

Running Head: PROFESSORS PROVIDE TEACHING THROUGH THE ART OF CARING

Caring By Design

Gale. A. Dalton

Oakland University

April 14, 2008

### Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to continue the encouragement of empathy skills in teachers which display the foundation of an exemplary professor. Consideration on adjusted course work was studied concerning students with sudden physical illnesses and emotional health related issues. A sample of 46 undergraduate and graduate students participated and not only took part in a piloted survey but also added comments on this focus area. The implications were students success in their course work during sudden physical illness or health related issues relies on the central core element: the ability to teach with empathy, thus the *Art of Caring*.

**Table of Contents**

Title Page .....	1
Abstract .....	2
Table of Contents .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Concept Map .....	5
Educational Value .....	6
Historical Value .....	7
Area of Focus Statement .....	8
Literature Review .....	9
Data Collection .....	10
Methodology .....	11
Table .....	11
Themes .....	12
Results .....	12
Discussion .....	13
Data Analysis & Interpretation .....	13
Action Plan Research .....	15-16
Professor Interview Form Appendix A .....	17-19
Final Thoughts .....	19
Appendix B-Journaling .....	20-21
References .....	22

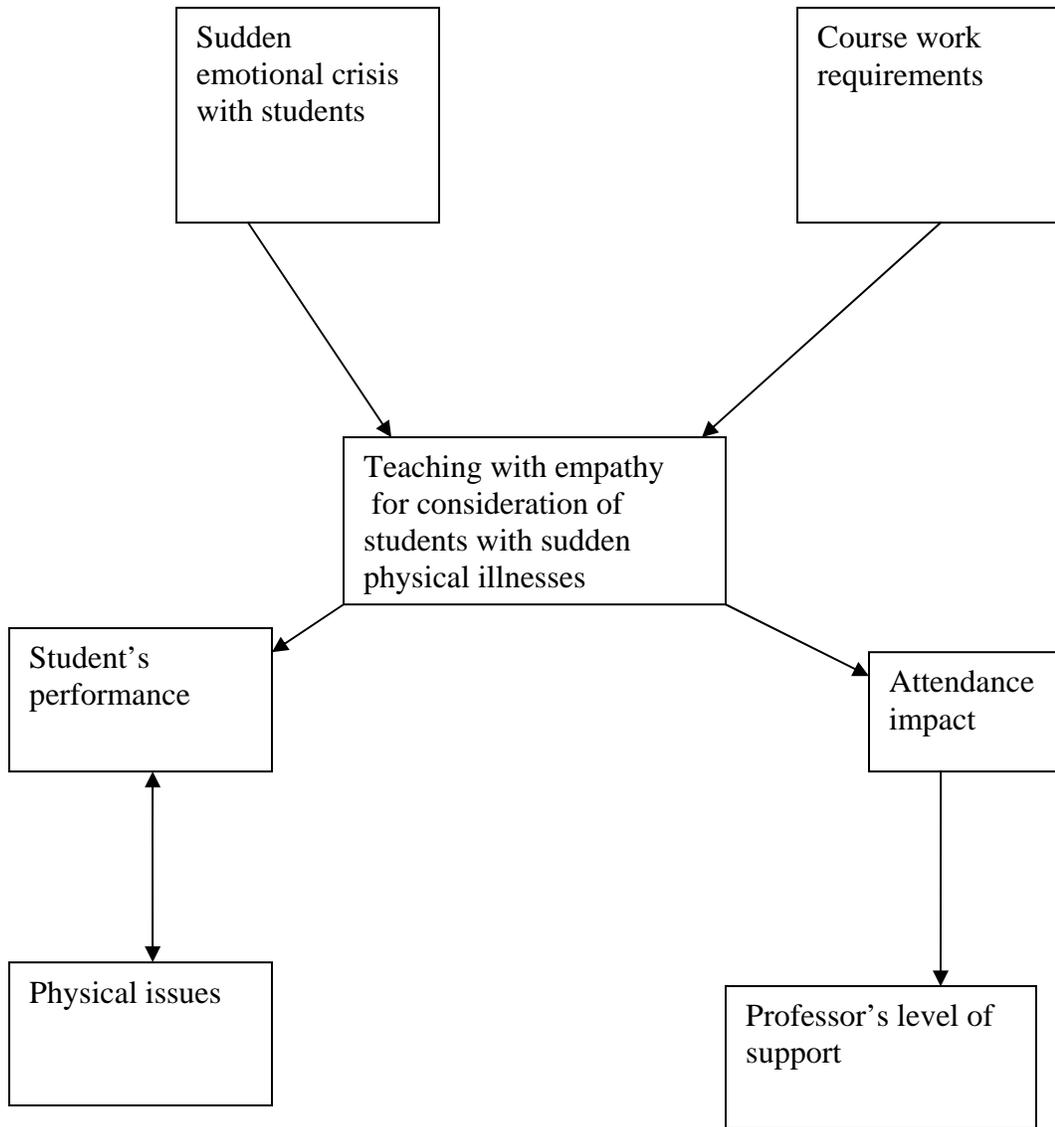
### **Introduction**

Over the years award-winning teaching or effective teaching has focused on best practices when it refers to teaching techniques and pedagogy. Madsen states, “student learning is considered of paramount importance in higher education institutions around the world.”(2007 p.5). With learning being ever present, one very important element that has to be included in the impact of successful learning and growth is empathetic teaching. Recent research has surfaced and has been conducted on teaching with empathy alongside empathetic listening. This can be also called “Transformative Teaching”.

With fervor, I became interested in this area through my personal experiences. Two years ago, my 23 yr old son was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma while I was in the midst of heavy course load. Being my sons care giver I had to make time to coordinate, chemotherapy, doctor appointments, and hospitalization while keeping up with the demands of my course requirements. It was this experience that moved me with such passion to see if other students like me are considered and helped while taking college courses.

My beginning research focused on the continuance of teaching with empathy. More specifically, I focused on the issue of teachers providing consideration to students with a sudden physical illness or emotional health related issues. These issues can impede students’ school performance. The outcome of this study is to share new research and design a plan for professors to continue to care for students while they are confronted with issues for the ultimate goal completing their course work.

### Concept Map



**Educational Value-** Based on my experience and research, if the teacher supports the student during times of sudden emotional or physical trauma, that would help he/she keep the belief that they can complete their class work. Also an important insight by Abell (2007) is “although much action research is meant to benefit only the teacher-researcher, or be shared with a small study group, a number of teacher-researchers have shared findings with a national audience.” (p. 2) As a teacher, that would be a great benefit if my findings could eventually be shared with a national audience.

Another educational claim by Abell (2007) is that for “action research to be most effective at catalyzing change, researchers must look deeply into student learning and challenge themselves to continually question and improve their instruction.”( p.3) How can you catalyze change or improve instruction with a student has issues that affect their outcome? The process lies in the research by another researcher Susan Madsen.

Even more, Madsen (2007) supports Abell by stating another benefit of action research “is the reflective and cyclical learning process that uses participative problem solving method aimed towards change and improvement.”(p. 10). Research is primarily reflective and is geared toward enhancement. Student thoughts and feelings have value in research which is why I share the following inclusion:

In the area of research are developments on college students’ insight into overall evaluations of teacher effectiveness. Gusthart (2005), therefore validates that student have self insight into how they evaluate teachers; which teachers do reflect on their teacher evaluations for change. (p.109) This enlightenment ignites my passion for catalyzing change being a grad student and also a new teacher researcher. We must as teachers look deeply into student learning, and in

doing so the research has found that concentration on empathy is an integral part of student learning as well as teacher instruction. This element: empathy is especially needed for students with sudden physical illnesses and emotional health related issues. So in essence, the teacher learns from the student and the student learns from the teacher. This brings about effective change.

**Historical Backgrounds** –As mentioned in my third semester while confronting these issues of my son’s illness, my professors were very compliant and worked with me so I could complete my course work. This act of caring inspired me to research studies and the effects this act of caring had on college students and their success in completing their classes. You never know when something sudden occurs in a student’s life that alters his/her consistency with school work. Students need the support and understanding of their teachers. Empathy is that much needed element.

To prepare for this project I went to the Michigan Curriculum Benchmarks which are so crucial to organization, focus and delivery.

**English Language Arts-** Effective organization or flow of a research paper is supported by the following standards:

**Substantive Conversation-** The teacher engages students in a conversation which builds a shared understanding about a topic.

ELA.10.LE.3

Use oral, written and visual texts to research how individuals have had an impact in their community and their nation.

ELA.11.LE.3

Organize and analyze information to draw conclusions and implications based on their investigation of an issue or a problem.

ELA.3.LE.4

Distinguish between verbal and non verbal communication and identify and practice elements of effective listening and speaking.

Michigan Curriculum Framework retrieved on April 5, 2008

[http://michigan.gov/documents/MichiganCurriculumFramework\\_8172\\_7.pdf](http://michigan.gov/documents/MichiganCurriculumFramework_8172_7.pdf)

As I begin with my research the following are my focus questions:

**Action Research Focus questions**

How do we encourage empathy skills in teachers so they will be more sensitive to the effects of sudden physical and emotional trauma on students?

To what degree should teacher's expectations of student's performance be adjusted due to the issues in the student's life outside the classroom?

To what degree do teachers adjust their expectations of student's performance due to issues in the student's life?

**Focus Question condensed**

How do we encourage empathy skills in teachers so they will be more sensitive to the effects of sudden physical and emotional trauma on students and should the teacher's expectations of student performance be adjusted due to issues in the student's life outside the classroom?

If so, I will propose an action plan for continuance of my research. In the future I will administer interviews with professors getting feedback on their providing consideration and caring in their educational practices.

**Review of Related Literature**

**Connection to Current Literature**

Empathetic caring has sparked a lot of interest in the research arena. More studies are defining the true element in teaching not relying on just best teaching techniques. In other words mechanically teaching a subject lesson. Providing consideration thus, having a caring attitude other

element in teaching. Going further with teaching with empathy is empathetic listening. The Hindu (2004) online edition of India's National Newsletter, brings out the importance of Empathetic Listening. It is said "Empathic Listening integrates an attitude of childlike curiosity with the compassion of Mother Theresa. When we listen empathetically, we are fully available and present for the other person."(p.1) Being available shows the student interest. It shows the openness of that professor.

Research further shows by Jenkins and Speck (2007) that most educators argue "it is not the things that teachers do themselves that makes great teachers but the intangible something that transcend all of the variables—the way they craft their practice". (p.) This is through caring as a foundation to effective teaching. So we have empathetic listening, caring and we will continue to see what other factors are necessary for teaching with empathy.

The relevance of Madsen (2007) action research takes us to the next step of action learning. Action learning is an experimental process. (pp. 5-17). "Teachers as researchers embark upon new innovative ideas to enrich their teaching experience and also their learning disciplines." It is for this reason another researcher by the name Burgstahler (2005) claims "that teachers should always look for opportunities to provide ways for motivation of the student while the student is going through a difficult or challenging time. This is descriptive of a caring attitude." (p. 69). Going through my challenging time I needed motivation. Motivation helped pave the way that I could still continue my studies despite my upheavals.

Madsen (2007) looks deeply and shares "that Dewey was a strong advocate of providing both experience and reflective opportunities for students. He warned of formal instruction being the subject matter of schools isolated from the subject matter of experience." I want to take Dewey's position a step further and say that teacher and student must provide each other with experience and reflection in their relationship in the

classroom. More specifically, when a student is confronted with a sudden physical illness and/or health related issue this is the time the teacher steps to see the student's outcome a positive one. This is also the time that the student opens up making their challenges known for assistance.

When I first found out the diagnosis of my sons condition that evening I had to attend class. We were doing a presentation of getting to know each other. During my presentation after talking about my ancestral roots and family, I just became teary eyed and told my classmates and professor of my new challenge. They became teary eyed and so supportive. During times of distress it is not healthy to keep such emotional feelings to yourself. My professor immediately adjusted to this news and wanted to help in any way possible. Her example prompted the students who were just getting to know me that 2<sup>nd</sup> week of class to show consideration and assistance. My professor was in connection with what was happening with one of her students. The class was in sync with our professor. The atmosphere of caring was precious and I found strength that day.

Fink(2003), sums it up so wonderful “ I have learned that my gift as a teacher is the ability to dance with my students, to co create with them a context in which all or us teach and learn.” (p.238) In other words, we dance to different rhythms or changes with students and we then create such an atmosphere that we are learning from each other. This is what teacher research is all about learning from your classroom environment, learning from you students.

### **Data Collection**

My data collection consisted of qualitative data collection techniques. I used for research observation, and a survey. There was no opportunity to observe students during their class while going through a sudden physical illness or emotional trauma. There were opportunities at the ERL where students voiced their feelings and shared their experiences after filling out the survey.

#### **A. Motivation for data collection**

The Survey was therefore conducted in the ERL with undergraduate and graduate students' providing information on their thoughts on teachers' showing empathy and consideration when students are overcome by a sudden illness or life-changing event.

Getting into the minds of the students gave me the understanding about how the professors interact with the students during a time of sudden crisis. Ideas for new methods can be suggested or added from the present research

The survey information will help me to scaffold my knowledge in designing a interview form. This form will provide professors with innovative ideas on teaching with empathy.

## **B. Proposed Methodology**

- Piloted Survey

46 undergraduate and graduate students filled out surveys while in the ERL providing insights into their experiences during their college years with their professors. Data analysis and data interpretation from survey was used to design the interview form for future research.

Utilizing this interview form for university professors will provide perception on professor's consideration teaching with empathy.

### **Data Sources**

- a. Pilot Survey
- b. Interview form to be designed from analysis and interpretation for future action plan research. The newly designed interview form will guide me with questions for continuing research of teaching with empathy
- c. Table – show percentage of opinions on the survey questions.

**Research Methodology** – The time line for survey was from February to beginning of March. Location: the ERL- Educational Resources Lab: Participants undergraduate and

graduate students from all disciplines with mostly education majors.

Measure - Piloted Survey (See Appendix A) and Table I

### **Procedure**

Piloted Survey was introduced to participants with full understanding regarding reason for study and of any obligation or responsibility. Confirmation was assured that there would be no deception, physical or psychological harm. Lastly, the participants were told that their confidentiality would be maintained. The surveys were all numbered from 1 to 46.

Data analysis and data interpretation of the method will be used for future step in my research.

**TABLE I**

Participants' Responses on Teachers' Empathy in Classroom Survey (N=46)

---



---

Item
1. Do most of your teachers show a caring attitude when it comes to you having a sudden crisis in your family or your life? (SA) (A) (U) (D) (SDA)
2. To what extent do you agree your professor should show empathy to immediate issues that arise in your life that interferes with your classroom performance or attendance? For example, sudden surgery surprise diagnosis; such as cancer, fall-fracture or break of a leg or arm. ? (SA) (A) (U) (D) (SDA)
3. Do you feel from the above question (2) professors should make adjustments with your course work to accommodate your needs? ? (SA) (A) (U) (D) (SDA)
4. Do you feel professors should teach a special course as part of the education curriculum on teaching empathy to be better prepared when a student is over come by a sudden crisis or illness? ? (SA) (A) (U) (D) (SDA)
5. During the time of an sudden emergency, crisis loss or death in your family, should you figure out how to help you get your course work completed? (SA) (A) (U) (D) (SDA)
6. Do you think if a sudden crisis occurs you are to keep quiet and not share it with your professor? (SA) (A) (U) (D) (SDA)
7. Overall during your course of college or graduate learning do your professor care enough when you or students go through sudden issues considered to be life changing or health related? (SA) (A) (U) (D) (SDA)

Percentage of Responses of Participants in Piloted Survey

Strongly Agree/ Agree Question 1	Unsure	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Agreement 74%	11%	Disagreement 15%
Strongly Agree/Agree Question 2	Unsure	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Agreement 85%	2%	Disagreement 13%
Strongly Agree/Agree Question 3	Unsure	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Agreement 78%	13%	Disagreement 9%
Strongly Agree/Agree Question 4	Unsure	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Agreement 44%	28%	Disagreement 28%
Strongly Agree/Agree Question 5	Unsure	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Agreement 48%	4%	Disagreement 48%
Strongly Agree/Agree Question 6	Unsure	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
Agreement 13%	11%	Disagreement 76%
Strongly Agree/Agree Question 7	Unsure	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Agreement 46%	41%	Disagreement 13%

With this survey other themes emerged that provides a wider perspective of Caring by design. These **themes** are: Teaching with empathy is the foundation which supports empathetic listening. Teaching with empathy stresses the significance of more patience and wait time with adults, and mutual understanding.

### **The Benefits of Empathetic Listening**

Increased empathetic listening and caring incorporated in the teaching styles expresses trust and relationship between student and teacher.

### **The Drawbacks of Empathetic Listening**

Are many professors attracted to new perspectives in transformative learning? Research says that some see empathetic listening as not that important. There is still greater emphasis on teaching techniques that lack the importance of teaching with empathy adequately.

## **Results**

Abell (2007) mentions “how action research improves and benefits teachers and students.”(p.4). Abell also emphasizes how action research is a powerful tool for professional development. (p.5) This

supports that my findings will be a powerful tool. My findings can be shared with a larger audience not just for my benefit.

## **Discussion**

### **Feedback**

Participants expressed a desire to know the outcome of the survey. Participants were receptive to filling out the survey. Participants frequently put comments on the survey form instead of just short answers. Participants also spoke directly with me on their feelings and opinions of this topic.

**Importance of Research** studies are persons productions with conclusions about the past, present and future findings. Surveys, observed accounts, and journaling, are elements subject to analysis and interpretation. Organizing all these factors feeds upon the range of data and compares interpretations that reveal more than one viewpoint on events. Journaling and reflection of the summation of the research process keeps one focused onto your aim and goal. (See Appendix B).

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The survey was an exciting time for me. I wanted the information and the interaction with the students. The students agreed overwhelmingly that most of their teachers show a caring attitude and should continue to go to great extent in compassion and understanding when it come to them developing a sudden physical illness in their life and family.

The students overwhelmingly agreed the professors should make adjustments when a student comes to them and explains they developed a sudden physical illness or emotional crisis in their life and/or family.

The undergrad and grad students felt that a special course wasn't needed to prepare future teachers on teaching for empathy but should have a special seminar on the topic. This was a good suggestion because this is part of life; *a real part of life*. The students in the survey were tied on if

they should try totally to help themselves figure how to get the course work completed or should they solicit help from their teacher. But at the same token they felt strongly on not keeping it to themselves. The teacher should know that they are going through a crisis. So I conclude from this result that the students feel independent enough to help themselves but also want the teacher to know. The only drawback is sometimes you feel like you are strong and can help yourself but really need help as you are trying to deal with the sudden life changing event.

The general conclusion is the undergraduate and graduate students through their years of college experience expressed their professors have shown a caring attitude and demeanor when faced with a sudden physical illness or emotional crisis.

The following is a list of qualities by Jenkins and Speck (2007) of award winning teachers who exemplified teaching with empathy for the continuance of these essential elements:

**Attributes of an effective educator teaching with empathy**

- Professors communicating both directly and indirectly the concern of students' welfare
- Professors saw themselves as being valuable to help students learn
- Inexplicable element in effective teaching
- Inexplicable element in caring; the students know "I am in their corner, and I try to help them where I am."
- Attention to students both inside and outside the classroom
- Satisfaction surveys given to them as feedback
- Meeting students needs. meaning meeting the variety of students learning needs
- Positive Attitude (p. 49).

A point given by Fink (2003) is to show no biases and teach with multiple perspectives. (p 249)

In other words be open minded and remember gender equity principles.

### **Action Plan/Future Research**

From all of my data analysis and interpretation, my plan of action would consist of designing an interview form based on the survey results. I would interview the professors for future continuance on ways to keep teaching with empathy vital to best practices.

Research supports that being an effective teacher through best practices is not sole role alone. Being an award winning effective teacher you have to teach with empathy inclusive of empathetic listening skills. Therefore the goal is, for professors to continue to research new tools of empathy/consideration teaching techniques to help college students in times of distress. I must also add that teaching with empathy is needful even when students are not going through a life changing event or sudden physical illness but is stressed more when these issues arise.

Another example of caring or teaching with empathy given by Jenkins and Speck (2007) are “I like to think that I give the impression that I am available, be accessible when people have questions or comments or just want to talk. Several of the professors talked about this attitude in terms of “caring” for the students, particularly, as one professor noted “caring about their learning.” (p. 44)

Additionally, this is a two-fold process: the teacher provides consideration and teaches with empathy during sudden illness and crisis in the student’s life. The other part of the process: the student feels comfortable enough to open up and express their need for help. At times, professors with perception and insight can detect that there is something wrong without the student’s verbal expression. It is here that the professor initiates consideration. The professor acting with empathy helps to give the student more stamina to persevere despite the sudden physical or emotional trauma, thus increasing the chances that the student will still complete his/her work and finish the course. This validates what Jenkins and Speck (2007) claim, “As students themselves report,

learning is highly emotional. It involves great threats to students’ self-esteem, especially when they are exploring new and different knowledge and skills domains.” (p. 44). So they need the support.

From the findings and comments by the participants of the study, it has been expressed for the continuance of a wonderful attribute providing consideration. It is with this motivation I formulated for future research an interview form. This form is to be given to professors asking questions surrounding their perceptions and attitudes of teaching with empathy as the central core caressing their best practices. (See Appendix A)

**Appendix A  
Interview Form**

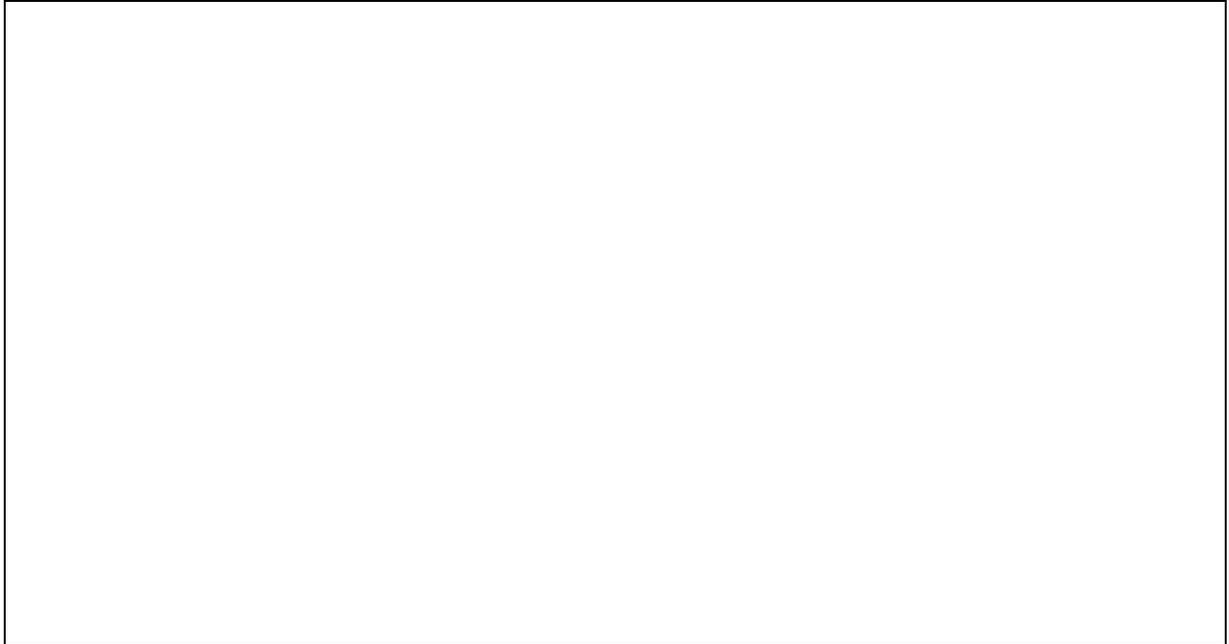
**Interview form**

Professor Interview date  
 Position  
 Interviewed by

Generic questions	
Have you experienced a student or students in your class room that have had a sudden crisis or illness?	
Have you experienced a student who had a sudden crisis in their family that hampered their school performance?	
When a student is confronted with a sudden illness like a fall/fracture, or a life threatening illness like cancer or sudden death is their class work adjusted?	
If so in which way? If not what is done because if their sudden emotional or health issue?	
Do you feel teachers should teach for empathy and show their caring side?	
What do you consider important, and why?	

What do you feel are good elements for helping the student successfully complete their course work?	
Do you feel one of your major strengths is teaching with empathy to all students?	
Do you feel that if a student has a sudden life changing, emotional or health issue they should let you the professor know?	
We know there are adjustments made for students with special needs but for students with sudden illnesses or crises in their life should there be any adjustments?	
Do you feel teaching with empathy is a major responsibility in your present job?	
What do you feel that you have done particularly well when it comes to helping out a student who has a sudden illness that can be life threatening?	
Do you feel that teaching with empathy can be a problem area as you encounter sudden health or emotional issues with your students? (Could this also become a problem in this job?)	
Are there any frustrations in your present job when a student has a major life changing health or emotional issue?	
Would you describe yourself as a very caring person as a professor?	
If you developed a sudden health or emotional issue and you needed accommodations as a faculty member would you let your colleagues know or keep it to yourself and try to work it out?	

**Additional Comments:**



### **Final Thoughts**

This action research project has been a wonderful and fulfilling experience for me. The paper allowed me to get involved for continuance of my focus topic question. The study allowed me to interact with the college students in hearing their thoughts and opinions on teachers providing consideration through the art of caring. Through research I learned the validation of award winning teachers is not just based on teaching techniques and best practices of subjects but the true essence, the true core of the foundation of teaching is teaching with empathy. I am delighted to show my caring by design in developing an interview form for further research to hear the professor's responses and opinions of this research topic. As a teacher researcher it has catalyzed me to search for questions challenging myself to improve my craft. With my experience and as studies claim not only benefits me the researcher but can be shared with small groups or a national audience.

## **Appendix B**

### **Journaling**

Journal

#### **December 2007**

Got the email with syllabus of research class wondered what will it be like to have an online class. Was a little anxious wondering how it will all be with my fractured shoulder and my fingers not working just right.

Well Dr. Mac Donald sent me two articles to print and told me about this site that I didn't get to go on until January.

I got some journals.

Wow it is a lot of reading.

Dr Mac Donald has answered all my emails.

#### **January 2008 1<sup>st</sup> week**

Pecking along and went to see Dr. Mac Donald on topic focus and what to do.

Still not so sure and wonder how this will pan out

Want to do a good job.

I got more articles and some resource books.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> week

Trying to focus on specific question and also reading the book that was assigned which is a really good book.

Easy to follow a lot of points to keep up with.

#### **January 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> week**

Reading the chapters in the book for action research and able to follow along the process.

The book is helping me to organize in my mind what I am supposed to do and the ethical way of doing it.

#### **January 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> week**

Reading is still going good. Step by step process to follow for the designing of the action research.

#### **February 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> week**

I see now that I am going to use a survey for the bulk of my research and met with my professor and he said I can use my interview form for future research as part of my action plan.

I will write up a proposal for this.

#### **February 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> week**

I will now use a table for my survey. My professor gave me a website where to go for my Journal lit review. Reading over different journals and he gave me one of his books to look over. I have now found the format for a research paper on web.

I started giving out my surveys last week for first time.

#### **March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and Third week**

Went to see my professor to see how I am coming along and he alleviated any worry on my part. He showed me a more excellent way on how I could use my designed interview form to ask

questions for professors to develop future insight in continuation of teaching with empathy as a foundation in excellent effective teaching.

I continued to research to gather information for the topic.

I finished my survey and was glad that different students added comments to the short answer survey.

I was interesting to see the results and analyze the survey responses.

I am glad to have the opportunity to journal my progress as I put the research paper together.

I want to reflect that the book we are using for the course has been magnificent in walking us through the process.

Also the supplemental materials are excellent resources.

**March 4<sup>th</sup> week**

I am enjoying the process and putting the research paper together.

**April 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> week**

This has been a wonderful process and experience that every teacher should practice.

### References

1. Abell, S. K., (2007). Action Research: inquiring into science teaching and learning. (Perspectives: Research and tips of support science education). *Science and Children*, Retrieved from March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008  
<http://find.galegroup.com/itx/retreive.do?contentSet=1AC-Documen>
2. Burgastahler, S. (2005). Preparing faculty to make their courses accessible to all students. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*. 16(2), 69-86.
3. Dallimore, E. J., Hertenstein, J. H. & Platt, M. B., Faculty-Generated Strategies for “Cold Calling” Use: A Comparative Analysis with Student Recommendations. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*. 16 (1) 1, 23-62.
4. Fink, L. D., (2003). Creating Significant Learning Experiences; an Integrated Approach for Designing College Courses. Jossey Bass p.238-249
5. Gusthart, L., Harrison, H., Ryan, J. M., & Moore, P. (2005). An examination of college students’ insight into how they make overall evaluations of teaching effectiveness. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 16(1), 109-124.
6. Harris B. A., (2005). Learning to Listen: A key to creative transformative learning. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*. 16 (1), 63-77
7. Jenkins, C.R., & Speck, B. W., (2007). “I’m in their corner”: Caring as foundational to effective teaching. *Journal on Excellence in College* 18 (2), 41-60.
8. Madsen, S.R. (2007). Action learning unveiled: Finding depth through understanding related constructs. *Journal of Excellence in College teaching*, 18(2), 5-25.
9. Mc Niff, J., (2002). “Action research for professional development; Concise Advice for new action researchers. Jean Mc Niff 2002
10. Michigan Curriculum Framework Retrieved April 5, 2008  
[http://michigan.gov/documents/MichiganCurriculumFramework\\_8172\\_7.pdf](http://michigan.gov/documents/MichiganCurriculumFramework_8172_7.pdf)
11. Mills, G. E., (2007). Action Research; a Guide for the Teacher Researcher. Third Edition Pearson- Merrill Prentice Hall. 101-114.
12. The Hindu: Online Edition of India’s National Newspaper (2004). Empathetic Listening. Online Edition of India’s National Newspaper, Retrieved February 18, 2008 from  
<http://www.hinduonnet.com/jobs/0411/2004112400391300.htm>