjusted. Any differences were discussed until a consensus was reached. All participants were coded alphabetically (e.g., Teacher A). First, all interview data based on participants’ responses to each question were transcribed verbatim. The researchers reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and to generate coding categories and subcategories in line with the study’s aims. In this regard, the study data were analyzed using MAXQDA (Analytics Pro 2022, https://www.maxqda.com, accessed on 29 June 2022), qualitative data analysis software, and the descriptive analysis technique was used. In descriptive analysis, collected data are interpreted by summarizing according to pre-defined themes [62]. During the analysis process, four-step qualitative data analysis strategies were used [63]. The first step involved identifying codes “meaning units” from the participants’ answers to the questions in the interview form. The codes were arranged by clustering similar ones into a category or theme and separating dissimilar ones to create distinct categories [64]. In the second step, the meaning unit codes were sorted and placed in their emergent categories, and the categories were analyzed for themes or patterns. In step three, the categories were examined for meaning and interpretation. In step four, a diagram was constructed to illustrate the codes and themes found in the data [65] (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Emerging themes and related codes.

4. Results

A code list was generated containing the answers to the research questions via MAXQDA, and the codes fell into five themes: (1) General paths, (2) cognitive dimension, (3) emotional dimension, (4) will dimension, and (5) behavioral dimension. These themes and related codes are shown in Figure 2. Research shows that promoting the sustainability of teachers’ caring requires the unity of teachers’ caring cognition, emotion, will, and behavior. Based on the teachers’ own practical experiences and theoretical background of caring in the process of ECE, combined with the influence of their own internal factors and external environmental factors, teachers put forward corresponding promotion paths from the cognitive, emotional, will, and behavioral dimensions of caring. It is worth noting that the importance of self-care for teachers was verified from the perspective of the teachers.
themselves, and could be accomplished by focusing on teachers’ leisure, job burnout, needs, and welfare. The teachers also proposed specific paths for each dimension and explained their impact on promoting the sustainability of teachers’ caring. These specific paths and related forms are shown in Figure 3.

4. Results

A code list was generated containing the answers to the research questions via MAXQDA, and the codes fell into five themes: (1) General paths, (2) cognitive dimension, (3) emotional dimension, (4) will dimension, and (5) behavioral dimension. These themes and related codes are shown in Figure 2.

Research shows that promoting the sustainability of teachers’ caring requires the unity of teachers’ caring cognition, emotion, will, and behavior. Based on the teachers’ own practical experiences and theoretical background of caring in the process of ECE, combined with the influence of their own internal factors and external environmental factors, teachers put forward corresponding promotion paths from the cognitive, emotional, will, and behavioral dimensions of caring. It is worth noting that the importance of self-care for teachers was verified from the perspective of the teachers themselves, and could be accomplished by focusing on teachers’ leisure, job burnout, needs, and welfare. The teachers also proposed specific paths for each dimension and explained their impact on promoting the sustainability of teachers’ caring. These specific paths and related forms are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Paths to promote the sustainability of kindergarten teachers’ caring.

4.1. Reading Provides Caring Skills and Methods to Support Teachers with Knowledge

The views of the participants regarding the cognitive dimensions and the related subthemes and their frequencies are given in Table 2.

| Views                                                                 | f  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Caring knowledge and methods can be acquired by reading              | 17 |
| Reading can convey the idea of caring                               | 15 |
| Reading promotes teachers’ professional development                 | 18 |
| Reading provides teachers with psychological support                | 13 |
| Reading strengthens knowledge reserve                               | 16 |
| Total                                                               | 79 |

As shown in Table 2, when asked questions related to the cognitive dimension, 94.1% of the teachers reported reading as the best way to strengthen caring cognition, as it broadened their horizons and strengthened their knowledge reserves, allowing them to better respond to children’s questions, which is also a performance of caring. Caring knowledge, skills, and methods can be acquired by reading. “The more books you read, the better your professional ability [. . . ]. Children will put forward questions of many kinds, so your knowledge reserve must be wide [. . . ] and [you must have] a good understanding of the children’s needs” (Teacher H). Teacher A said, “Reading professional things is helpful for my work and allows me to compare and reflect.” Reading can help teachers recognize the importance of caring and learn caring methods: “The cases in the book showed me that caring accounts for a lot of children’s growth. So, reading reminded me to focus on this aspect. For example, classics in education can help me promote my caring” (Teacher E). Additionally, reading provided the teachers with psychological support, as Teacher F’s response shows: “When reading, you feel supported by the fact that there are other people who are going through the same problems as you [. . . ]. It provides psychological support and helps you learn more about how to care for young children.” Some teachers had also gained experience and learned methods by reading picture books with caring themes:

Many picture books that depict caring show me where caring comes from and how to express it [. . . ]. The knowledge of caring that I learn through interacting with my child allows me to experience caring and pass it on to the school children (Teacher A).
4.2. Leisure and Art Regulate Work Mood to Support Teachers with Caring Emotions

The participants’ views regarding the emotional dimension and the related subthemes and their frequencies are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Views of the participants regarding the emotional dimension.

| Views                                          | f   |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Artistic activities can convey a caring spirit and concept | 12  |
| Artistic activities can improve teachers’ self-cultivation | 18  |
| Artistic activities relieve teachers’ negative emotions | 20  |
| Emphasize self-care for teachers                  | 20  |
| Leisure time quality affects teachers’ working mood | 18  |
| Total                                           | 88  |

As shown in Table 3, when asked questions related to their emotions and the atmosphere, most teachers frequently expressed the lack of enough leisure time. Teacher I noted, “There is no time to relax in front of the children at work. You have to do more work, such as copy-writing, teaching research.” In a similar vein, Teacher M said, “Focusing so much energy on paperwork undermines one’s ability to do other things. How can a teacher who is not loved and understood be able to care more for children?” Dedication and unity were highly emphasized, while teachers’ personal needs were somewhat neglected and their self-care was ignored. A number of interviewees claimed that the lack of leisure time directly affected their work performance and emotional involvement. As Teacher G stressed,

My leisure time is abundant, so I feel confident about my work [. . . ]. If a teacher is in a good mood, the children will be happy. If a teacher is under pressure every day, their suppressed emotions will be passed on to the children.

The teachers expressed that they took part in certain artistic and aesthetic activities to relieve their negative emotions and recognized their important role in cultivating caring emotions: “Artistic activities, such as listening to music, make you more motivated to care about others. Music is a way for me to release negative emotions” (Teacher H). Artistic activities can improve teachers’ self-cultivation and affect their relationship with children as a result. As Teacher D said, “Art improves self-cultivation and makes you more peaceful [. . . ] [you] are not so hard on a child for a trifle.” Overall, the teachers stressed that artistic activities could convey a caring spirit and concept. For example, watching films featuring the themes of truth, kindness, and beauty can awaken caring emotions: “Films, such as Les Choristes and The Sound of Music definitely have an impact on my school children and myself. [The films convey] a kind of love, which is bound to elevate human emotions” (Teacher G).

4.3. Culture Promotes Review and Reflection to Support Teachers with Caring Beliefs

The participants’ views regarding the will dimension are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Views of the participants regarding the will dimension.

| Views                                          | f   |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Contemporary social culture emphasizes the theme of caring | 12  |
| Culture influences teachers’ values, beliefs, and missions | 18  |
| Kindergarten’s caring culture promotes teachers’ caring | 15  |
| Philosophy promotes reflection                  | 14  |
| Traditional Chinese Confucian culture contains themes of caring | 15  |
| Traditional Chinese caring culture inspires caring wisdom | 13  |
| Total                                           | 87  |
As shown in Table 4, when asked questions related to the will dimension, 88.2% of the interviewed teachers believed that culture affects teachers’ values, beliefs, and missions, and that caring forms part of teachers’ educational beliefs and responsibilities. The teachers frequently emphasized the influence of Chinese traditional Confucian culture, social culture, family culture, and kindergarten culture. Interviews clearly and objectively showed the importance of cultural immersion for the caring belief. As Teacher E noted, “The main function of culture in the development of teachers is actually a directional role, teachers must grow up under the culture’s influence.” From the perspective of traditional Chinese caring culture, some teachers thought that appropriate care must involve a certain degree of rationality. As Teacher F highlighted, “I think the [idea of] traditional Chinese caring for children means loving [them]. You should give children love and care to a certain degree, but also maintain a sense of boundaries and bottom line.” It was of great benefit for the teachers to reflect on their own caring beliefs and behaviors. On the role of culture in promoting teachers’ reflection, most of the teachers emphasized that philosophy plays a positive role in the cultivation of their caring qualities. As Teacher A described,

quote
Philosophy is like reflection. My philosophy is to make children better, so every child receives my care. This has always been the same. As long as I respect my philosophy, my teaching will not hurt children and love can keep us going.

quote
Philosophy further promotes individuals’ dialectical thinking and allows for the accumulation of love:

quote
Caring is the energy that people export to the outside world, and the dialectical thinking that philosophy brings to people can help their inner mind export energy after becoming stable and consistent [. . . ]. In the process of philosophical thinking, we constantly accumulate more energy to radiate to others (Teacher F).

quote
As for the kindergarten culture, the teachers frequently mentioned words similar to “We are like family.” Most teachers mentioned that their kindergarten cultures use “family culture” as the central theme and incorporate ideas of caring. The teachers generally believed that their kindergarten culture affected their job satisfaction, their relationships with the children, and the cultivation of their caring qualities. As one of the teachers stated,

quote
A teacher who works in a kindergarten full of love and care must be concerned with the quality of caring [. . . ]. Everyone gets fair and satisfactory care, and the teacher will care more for their students.

quote
Further, several interviewees claimed that the kindergarten culture also influences educational concepts, as Teacher F claimed, “Our kindergarten culture is about care and respect. These things affect your educational concept. When you use these concepts to lead you, you feel that every child is special.” Finally, the kindergarten culture can provide teachers with spiritual support: “Every kindergarten has its own unique culture. Because teachers need this kind of spiritual support [. . . ], My behavior is supported” (Teacher F).

4.4. Mentoring Provides Model Experiences to Support Teachers with Behavioral Reference

Another theme emerging from the participants’ views was related to the behavioral dimension. The related subthemes and frequencies are given in Table 5.

| Views                                           | f  |
|-------------------------------------------------|----|
| Mentoring can modify caring behaviors           | 16 |
| Mentoring imparts caring experience and skills  | 18 |
| Mentoring provides a reference for caring behaviors | 21 |
| Total                                           | 55 |

Table 5 represents the views of the participants regarding the behavioral dimension. Almost all teachers believed that experienced teachers can help novice teachers obtain
direct practical experience and behavioral references. This is conducive to the acquisition and improvement of teachers’ caring behavior, especially for novice teachers, as Teacher A said, “The most direct and immediate skills can be obtained from experienced teachers. These skills can be taught through mentoring, so novice teachers can grasp them quickly.” Teacher K similarly added,

This kind of mentoring system provides us with a process model for improving our caring behaviors. Novice teachers can learn how to care for children from experienced teachers [. . . ], otherwise, they just go to work and don’t [already] know about it.

Finally, Teacher L stated,

When I first started my internship in a kindergarten, the type of care was similar to spoiling. It was like [giving the children] unconditional satisfaction. Later, I learned a more reasonable way of caring for children from an experienced teacher who is my partner.

The interviewed teachers stressed that experienced teachers know more about children and caring for them, due to their experience: “Experienced teachers may do better at caring, because they have rich experience, knowing what children need, and [they can] help children according to these needs” (Teacher E). In this regard, Teacher M provided a detailed response,

Caring is based on observations and understanding, and this is the first step. Only when you understand what the child needs are you able to act with care [. . . ].

The second step is determining how many ways you have to express your caring [. . . ]. How much energy do you have to accurately convey that you care to them? [. . . ] You have to understand and convey it. Novice teachers [. . . ] care for their children, but they don’t know what kind of care the children want [. . . ].

As experienced teachers are relatively skilled, they can correctly understand children and give them more suitable care.

5. Discussion
5.1. Reading Promotes the Sustainability of Caring Cognition and Awakens the Conscience

The results reflected that reading based on professional needs can effectively improve teachers’ professional skills, as it is a fundamental method for acquiring knowledge and information [66]. Here, the knowledge of caring is clearly included. As Riley [50] argued, caring requires intellectual engagement, reflective functioning, and learning. It is consciously undertaken. Therefore, to promote teachers’ caring, more caring knowledge and strategies can be obtained through reading.

The above is conducive to the continuous reinforcement of caring cognition, thereby promoting its sustainability. In addition, reading content related to caring in classic literature, picture books, fiction, and poems can provide caring thoughts for teachers. Specifically, literary classics are advanced spiritual products of the coexistence of the true, good, and beautiful, and are full of concern for the ultimate meaning of human existence [67]. Thus, these works can promote these positive aspects of human nature. These conclusions are consistent with the results of the present study, as we found that reading can stimulate deep inner love and care, while providing psychological comfort and support. It can also lead to a deeper understanding of the truth, goodness, and beauty, thus generating more caring qualities.

5.2. Leisure and Art Activities Promote the Sustainability of Caring Emotion

This study showed that the quality of leisure time affects teachers’ mood at work. A lack of leisure time can lead to negative emotions among teachers, thus affecting their relationship with students. Shen [68] demonstrated that a lack of leisure time is likely to cause teachers to doubt or even lose their professional identity, and cease devoting love and care to their students. It may even induce behaviors that violate the requirements of teachers’ professional ethics, due to the resulting psychological imbalance. Wang [69]
emphasized that high-quality leisure time can help teachers release pressure and allow them to positively devote themselves to their work. According to González [70], leisure must be understood as a human experience that positively contributes to one’s health and well-being, both physical and mental, and is also a means for personal and social development.

In this study, more than half of the interviewed teachers worked more than eight hours a day and expressed their need for increased leisure time. Thus, leisure time should be fully guaranteed to enhance their happiness and positive emotions at work and promote their caring. In addition, artistic activities can convey truth, goodness, and beauty, thus relieving negative emotions and encouraging the generation of positive caring emotions, consistent with the results of neuro-aesthetic research. The self-rewarding nature of aesthetic experiences may influence the beholder’s affective state, possibly improving well-being [71]. Aesthetic education can also impart the values of care, as excellent art contains elements of social thought and morality, life values, and ideal pursuits [72]. Thus, individuals who appreciate art can effectively expand their ideological realm and form a good moral character. As teachers can promote caring through their devotion to art, we should recognize the important role of artistic and aesthetic activities in the development of teachers’ positive emotions. It argues that emotions have never been far away from either behavior or any other psychological systems [73]. Emotions can motivate people to perform ethical duties, and they play an indispensable role in making moral judgments and motivating ethical actions [74]. Consequently, better performance by teachers can only be expected if they are satisfied with their jobs [27]. Providing adequate leisure time is one way of caring for teachers. Artistic and aesthetic activities not only enhance teachers’ positive emotional experience but are also a way for teachers to achieve self-care. Thus, the sustainability of caring emotions can be facilitated through adequate leisure and artistic activities.

5.3. Cultural Immersion Promotes the Sustainability of Caring Will and Cultivates Beliefs

The results showed that culture plays an important role in the cultivation of teachers’ caring beliefs. First, caring thoughts, which are rooted in Chinese traditional culture, motivate teachers positively and form the foundation of their caring beliefs. “Respecting the old and caring for the young” is a traditional virtue in China, incorporating not only human instincts to protect their biological lineage, but also their sense of cultural protection and continuity [75]. As a form of cultural expression, values and moral traditions enrich people spiritually and have strong permeability, sustainability, and stability [76]. Therefore, teachers growing up in the context of the traditional Chinese culture of caring for children internalize caring beliefs through the edification and permeation of caring thoughts.

Second, teachers’ immersion in kindergarten culture also cultivates their caring beliefs. Research has shown that the effect of kindergarten culture is to cultivate, infiltrate, generate, and sublimate [77], as well as guide, constrain, condense, motivate, and radiate [78], which is consistent with the results of the present study. Therefore, creating a caring culture and environment that would help develop teachers’ caring beliefs, with particular emphasis on teachers’ immersion in kindergarten culture, is vital. Third, the results also indicated that philosophy, the essence of traditional Chinese culture, plays an important role in regulating the cultivation of caring beliefs. Specifically, philosophy promotes teachers’ self-reflection and strengthens their beliefs. Studies indicate that philosophy encourages teachers to think deeply, improve self-awareness, listen, and consider different viewpoints [79], which is consistent with the results of the present study. Thus, philosophy promotes teachers’ self-reflection and improvement in caring behaviors, which is conducive to the sustainability of their caring beliefs.

5.4. Mentoring Practice Promotes the Sustainability of Caring Behaviors

The teachers generally confirmed the important role experienced teachers play in shaping their caring behaviors. Experienced teachers have more caring experience and knowledge and can help novice teachers shape and regulate their caring behaviors through a model of novice teachers observing and imitating experiences ones. Studies have shown
that experienced teachers’ daily teaching reveals their implicit educational wisdom, which can provide novice teachers with opportunities to learn directly and accumulate significant skilled teaching experience [80]. For instance, Tian et al. [81] found that imitating experienced teachers, learning through mentoring, and learning from excellent teachers is an effective way for teachers in the adaptation and exploration stages to achieve professional growth. Further, Goldhaber et al. [82] suggested that assigning student teachers to more effective mentor teachers is a sensible, low-cost approach to inducing marginal improvements in their teaching quality. This is consistent with the results on mentoring effects found in the present study’s interviews. Therefore, we should actively promote the role of experienced teachers, specifically their capabilities to demonstrate the cultivation of caring behaviors and help novice teachers to grow their caring experience and improve their caring abilities through mentoring. This would be beneficial to promoting the sustainability of teachers’ caring behavior.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed to emphasize a concern for the theme of caring in the sustainability of ECE and to explore the path to promote teachers’ caring. The main findings of this research extended the existing literature on teachers’ caring. The data were analyzed using a qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA, and the descriptive analysis technique. The overall results demonstrated a four-dimensional path for promoting the sustainability of kindergarten teachers’ caring, from the perspective of teachers. The cognitive dimension path highlighted reading as a means to awaken teachers’ caring conscience and promoted the sustainability of caring cognition; the emotional dimension path emphasized leisure and art activities as a means to generate teachers’ caring emotions and promoted the sustainability of caring emotion; the will dimension path underlined cultural immersion as a means to cultivate teachers’ caring beliefs and promoted the sustainability of caring will; and the behavioral dimension path highlighted mentoring practice as a means to shape teachers’ caring behaviors and promoted the sustainability of caring behaviors. Thus, by awakening the caring conscience, stimulating caring emotions, cultivating caring beliefs, and practicing caring behaviors, the sustainability of teachers’ caring can be comprehensively improved. This study provides systematic paths for promoting the sustainability of kindergarten teachers’ caring and indicates that teachers’ self-care is essential to ensure their caring. Moreover, it is a key problem restricting the SD of ECE, particularly in aging China.

This study has some limitations. First, the comprehensiveness and balance of the sample need improvement. Future studies should include a wider range of participants and an improved sample selection. The participants were all drawn from the same region of China. Teachers from different communities, regions, and cultures may have different perceptions and practices for promoting teachers’ caring in ECE. Although our research suggests a possible path to improve teachers’ caring in the Chinese ECE context, future research should explore the perceptions and practices of teachers from different populations and compare the outcomes to determine consistency and variation. Second, the objectivity of interview data should be further strengthened.

Our research does not conclude that the sustainability of teachers’ caring could only be promoted through the four paths indicated. Instead, it represents an effort to emphasize the theme of teachers’ caring in the SD of ECE and provides a Chinese experience. First, this study indicates that teachers’ caring is an important issue for the SD of ECE. It provides a four-dimensional path for promoting teachers’ caring from the perspective of teachers themselves. It emphasizes that this path is not singular, unidirectional, and scattered, but sustainable and systematic. Second, the study emphasizes that teachers’ internal processes, along with external support, can improve their caring abilities. The methods we introduced are valuable for educational practitioners and administrators, as well as researchers and decision-makers dedicated to promoting caring among kindergarten teachers both regionally and internationally. Third, this study also addresses the knowledge deficiencies relating to this topic and provides a solid foundation for future research. Finally, it emphasizes that
to improve teachers’ caring abilities, we must care for the teachers themselves. We must first care for teachers and help teachers realize self-care. As such, the findings are beneficial for the sustainability of kindergarten teachers’ caring and for informing the content of teacher education in sustainable ECE. The research conclusions will also make teachers and policymakers aware of the importance of caring for teachers themselves in the development of ECE, which can stimulate teachers’ internal drive for promoting their caring qualities and eventually enhance their professionalism. This has positive implications for improving the quality and sustainability of ECE in China and policy formulation in other regions. To achieve higher quality and sustainable ECE in aging China, it is necessary to promote teachers’ caring.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, and writing—original draft preparation, J.L.; validation and writing—original draft preparation, Y.J.; methodology—review and editing, supervision, B.Z.; writing—review and editing, X.Z.; writing—review and editing, T.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research and the APC were funded by major projects of the National Social Science Fund of China, grant number 18ZDA336.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committee of East China Normal University (HR 027-2019).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to the ethical requirement.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

Appendix A

Table A1. Interview Outline for Kindergarten Teachers.

| Prescribed kindergarten and working context |
|---------------------------------------------|
| • Could you provide your years of teaching experience, age, and educational background? |
| • How would you describe the working relationships in your kindergarten (e.g., interpersonal relationships)? |
| • Could you explain your tasks? How long do you work every day? |
| • How would you describe the caring atmosphere in your kindergarten? |

| General paths to promote the sustainability of kindergarten teachers’ caring |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| • What paths can promote the sustainability of kindergarten teachers’ caring? |
| • Could you explain your thoughts on the promotion paths in general? |
| • How do you usually improve your caring ability? |

If the participants reported some promotion paths in caring, they were invited to specify them (e.g., forms and techniques).

| Forms and techniques |
|----------------------|
| • What form/technique is used in this path? |
| • Have you used this form/technique? |
| • What were the results and influences of this path? |
| • What is the role of this path in improving teachers’ caring? |
Table A1. Cont.

Prompts

If participants did not provide more information, the researcher used the following prompts based on the original four dimensions of the teachers’ caring promotion model:

**The cognitive dimension**
- What path can be used to promote the sustainability of teachers’ caring in the cognitive dimension (e.g., reading classic works, picture books, fiction, and poems to awaken the caring conscience)?
- Please describe your reading habits. What are your reading values?
- What types of books do you prefer to read? Please explain why you read these books. Are the works and poems of famous educators included? What inspiration do these famous educational works provide to you? Could you explain the impact of such inspirations on your daily caring practice?
- What is the impact of reading on teachers’ caring in the cognitive dimension? Are there any other reading forms or techniques you would like to add?

**The emotional dimension**
- What path can be used to promote the sustainability of teachers’ caring in the emotional dimension (e.g., using leisure and art to generate caring emotions)?
- Do you have sufficient leisure time? How do you spend your leisure time? Can you explain your values pertaining to leisure?
- Please explain the impact of leisure and art on teachers’ caring in the emotional dimension. Are there any other specific art or leisure forms or techniques you would like to add?

**The will dimension**
- What path can be used to promote the sustainability of teachers’ caring in the will dimension (e.g., using cultural immersion to cultivate caring beliefs)?
- How would you describe Chinese kindergarten teachers’ culture or your kindergarten culture? What is your attitude towards this culture?
- Could you explain the impact of Chinese kindergarten teachers’ culture or kindergarten culture on teachers’ caring in the will dimension? Are there any other specific cultural forms or techniques you would like to add?

**The behavioral dimension**
- What path can be used to promote the sustainability of teachers’ caring in the behavioral dimension (e.g., using mentoring to shape caring behaviors)?
- What are the differences between novice and experienced teachers in caring practice? How do you understand these differences? Have one or more teachers had a profound influence on you in your educational career? What impact did they have?
- Please explain the impact of mentoring on teachers’ caring in the behavioral dimension. Are there any other mentoring forms or techniques you would like to add?

References

1. Engdahl, I. Early childhood education for sustainability: The OMEP world project. *Int. J. Early Child.* 2015, 47, 347–366. [CrossRef]
2. Ärlemalm-Hagsér, E.; Pramling Samuelsson, I. Early childhood education and acre for sustainability–Historical context and current challenges. In *Early Childhood Care and Education for Sustainability*; Huggins, V., Evans, D., Eds.; Routledge: London, UK, 2018.
3. Furu, A.C.; Heilala, C. Sustainability Education in Progress: Practices and Pedagogies in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care Teaching Practice Settings. *Int. J. Early Child. Environ. Educ.* 2021, 8, 16–29.
4. Hedefalk, M.; Almqvist, J.; Östman, L. Education for sustainable development in early childhood education: A review of the research literature. *Environ. Educ. Res.* 2015, 21, 975–990. [CrossRef]
5. Park, E.; Kim, H.; Yu, S. Perceptions and attitudes of early childhood teachers in Korea about education for sustainable development. *Int. J. Early Child.* 2016, 48, 369–385. [CrossRef]
6. Warren, A. A posthumanist perspective on caring in early childhood teaching. *N. Z. J. Educ. Stud.* 2019, 54, 261–275. [CrossRef]
7. Shi, L.; Han, L.; Yang, F.; Gao, L. The evolution of sustainable development theory: Types, goals, and research prospects. *Sustainability* 2019, 11, 7158. [CrossRef]
8. Mutalimov, V.; Kovaleva, I.; Mikhaylov, A.; Stepanova, D. Assessing regional growth of small business in Russia. *Entrep. Bus. Econ. Rev.* 2021, 9, 119–139. [CrossRef]
9. Bushukina, V. Specific Features of Renewable Energy Development in the World and Russia. *Financ. J.* 2021, 5, 93–107. [CrossRef]
10. Kranina, E.I. China on the way to achieving carbon neutrality. *Financ. J.* 2021, 5, 51–61. [CrossRef]
11. Moiseev, N.; Mikhaylov, A.; Varyash, I.; Saqib, A. Investigating the relation of GDP per capita and corruption index. *Entrep. Sustain. Issues* 2020, 8, 780–794. [CrossRef]
12. Matveeva, N. Legislative Regulation Financial Statement Preparation by Micro Entities: International Experience. *Financ. J.* 2021, 5, 125–138. [CrossRef]
13. Buchanan, J. Sustainability education and teacher education: Finding a natural habitat? 
   *Aust. J. Environ. Educ.* **2012**, *28*, 108–124. [CrossRef]

14. Siraj-Blatchford, J. Editorial: Education for sustainable development in early childhood. 
   *Int. J. Early Child.* **2009**, *41*, 9–22. [CrossRef]

15. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Guidelines and recommendations for reorienting 
   teacher education to address sustainability. In *UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development in Action*; UNESCO: Paris, France, 2005.

16. Velasquez, A.; West, R.; Graham, C.; Osguthorpe, R. Developing caring relationships in schools: A review of the research on 
   caring and nurturing pedagogies. *Rev. Educ.* **2013**, *1*, 162–190. [CrossRef]

17. Raivio, M.; Skaremyr, E.; Kuusisto, A. Caring for worldviews in early childhood education: Theoretical and analytical tool for 
   socially sustainable communities of care. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 3815. [CrossRef]

18. Määttä, K.; Hyvärinen, S.; Äärelä, T.; Uusiautti, S. Five basic cornerstones of sustainability education in the Arctic. 
   *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 1431. [CrossRef]

19. Mayseless, O. *The Caring Motivation: An Integrated Theory*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2015.

20. Laursen, E.K.; Birmingham, S.M. Caring relationships as a protective factor for at-risk youth: An ethnographic study. 
   *Fam. Soc. J. Contemp. Soc. Serv.* **2003**, *84*, 240–246. [CrossRef]

21. Vaughan-Jensen, J.; Smith, D.M.; Blake, J.J.; Keith, V.M.; Willson, V.K. Breaking the cycle of child maltreatment and intimate 
   partner violence: The effects of student gender and caring relationships with teachers. *J. Aggress. Maltreat. Trauma* **2020**, *29*, 
   223–241. [CrossRef]

22. Morrisson, J.; Frost, J.; Gotch, C.; McDuffie, A.R.; Austin, B.; French, B. Teachers’ role in students’ learning at a project-based STEM 
   high school: Implications for teacher education. *Int. J. Sci. Math. Educ.* **2021**, *1*, 1103–1123. [CrossRef]

23. Cekaite, A.; Bergnehr, D. Affectionate touch and care: Embodied intimacy, compassion and control in early childhood education. 
   *Eur. Early Child. Educ. Res. J.* **2018**, *26*, 940–955. [CrossRef]

24. Teven, J.J. Teacher temperament: Correlates with teacher caring, burnout, and organizational outcomes. 
   *Commun. Educ.* **2007**, *56*, 382–400. [CrossRef]

25. Lavy, S.; Naama-Ghanayim, E. Why care about caring? Linking teachers’ caring and sense of meaning at work with students’ 
   self-esteem, well-being, and school engagement. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2020**, *91*, 103046. [CrossRef]

26. Weldemariam, K.; Chan, A.; Engdahl, I.; Samuelsson, I.P.; Katiba, T.C.; Habte, T.; Muchanga, R. Care and Social Sustainability in 
   Early Childhood Education: Transnational Perspectives. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 4952. [CrossRef]

27. Okeke, C.I.; Mtyuda, P.N. Teacher job dissatisfaction: Implications for teacher sustainability and social transformation. 
   *J. Teach. Educ. Sustain.* **2017**, *19*, 54–68. [CrossRef]

28. Corral-Verdugo, V.; Pato, C.; Torres-Soto, N. Testing a tridimensional model of sustainable behavior: Self-care, caring for others, 
   and caring for the planet. *Environ. Dev. Sustain.* **2021**, *23*, 12867–12882. [CrossRef]

29. Fopka-Kowalczyk, M.; Krajnik, M. Expectations and self-care of family members in palliative care. The analysis of needs and 
   workshop plan. *Przegląd Badań Eduk. Educ. Stud. Rev.* **2019**, *2*, 91–110. [CrossRef]

30. Tobón, O. El autocuidado, una habilidad para vivir [Self-care, a skill for living]. *Hacia Promoc. Salud* **2015**, *8*, 38–50.

31. Rabin, C. “I already know I care!”: Illuminating the complexities of care practices in early childhood and teacher education. In 
   *Theorizing Feminist Ethics of Care in Early Childhood Practice: Possibilities and Dangers*; Langford, R., Ed.; Bloomsbury Academic: 
   London, UK, 2019; pp. 125–144. [CrossRef]

32. Falkenberg, T. Starting with the end in mind: Ethics-of-care-based teacher education. *Counterpoints* **2009**, *334*, 50–59.

33. Lampert, M.; Franke, M.L.; Kazemi, E.; Ghousseini, H.; Turrou, A.C.; Beasley, H.; Crowe, K. Keeping it complex: Using rehearsals 
   to support novice teacher learning of ambitious teaching. *J. Teach. Educ.* **2013**, *64*, 226–243. [CrossRef]

34. Nowak-Fabrykowski, D.; Caldwell, P. Developing a caring attitude in teacher preparation. *Education 2002*, *123*, 358–364.

35. Mahoney, J.L.; Durlak, J.A.; Weissberg, R.P. An update on social and emotional learning outcome research. *Phi Delta Kappan* 
   **2018**, *100*, 8–23. [CrossRef]

36. Rabin, C.; Smith, G. Teaching care ethics: Conceptual understandings and stories for learning. *J. Moral Educ.* **2013**, *42*, 164–176. 
   [CrossRef]

37. Sanger, M.; Osguthorpe, R. *The Moral Work of Teaching and Teacher Education: Preparing and Supporting Practitioners*; Teachers 
   College Press: New York, NY, USA, 2013.

38. Schussler, D.; Knarr, L. Building awareness of dispositions: Enhancing moral sensibilities in teaching. *J. Moral Educ.* **2013**, *42*, 
   71–87. [CrossRef]

39. Ramberg, J.; Läftman, S.B.; Almquist, Y.B.; Modin, B. School effectiveness and students’ perceptions of teacher caring: A multilevel 
   study. *Improv. Sch.* **2019**, *22*, 55–71. [CrossRef]

40. Narinasamy, I.; Mamat, W.H.W. Caring teacher in developing empathy in moral education. *Malays. Online J. Educ. Sci.* **2018**, *1*, 
   1–19.

41. Louis, K.S.; Murphy, J.; Smylie, M. Caring leadership in schools: Findings from exploratory analyses. *Educ. Adm. Q.* **2016**, *52*, 
   310–348. [CrossRef]

42. Niu, W.Y. The connotation of sustainable development theory: Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the United Nations 
   Conference on Environment and Development in Rio. *China’s Popul. Resour. Environ.* **2012**, *22*, 9–14.
43. Noddings, N. Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education; University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA, 1984.

44. Owens, L.M.; Ennis, C.D. The ethic of care in teaching: An overview of supportive literature. Quest 2005, 57, 392–425. [CrossRef]

45. Noddings, N. Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy; University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2002.

46. Noddings, N. Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education; Teachers College Press: New York, NY, USA, 2002.

47. Noddings, N. The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education; Yu, T., Translator; Teachers College Press: New York, NY, USA, 2003.

48. Baice, T.; Fonua, S.M.; Levy, B.; Allen, J.M.; Wright, T. How do you (demonstrate) care in an institution that does not define ‘care’? Pastor. Care Educ. 2021, 39, 250–268. [CrossRef]

49. Carroll, M. The practice of pastoral care of teachers: A summary analysis of published outlines. Pastor. Care Educ. 2010, 28, 145–154. [CrossRef]

50. Riley, P. Attachment theory, teacher motivation pastoral care: A challenge for teachers and academics. Pastor. Care Educ. 2013, 31, 112–129. [CrossRef]

51. Fonagy, P.; Gergely, G.; Jurist, E.L.; Target, M. Affect Regulation, Mentalization, and the Development of the Self; Other Press: New York, NY, USA, 2002.

52. Xie, G.X. Love and education love. J. Teach. Manag. 2014, 36, 22–25.

53. Wang, J. The unfication of “informed, intentional and action” in the permeable engineering ethics teaching. Mod. Univ. Educ. 2011, 4, 100–105.

54. Xu, S.A. Theoretical premise of “four-in-one” cultivation education—Based on the conceptual distinction of cognition, emotion, will and behavior. Univ. Educ. 2017, 11, 24–28.

55. Wang, X. Analytical framework for realization of individual political socialization—unification of cognition, emotion, will and behavior. J. Party Sch. Taiyuan Munic. Comm. Communist Party China 2014, 1, 68–70.

56. Feng, Y. Improving the acceptance effect of ideological and political education under the guidance of the relationship between knowledge, emotion, intention and behavior. High. Agric. Educ. 2006, 4, 17–20.

57. French-Lee, S.; Dooley, C.M. An exploratory qualitative study of ethical beliefs among early childhood teachers. Early Child. Educ. J. 2015, 43, 377–384. [CrossRef]

58. Kelly, S. Qualitative interviewing techniques and styles. In The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Health Research; Bourgeault, I., Dingwall, R., de Vries, R., Eds.; SAGE: Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2010; pp. 307–326.

59. Palinkas, L.A.; Horwitz, S.M.; Green, C.A.; Wisdom, J.P.; Duan, N.D.; Hoagwood, K. Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods 2006, 5, 363–377. [CrossRef]

60. Fonagy, P.; Gergely, G.; Jurist, E.L.; Target, M. Affect Regulation, Mentalization, and the Development of the Self; Other Press: New York, NY, USA, 2002.

61. Braun, V.; Clarke, V. Analyzing Your Own Data, Qualitative Research for Social Workers; Allyn and Bacon: Calgary, AB, Canada, 1996.

62. Karasar, N. Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri; Nobel Yayın Dağıtım: Ankara, Turkey, 2012.

63. Miles, M.B.; Huberman, M. Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods; Sage Publications: Beverly Hills, CA, USA, 1994.

64. Wang, Y.G.; Wang, Q. Some problems in the study of reading culture. Libr. Inf. Knowl. 2008, 26, 377–384. [CrossRef]
80. Zhang, Q.N. Conceptual analysis and realization approach of sustainable development of kindergarten teachers. *J. Chengdu Norm. Univ.* **2021**, *37*, 60–68.

81. Tian, J.Z.; Wang, S.X.; Liu, Y. An analysis of the growth process and influencing factors of post-80s excellent kindergarten teachers. *Theory Pract. Contemp. Educ.* **2019**, *2*, 147–152. [CrossRef]

82. Goldhaber, D.; Krieg, J.; Theobald, R. Effective like me? Does having a more productive mentor improve the productivity of mentees? *Labour Econ.* **2020**, *63*, 101–792. [CrossRef]