Exemplary Teaching Professors’ Conceptualizations of Care

Neil A. Knobloch

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

139 Bevier Hall, 905 S. Goodwin Avenue

Urbana, IL 61801

(217) 244-8093

nknobloc@uiuc.edu
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“The teaching methods one uses may be less important than aspects of teaching that cut across methods. The degree to which students feel we know them as individuals and care about their learning, the extent to which they know us as individuals (not simply as experts or authorities), the openness we have to questions and opposing points of view, our willingness to risk change in ourselves—these have much to do with the students’ willingness to open their values to examination and change.” (Wilbert J. McKeachie, 2002, pp. 302-303).

Abstract

Twenty-six exemplary teaching professors’ wisdom of practice were studied through a theoretical framework of care in higher education to explore and understand what constituted professors’ conceptualizations of care. Professors participated in a two-hour focus group interview and one-hour face-to-face interviews. Professors were asked to describe themselves as a teacher, what made them different from non-exemplary teaching professors, what motivated them to teach, their greatest joys, and the best thing about teaching. Evidence from professors’ concept maps of teaching and learning, focus group interviews, and face-to-face interviews were analyzed. The exemplary teaching professors, explicitly and implicitly, expressed that they cared about teaching and learning. The professors’ conceptualizations of pedagogical care emerged into two groups: (a) caring for student learning, and (b) caring for student development. Three conceptual themes emerged out of two groups of professors regarding the professors’ roles of creating a context for learning, roles of teaching knowledge, and motives and satisfiers as teachers.
Introduction

Caring professors. Is this an oxymoron? Professors are high-performers (Lowman, 1995) and care deeply about what they do. Although most professors see themselves as caring, many students disagree (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996). There are a multitude of reasons for this disparity. Disciplines (Braxton, 1990) and type of institution (Braxton, 1989) divide faculty between two groups—a commitment to teaching and a commitment to research (Fulton & Trow, 1974; Light, 1974). Faculty are pressed by reward systems to teach well and do significant research (Leslie, 2002). The explicit reward structure in higher education favors research performance and Leslie (2002) suggested that this disconnect between the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in academe poses problems for faculty motivation and performance.

Does the pressure to excel as a teacher and researcher affect performance? Although professors value teaching (Knapper, 1997; Leslie, 2002), large numbers of students, the relentless drain of energy, unappreciative students, and many other factors diminish teachers’ caring and interpersonal attitude (Hansen & Wentworth, 2002). Jewler (1994) posited that care was important for professors to connect and develop relationships with students. However, professors’ rigorous workloads and attention to their research over their teaching keeps professors from building close relationships with students. New faculty who fail to manage teaching early in their careers can experience negative effects on their performance (Boice, 2000). Veteran professors can experience what Machell (1989) calls, “professorial melancholia”—a progressive emotional process of negating a professor’s motivation, attitude, and self-esteem. Thereby, creating an illusion that they just don’t care.
Understanding faculty motivation is complex, yet it plays an important role in performance. In 1987, Ernest Boyer prompted the academy to think of an ideal community in higher education as purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring and celebrative. Boyer continued his discussions on a more connected and integrated professoriate, which evolved into the scholarship of teaching. Lee Shulman has continued Boyer’s work on the scholarship of teaching. Shulman (1999) argued that if professors take learning seriously, they must profess teaching, and take their profession as teachers seriously. Shulman explained, “At the heart of the concept of a profession is a public and moral commitment to learning from pedagogical experience and exchanging that learning in acts of scholarship that contribute to the wisdom of practice across the profession.” Shulman (2003) calls for excellence in teaching as more than a matter of knowing the latest techniques and technologies. He described excellence as an ethical and moral commitment, called the pedagogical imperative. Shulman explained that professors with an ethical and moral commitment are actively responsible and accountable for their performance by inquiring into the consequences of his or her work with students. Teachers are, with students, the heart of the educational process (Noddings, 1984). Professors communicate their values when students see they are willing to sacrifice time from their own endeavors in order to help them (McKeachie, 2002). Student-teacher interactions and mutual respect impact student performance (Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Thus, professors need to care if they want to be effective teachers.

Teaching has profound moral and social dimensions (Sutton, 1993). In his 20-year review, Knapper (1997) summarized the literature on effective teaching to depend on the quality of interaction with students, opportunities for active learning, and careful design of student assessment tasks. The interpersonal relations between the professor and students inside and
outside of the classroom affects the motivation and performance of both the professor and students. The moral and social dimensions of teaching and learning in higher education have been described through a variety of concepts and labels: positive learning climate and rapport (Centra, 1996; Feldman, 1989; Hativa, 2000; Hativa, Barak, & Simhi, 2001; Lowman, 1995; Murray, 1997); immediacy or relational closeness (Palmer, 1998); facilitation (Feldman, 1976); and trust (Brookfield, 1991). Based on a summary of literature, McKeachie (2002) recommended that all students need to: (1) feel welcome, (2) feel that they are treated and respected as individuals, (3) feel they can participate fully, and (4) be treated fairly.

The moral dimension of teaching raises ethical issues for professors in higher education. Although there are several ethical principles for professors (AAUP, 1987; Murray, Gilmore, Lennon, Mercer, & Robinson, 1996), two principles are touched on here because they relate closely to teaching and learning. First, because the primary purpose of teaching is to encourage learning, the first ethical responsibility professors have is to know the content to be learned, the students who will do the learning, and the best methods to foster learning (McKeachie, 2002). Professors need to prepare and conduct well-designed instruction. This involves preparing for each class session and staying current in the content area and research on teaching and learning. The second ethical responsibility of professors is to respect students as individuals. Professors need to accommodate student differences and respect their goals, values, and choices. Much of the way professors treat students can be seen and heard in how they interact with their students in and out of class. Comments, nonverbal actions, listening, accessibility, and attentive communication of one’s regard for another person (McKeachie, 2002).

The conceptual framework of this study was based on the premise that professors play an integral role in educating college students and their motivation is in part connected to the concept
of care. Specifically, professor motivation and what they believe about teaching and learning shape their practice and interactions with students, which influences student motivation and performance. This particular study was born out of a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) project of exemplary teaching professors in a college of applied, consumer and environmental sciences at a large, Midwestern land-grant university. The SoTL project focused on understanding professor motivation as exemplary teachers. However, the participants discussed that care was an integral component of their motivation. The wisdom of practice of 26 exemplary teaching professors were studied through a theoretical lens of care in higher education to explore and understand what constituted the professors conceptualizations of care.

Theoretical Framework

“Education is part of a larger ethical, social and cultural enterprise in which teachers are morally responsible to help students engage in a struggle for a more human world” (Sutton, 1993, p. 163). The moral grounds of education focus on mutual respect between teachers and learners as people (McKeachie, 2002). Relation as human encounter and affective response is a basic fact of human existence (Noddings, 1984). Human caring is foundational to the moral action and ethical response of people interacting with each other. Noddings recommends that all educational institutions and teachers nurture caring in all their efforts. This raises an immediate question.

How do we know if one cares? Noddings raises two primal points. First, the action either brings a favorable outcome or appears to be likely that it will. Second, the one-caring displays variability in actions and acts in a nonrule-bound fashion. Caring arises naturally in the inner circles of human interactions and is summoned by a concern for the ethical self in situations where it does not occur naturally (Noddings). Mayeroff (1971) defined “caring, as
helping another grow and actualize himself, is a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development” (pp. 1-2). Mayeroff’s conceptualization of caring has eight elements: knowing the recipient, patience, honesty, trust, humility, hope, courage, and alternating rhythms of evaluating and adjusting actions to better help the recipient.

Caring teachers genuinely want to see motivated students who freely choose projects, pursue tasks, and spontaneously share accounts of their experiences from their interactions and teaching efforts. In pedagogical caring, one must look at caring before pedagogy to discern what form caring takes place in the teaching function. Noddings’ (1984, 1992) concept of a caring teacher served as the theoretical framework. Caring is when a teacher has engrossment and motivational displacement in a student and when the student recognizes that the teacher cares. Caring teachers displace their motive energy engrossed on individual students through mutual relations with an inclusive attitude. The following theoretical framework is based on Noddings’ concept of a caring teacher, unless otherwise cited.

*Individual Students*

Caring teachers focus on individual students (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Teachers should stretch the students’ world by selecting that which the students should experience, work cooperatively with students in their struggle for competence, and above all, nurture each student’s ethical ideal. If students are not interested in what the teacher has selected to be learned, Noddings (1984) suggests that caring teachers should accept the students’ attitude toward the subject, adjust their requirements in light of the students’ interests and abilities, and support the students’ efforts without judging them. Caring teachers communicate to their students while they teach, “I am still interested in you. All of this is of variable importance and
significance, but you still matter more” (p. 20). The teacher must always be aware that the student is more important and more valuable than the subject.

Caring teachers provide cooperative guidance and focus on developing a sense of efficacy in their students (Noddings, 1984, 1992). They realize that the challenge in learning new tasks needs to be within optimal range. If too difficult, students can get frustrated and give up. If too easy, students can get bored and move on to other activities. Caring teachers recognize that their students will often respond with interest if the students respect and trust the teacher. Caring teachers develop a sense of efficacy by working with students and developing competence through modeling, coaching, overcoming physical and emotional barriers, and mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). Technically, teachers develop their knowledge to enhance their caring efforts. Caring teachers develop content expertise so that they can teach their subjects inclusively for all students.

**Mutual Relations**

Caring teachers establish mutual relations with students (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Receptivity and reciprocity maintains and enhances the relatedness between the teachers and students. A receptive teacher is one who is committed to the student and assumes full individuality in relatedness. A caring teacher needs to be totally and nonselectively present to each student as the student addresses the teacher. A caring teacher looks and listens through eyes and ears, accepts and receives students’ feelings toward subject matter, and develops a mentoring relationship with students. However, caring is completed in teacher-student relationships through the understanding of caring by the student. Students who are receptive engage themselves in relationships with others and the teacher. Students who respect the teacher feel free to initiate conversation and suggest areas of interest. Receptive students engage in free
dialogue with teacher and provide spontaneously volunteered responses of acceptance of the caring teacher’s efforts.

Reciprocity is facilitated when a teacher sees things through the eyes of the students in order to teach them. A caring teacher “interprets what she sees from one pole in the language that she hears at the other” (Noddings, 1984, p. 70), and the teachers grasps the effectance motivation of the students based on their efficacy, task-values, and interests. Students can contribute to a caring relation with teachers by responding as free-will agents to the teacher’s engrossment of worry and relief, and by sharing their aspirations, appraisals, and accomplishments. It is natural for a caring teacher to receive the gift of responsiveness from a student who felt cared for. Students respond to caring teachers out of intrinsic interest and trust and admiration for the teacher.

_Inclusive Attitude_

Caring teachers convey an attitude of disposability, warmth, trust, acceptance, inclusion, and confirmation in all their actions (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Disposability is making oneself available and being ready to spend oneself. In doing so, one invests self in a relationship that reveals itself as engrossment with an attitude that warms and comforts the other person. Teachers not only show that they care by authorizing to help or instruct students, they see through the students’ perspectives in order to meet the needs of the students. Caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference and into the other person’s frame. Caring is when one considers the other’s point of view, his needs, and what he expects of us. When we care, we act on affect and regard. One who cares does not follow rules. Each situation is acted on differently based on the individuals needs. Teachers know their students’ interests and preferences in certain topics and tasks, and they develop students.
Caring teachers differentiate their instruction so that it inclusively meets the needs of all their students (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Inclusion not only is a prerequisite for successful teaching, teachers confirm their students through inclusion. Caring teachers confirm their students by seeing them as they are and as they might be based on how students envision their best. Students’ apprehension that their teachers care is generated by inclusion and confirmation efforts of their teachers. However, teachers with caring motives do not always result in caring relations. Although teachers may try to care, sometimes students do not feel that the teacher cares. When this is the case, students may still respond through acts of ethical heroism and contribute to the caring relation. The teacher may recognize that her use of ‘I care’ in the incomplete relation is an ellipsis of sorts. The teacher acknowledges that she is not alone, in taking crediting or receiving blame, in the caring relation.

*Modeling, Dialogue, Practice, and Confirmation*

Teachers nurture caring relations with students through modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Caring teachers show that they care for students by creating caring relations and *modeling* care. Caring teachers engage in *dialogue* with students. During class discussions, caring teachers seek student involvement and try to develop a moral sense in students by engaging them in dialogue of the social-moral aspects of all subjects and how people are affected by them. In doing so, students learn that responsibilities flow from their interconnectedness with the world in which they live. Further, the moral sense and ethical ideal of students is developed through *practice*. Teachers provide students real-life applications in which they do regular service activities for others. Practice provides students opportunities to learn how to care. Finally, caring students are developed through *confirmation*. Teachers confirm students by attributing the best possible motive based on appropriate thought, sensitivity,
and open communications. Teachers have opportunities to confirm students when faced with inappropriate behavior. If teachers need to confront students regarding inappropriate behavior such as cheating, caring teachers begin by attributing the best possible motive and then proceed to freely express why they cannot allow this type of behavior. Grading also creates problems for caring teachers because it can be intrusive in relationships. Teachers can resolve this conflict by confirming students.

Noddings (1984) describes that an ethical ideal gives people a realistic mental picture of what it means to care and it guides people to meet other persons morally. Moral education is grounded on an affective relation of cognitive activity (Noddings, 1984). Two people communicate to each other through verbal and body language based on emotional feeling and consciousness. Understanding if teachers, for example, truly care is complex, intricate, and subjective. Although Noddings cautioned against using a criteria of caring, she acknowledged the “need to know what to look for” (p. 12). Noddings posited that there is empirical support for a logic of the caring relation, but doing so would likely destroy the uniqueness of caring. She asserts that empirical support “must be captured in the caring moment—in the one-caring and in the cared-for” (p. 33). In an analysis to discern care, Noddings looked at a case through several questions regarding: The conditions in which a teacher is willing to care, the motives of the teacher, the ways in which caring was conveyed, and the meeting that occurred between the teacher and student.

**Review of Literature**

The concept of caring is often overlooked in education (DeFord, 1996) and the educational research on care is limited and has been mostly conducted in elementary schools (Alder, 2002). Although few studies on caring professors have been conducted, higher education
literature is starting to discuss care as an important concept in college classrooms. In 1984, Lowman described caring and individual attention as the extent to which students feel the professor is concerned about them as persons, is sensitive to their needs and situations, invites student input, and is cordial. Effective professors have been identified as caring (Archer, 1994; Basow, 2000; Knapper, 1997; Palmer, 1998). Further, when professors and students care about each other and teaching and learning, they will feel intrinsically rewarded, have higher estimations of each other on evaluations, and be more motivated to help each other and perform well (Walsh & Maffei, 1994). Walsh and Maffei conceptualized that professor-student relations will be more positive if they are built on fairness, caring and individual attention, flexibility and open-mindedness, and trust and credibility. Dillon and Stines (1996) found that college students perceived caring as recognition of their unique individuality and professors sharing and giving of self and time. Two studies specifically studied caring professors.

Thayer-Bacon and Bacon (1996a) found that six caring professors defined caring as (a) trying to be approachable and welcoming to their students, (b) placing emphasis on the learning process and learning concepts, (c) permitting student voice in what they are learning so that students experience engaged learning, and (d) encouraging and developing safe, supportive learning environments. Caring professors expressed that they focus on the learning process using student-centered methods (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996b). They believe that students contribute unique experiences to the learning process and caring professors try to develop relationships with students and integrate students’ backgrounds into the learning process.

Smith (2000) observed community college classrooms for over 150 hours and found that three extraordinary professors did some ordinary practices in caring for the needs of students and providing a setting in which they can learn. Caring, community, and transcendence were three
qualities community college professors employed to create a positive environment for learning. Although care in college classrooms and campuses by professors can take on many forms, some practices appeared to be regarded as being cared for by students. Professors showed that they cared for their students by giving encouragement and positive feedback, instilling students with confidence that they could learn, not criticizing students, giving lively and interactive presentations, creating relevance by connecting students to the content with practical examples, having a casual attitude with self-deprecating humor, providing a safe environment in which to speak, recognizing what students needed, continually monitoring students’ understanding, returning work quickly with detailed feedback, and giving intense attention to individual students through "an undivided moment" to make them feel recognized and supported. Being a caring professor takes a lot of time, energy, and hard work. Smith reiterated, “caring can be communicated, not only by affect, but also by simple hard work” (p. 62). It was likely that these community college professors had more teaching responsibilities and few, if any, research responsibilities.

A caring professor’s actions are based on philosophical assumptions (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996b). Teacher beliefs and conceptions influence how teachers function, which in turn effect student learning outcomes (Kember, 1997; Pajares, 1992). Pratt (1992) defined “conceptions are specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena” (p. 204). In line with the assumptions of scholarship of teaching and learning, wisdom of practice is knowledge that derives from experience and is largely intuitive. It is most widespread and most frequently influences pedagogical thought and action, however, the number one problem of wisdom of practice is that it does not depend on theoretical frameworks (Weimer, 2001). Therefore, exemplary teaching professors’ motives and
ways in which they described their interactions with students (wisdom of practice) were investigated as the researcher was informed by Noddings’ (1984, 1992) concept of a caring teacher.

Knobloch (2003) suggested empirical evidence was needed regarding care and effective college teachers in applied life, consumer and environmental sciences. This naturalistic study allowed exemplary teaching professors to co-construct the text regarding their wisdom of practice. Although the professors were not directly asked about being caring, they shared what motivated them as teachers and perhaps provided more authentic conceptions of care. This study specifically investigated how 26 exemplary teaching professors discussed care as a teacher and how they described their practice as caring professors.

Methods and Data Sources

An interpretivist, collective case study (Stake, 2000) served as the design of the study to understand the wisdom of practice of exemplary teaching professors and what motivated them as exemplary teachers in higher education. Thirty-two tenure-track professors were purposively identified through student nominations, instructional ratings, and teaching awards to represent the various academic departments in the college. The selection process was consistent with Kreber and Cranton’s (2000) first two levels of the scholarship of teaching, and North American College and Teachers of Agriculture’s Teaching Fellow and Teaching Award of Excellence (NACTA, 2003), the National Awards Program for Excellence in College and University Teaching in Food and Agricultural Sciences (USDA, 2003), and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education’s Professor of the Year award (CASE, 2003) selection criteria of excellent or outstanding teachers. College administrators, who are experts on teaching and learning, verified the list of excellent teachers. Twenty-seven tenure-track professors participated in one of four, two-hour focus group interviews. During the focus group interview,
professors drew concept maps of their mental picture of teaching and learning, and answered three questions.

Of these professors, 26 participated in one-hour semi-structured interviews. Professors were asked questions based on Kember’s (1997) dimensions used to delimit conceptions of teaching: Self-understanding as a teacher, motivation to teach, concepts and practices of teaching and learning, challenges and self-development as a teacher. Because of this limited sample, the exploratory nature of this research needs to be highlighted.

The context of the study was located in a college of applied life, consumer and environmental sciences in a Midwestern land-grant university. This context was chosen for several reasons. The college is a microcosm of many universities with a wide range of disciplines. Because many university professors consider themselves as members of their disciplines (Becher, 1989) and professors are uniquely shaped by their disciplines, it is imperative to look at teaching within the contexts of various disciplines. The college also exemplifies the land-grant university philosophy with faculty actively engaged in teaching, research, and extension outreach/service. The college has been promoting teaching excellence through teacher workshops, recognition programs, and a peer evaluation system. Although the college places a high priority on quality teaching, the culture supports the attitude that research is most important.

The twenty-six exemplary teaching professors represented a range of academic disciplines in the college: 7 (27%) were in animal science; 6 (23%) were in agricultural and consumer economics; 4 (15%) were in natural resources and environmental sciences; 3 (12%) were in agricultural engineering; 3 (12%) were in human development, family studies, and agricultural education; 2 (8%) were in food science and human nutrition; 1 (4%) was in crop
Four (15\%) were untenured assistant professors, 9 (35\%) were tenured associate professors, and thirteen (50\%) were tenured professors. The professors taught an average of 17 years, ranging from 5 to 34 years.

Data Analysis

The researcher collected and interpreted the data using qualitative methods from an interpretivist stance (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Caring was identified as a theme from a previous study (Mitchell, Knobloch, & Ball, 2004). A word processor was used to help create organizers to code and summarize the qualitative data. Open coding was used to analyze the qualitative data from the concept maps and open-ended questions. Using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000), the transcribed interviews were analyzed five times for concepts, themes, and patterns. This approach provided insight in how the professors described teaching and learning based on their wisdom of practice. The researcher created a coding scheme of the central ideas and related responses (Glesne, 1999).

Trustworthiness and believability was established through the use of data source, investigator, and theory triangulation (Denzin, 1984); direct quotes, peer debriefing, an audit trail, and a reflexive journal (Donmoyer, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

All transcribed interviews, field notes, and concept maps were read numerous times looking for evidence, definitions, and explanations of caring using three guiding questions: Did the professors care? What did professors care about? How did they describe what they do regarding what they cared about? All data sources were compiled into subcategories and divided into two groups of professors based on their wisdom of practice as it related to care. Subcategories emerged as patterns and professors who had consistent and multiple representations across the three subcategories formed one of the two groups. After the
Two additional iterations were conducted for development of the conceptual themes in the model and confirmatory analysis. Divergent data representing an absence of care or negative effects of care were also sought. The unit of analysis included word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph levels. Various grain sizes were used in the analysis to best understand the data. For example, some participants explicitly stated “care or caring,” whereas others implied that they cared through narrative and stories. Three conceptual themes emerged out of each group of professors regarding the professors’ roles of creating a context for learning, roles of teaching knowledge, and motives and satisfiers as teachers. Within each group of professors, conceptual themes are represented by direct quotes for each instance from the data. The professors’ names were changed to pseudonyms. When appropriate, frequencies were reported when participants shared the same concept. More frequencies were reported for the first group of professors because they varied more on in their wisdom of practice on the conceptual themes. The second group of professors were smaller and more consistent in their wisdom of practice; therefore, few frequencies were reported for this group. Figure 1 is the emergent model that represents conceptualizations of pedagogical care of exemplary teaching professors in the college of applied life, consumer and environmental sciences at the university.

Results

The exemplary professors expressed that they cared about teaching and learning. Half of the professors explicitly mentioned caring and half of the professors implied that they cared about students’ performances in class, students’ lives outside of class, their teaching preparation and performances, and continuous self-improvement as a teacher. There were consistent themes
across the professors’ wisdom of practice that emerged from the initial analysis. The professors described getting to know their students, making content relevant to their students, giving students opportunities to apply content or concepts, being accessible and approachable, recognizing that students learn differently and taught content using different methods and repeated examples, knowing the content and staying current, desiring to improve as a teacher, and spending time on teaching at the expense of doing research (if tenured) or establishing time restrictions on teaching (if untenured).

The professors’ wisdom of practice of pedagogical care emerged into two groups with three conceptual themes for each group. The first group of 18 exemplary teaching professors described that they cared about student learning. The second group of eight exemplary teaching professors described that they cared for student development. Three themes emerged out of each group of professors regarding the professors’ roles of creating a context for learning, roles of teaching knowledge, and motives and satisfiers as teachers. The three themes for each group are presented in Table 1. Each theme is discussed within each group of professors in the following sections.

Caring for Student Learning

The first group of 18 exemplary teaching professors conceptualized caring about student learning. They took their role as a teacher seriously and invested their efforts as a facilitator of learning for their students within the context of the course. Three themes emerged within this group of professors regarding the three key elements: (a) making students feel comfortable and responsible for their learning in the context of the classroom, (b) facilitating student thinking and activities to learn content and apply concepts, and (c) connecting with students as learners.
Table 1

*Exemplary Professors’ Conceptualizations of Care (N = 26)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
<th>Caring about Student Learning (N = 18)</th>
<th>Caring for Student Development (N = 8)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating context</td>
<td>Making students feel comfortable and responsible for their learning in the context of the classroom</td>
<td>Learning together in an inclusive community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching knowledge</td>
<td>Facilitating student thinking and activities to learn content and apply concepts</td>
<td>Engaging students with cognitive and affective support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motives and satisfiers</td>
<td>Connecting with students as learners through teaching and content</td>
<td>Connecting personally with students</td>
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through teaching and content. Professor Kline shared a thought that represented his colleagues. “The real key is student learning, not worrying about what the ICES [student evaluation of instruction] score is, but worrying about what the students are learning.”
Creating context: Making students feel comfortable and responsible for their learning.

Professors in this group described that they created a context for learning in their classrooms by making the students feel comfortable. They discussed disposition, showing interest, and establishing communications to make students comfortable. Eleven professors described their dispositions as being “relaxed, informal, laid back, low-key, non-threatening, being approachable, patient, having fun, showing humility, using self-deprecating humor, and enthusiastic.” (Miller, Robins, Jones, Painter, King, Becker, Elliot, Horn, Taylor, Hogan, Wood) A few comments illustrate what how professors they described using their disposition to create a comfortable context. A professor of economics (Jones) shared that he “makes students feel comfortable in the classroom. I’m laid back, not intense. I use self-deprecating humor.” Another economics professor (Painter) shared, “I’m pretty good at having that one-on-one kind of atmosphere in class…where we can just talk.” An animal sciences professor (Becker) focused on having fun. “I tend to have fun with the kids. We have great fun with the kids out at the farm and poking fun at other professors or coaches. It is fun.”

Eleven professors also discussed that they showed interest in getting to know their students. An economics professor (Painter) shared, “I try to understand my students—what is going on in their lives.” Another economics professor (Hogan) added, “I like to know the students as well as I can. I try to have some kind of a personal connection they can rely on.” Professor King expanded that “if you care about that and interact with them and get to know them, they are going to listen and you will be able to deliver what you are trying to deliver with open-minded interested students rather than strangers.” Professor Taylor added to this thought, but also discussed the idea of meeting students at a midpoint, “Knowing the students…gives some importance to who they are. Most of them are going to know who I am because I’m the
person at the front and people in the class can identify who that is. I try to meet them halfway by also trying to know who they are.” Professor Hoover had a similar thought about meeting students in at a midpoint, “I work really hard for you to understand what I’m saying. And therefore if you put in and meet me halfway, if you go to the halfway mark, then you’ll be successful.”

A couple professors shared that they try to make the students feel comfortable while they teach so they can better facilitate learning. Professor Hogan works at establishing communication channels during the first couple weeks and then determines how far he can push the dialogue. “I try a lot of jokes and I try to be light-hearted in my own pronouncements, but I take their comments and questions seriously. I give them feedback when they pose a question or a challenge. This is always, ‘that’s a great point,’ ‘I hadn’t thought of that,’ to reinforce their movements toward me is what I am looking for.” Professor Short tries to get students to feel comfortable to speak in class. “They’re afraid to say what they’re really thinking. And I can’t get them comfortable enough to give a stupid answer. Because there is not such thing as a stupid answer. But I can’t get them comfortable enough to do that.”

Three professors explained that they felt that they connected with students because they clearly communicated content and its importance to students. They felt this gave them credibility. An economics professor (Smith) shared, “It’s all about why it’s important to you and if it wasn’t important to you, I wouldn’t be wasting my time in the process of wasting your time. That, in and of itself, establishes a little sense of credibility.”

Five professors communicated their expectations of students early in their courses. They clearly communicate expectations to try to prevent student problems. In doing so, they desired an atmosphere of fairness and expected students to be responsible for their learning. Several
professors were conscious of how their actions and views might negatively affect students. A couple professors mentioned that they tried to “be as fair as possible” and “attempt to treat all students the same.” Other professors shared how they were conscious of being fair as they taught content. Professor Painter shared that she has “really strong views on a lot of these materials, that I need to keep a lid on…to be fair on both sides of the issues.” A human development professor (Miller) shared how she teaches sensitive topics such as ethnicity “in a way that is fair to everyone, that brings student awareness of issues, but not at the expense of others.” An economics professor (Smith) discussed his approach as being different. “I like to tease them and challenge their beliefs. I don’t tell them they are stupid. I don’t pass judgment on them. It’s just fun to see about their own values and sometimes it goes over okay and sometimes it doesn’t.”

Five professors discussed that they try to communicate that students are responsible for their learning. Professor Miller tells her students she expects them to think critically. “‘You’re not going to come in here and get by. I expect that you’re going to think about this and I expect that you will take it seriously.’ And when you make those expectations clear, then I think that students do their work seriously.” A couple of examples are shared to show a contrast of how two professors tried to communicate student responsibility. Professor Hoover mentioned, “I realize there might be other learning styles, and I’m apologetic for that and I talked to them about it. And yet I say, on the other hand, I come with my baggage and I can only teach it best in the way I understand it. If you having this kind of difficulty, if your learning style doesn’t accommodate, you have to give me feedback. An you have to come to your TA and you’re going to have to work a little bit harder.” Another professor (Miller) acknowledged her limitation in reaching every student. “You’re not going to please everyone and that’s the
bottom-line.” For the second example, a professor (Page) described how she established her expectations. “I’m more clear about starting out at the very beginning with this is what I expect, this is what I don’t expect, these are the consequences, it’s not personal, and I will follow through.” This professor was the only negative example of care; one who took an active, impersonal approach to promote student responsibility. “I don’t put up with a whole lot of crap and I let people know from the very beginning so I don’t get a whole lot of crap. In a big lecture, I’ll walk up to someone and say, ‘If you want to whisper, leave.’ That kind of thing. I tend not to make it personal, but I will make it as personal as it needs to be if someone’s going to escalate it. And I haven’t had to deal with too much of that. But I don’t feel like rewarding incompetence and I don’t feel like putting up with a whole lot of sort of tackiness behavior. And I don’t.”

*Teaching knowledge: Facilitating student thinking and applications of concepts.*

This group of professors discussed that their role was to facilitate learning of the content for the key element of teaching knowledge through helping students learn, teaching with different modalities, and helping students apply the content. “My performance is supposed to facilitate their learning; it’s not about my performance. I tend to teach stuff that shakes people up. And I like that.” Five professors described their teaching style as being interactive and dynamic. Professor Hogan described his style as, “I don’t know what I am going to do until I meet the students and then it is what develops.” Sometimes, “I will give them small tasks to do which are quantitative around this course to see if they respond more to calculating in rational, or if they prefer to puzzle things out verbally. I try to find the bulk of the students somewhere in there.” Professor Page takes a similar approach by trying to be more responsive to student interests. “In the classroom, I’m perfectly fine kind of being on stage and directing people. The
more I teach a class the more I sort of know where I’m going with it and I’m better able to
develop more creative ways of delivering the material. So I’m really trying to facilitate that this
is about them and their learning and their interaction with each other and stimulating each other’s
thinking. I do not want my classes too scripted because I’ll take it in a direction the students
want to go.”

The professors focused on helping students learn and apply concepts, and expecting them
to be responsible for their learning. Fourteen professors reported that they wanted students to
understand concepts. Four professors added that they try “to get people to think, and think
critically.” Professors facilitated learning by making the content relevant to students, engaging
students in discussions, using several modalities to present the content, and making students
apply concepts through real-life problems. Most of the professors described themselves as
facilitators who made learning interactive for students. Professor Elliot teaches animal
reproduction technology and he relates his examples to humans rather than cows. “I have totally
changed the class to fit in to the change. If students can relate to something, then they will be
able to remember it. I pick and choose, based on their backgrounds to fit in information that they
will remember.” Professor Miller added that she “gets her students to think by asking her
students why they think the content is relevant.” Professor Smith stressed, “The more they
understand about why this is used and how this is used, the better off everybody is. The easier it
is for me to get the point across to motivate the method, to motivate the topic, the easier it is for
them to see how it fits within their lives and to take that with them into the future.”

Eleven professors described using different modalities to present and talk about the
content so that students will get involved. Professor Miller gives her students “opportunities for
conversing, instead of just going in their and saying I have to get this to them, this concept or this
knowledge, but giving them opportunities to think about it.” Professor Miller also discussed that she monitors “where the students are and where the class is going. I try to put some guidance to help them make choices about the pathways in which they are going to learn it. So I can provide structure and guidance often at the same time based on their level and kind of encourages autonomy and critical thinking skills to reach that end.” Professor Becker agreed with the idea of autonomous student learning, “Their job is to pull that information together to develop a knowledge base.”

The professors believed that students learn when they are given some concepts, methods, and facts and are given something to do with them. Sixteen of the professors shared how they engaged students into hands-on activities to apply concepts or content. Professor Smith summarized this pragmatic approach, “You can’t just tell somebody. You’ve got to let them try. We try to bring in the outside world quite a bit and tell them to pay attention to this stuff. It matters. It matters to you, if you want a job. If you expect to have a career.” Illustrated presentations, lab activities, case studies, and discussions were the most common methods reported by the professors. Professor Smith has students shadow a business professional for a day and write a report on their experiences. He stressed, “It’s all about taking the initiative to have responsibility for exploring those kinds of things rather than waiting for opportunities related to come to them, so they start choosing among the ones they want. I put the burden on them to go initiate a cold contact.” It was apparent that several professors emphasized their role was being the facilitator and the students’ role was being responsible.
Motives and satisfiers: Connecting with students as learners through teaching and content.

This group of professors described four motives and satisfiers as they sought to help students learn. These professors cared about learning, teaching, content, and students. Professor Kline illustrated the thoughts of many professors, “But you need to care and try to do the best every time and try to get connected with your students every semester. Regardless of the grade they are going to get in the class, I care about them learning something while in class.” A distinct descriptor was that professors cared about students in the context of their course. Professor Page mentioned, “I think I genuinely like my students and I care that they think. I really see that it’s about them; it’s about their learning.” Nearly all the professors commented that their most motivating and satisfying experiences were seeing students learn the content, hearing them say how much they learned in the course, and telling the professors that they did a good job. Professor Elliot shared that student satisfaction in learning the material was most rewarding for him. “Having them tell you and seeing the light bulb go up and on.” Professor Wood clarified the effect student satisfaction has on his motivation. “I like it a lot when a student says that my class was a great class and they enjoyed it. That feels great. Personal motivation makes me care.” This connection between motivation and care was apparent regarding student learning. Three professors specifically mentioned that they “worry, really feel bad, and are really concerned” when students do not learn.

Half of the 18 professors specifically shared that they cared about teaching and their performances. Some professors suggested that they were professionally responsible be a good teacher. Professor Smith said, “I just go do it. It depends on me when I walk in the room. I try to tell them where we’re going to go with it and why it’s important. I think I owe them that.”
And if I don’t owe them, we owe their parents, or whoever is paying the bill.” Several professors shared how they enjoyed the challenge of organizing content and creating new ideas. Teaching is an outlet for Professor Miller to “share the knowledge and the passion about the things that I do. I’m a creative person and it’s another way for me to think about how all this should work. And I like that. I get to try a lot of new ideas.” Five professors shared how they were motivated by figuring out how to teach a class to the levels of expectations they had for themselves. Professor Miller commented, “It’s more than caring about what happens to students, I see it philosophically, professionally, the expectations for me. Because I have expectations for my students and I have expectations for myself as a teacher and that is to get to that middle part [of the onion].” A couple were satisfied with their accomplishments, and perhaps a couple professors may never get there. Professor Elliot shared, “I do a pre-class quiz and a post-class quiz. That kind of gives me a feel for the semester differences. Are they learning more or retaining it more? I use it as a self-assessment as well. To see where I am. I am never quite there. There is always room for improvement. I am never satisfied at the end of a semester.” Professor Hogan added, “Being good at teaching gives me enormous self-actualization. I am always looking for ways to improve. I always throw away one-third to one-half of my syllabus every year. I go out and I read thousands of pages asking myself if I should include it in my class. I then throw away the stale stuff. I sit in on other people’s courses to see how they do it and how they think.”

Five professors implied how they cared about the content that they taught to their students. Professor Adams said the best thing about teaching was the subject matter. “I like to see them understand better what each class and material is about. If I have done a good job, when they hear those three words, they will always be haunted by these memories. In know that
some of them internalize that. They get it. It is aiming for that.” Similarly, Professor Smith was motivated by trying to give his students based on what they would need in their future careers. “I try to check on whether or not I’m delivering value based on where I’m projecting where they are going to be. It’s a constant struggle to know whether or not you’re doing it right.” Four professors felt that they taught content that students appreciated. Professor Page shared, “They’re going to get something that they might not learn in any other class,” and Professor Hoover added, “This is the material that they’ve really waited all their whole career to learn if they are really interested in nutrition.”

Three of the 18 professors shared comments that suggested they cared about students outside of the classroom setting. Professor King was motivated by his students coming back and telling him what was going on in their lives. He said that you have to “get to know your students as people.” Professor Becker had similar experiences, “I run into parents and they compliment me on their child’s feelings towards my class. The ability to help a student in the classroom, or get a job, or handle a death in the family or…having a sick parent. I find pleasure in that.” Professor Smith mentioned that he dislikes that he will not see his students again after the course. “This is more like a drive-by shooting, constantly. And I don’t like that. I really don’t like that at all. I’ve been doing this now for 15 years and I’ve had occasional times when I’m able to reach back into some of those relationships.”

Caring for Student Development

The second group of eight exemplary teaching professors conceptualized caring for students by developing students through teaching and learning. Because of their teacher-student relationship, they took the opportunity to develop personal relationships with individual students and focused on their development beyond the course. Three themes emerged within this group
of professors regarding the three key elements: (a) Learning together in a community that extends beyond the classroom, (b) engaging students with cognitive and affective support, and (c) connecting personally with students. Not only did these professors care about teaching and student learning, they cared most for their students. The professors’ focus of caring was on student development. This focus on developing student relationships with individual students is what made them uniquely different than the other group of professors. Professor Mitchell summarized, “I put a pretty high priority on teaching. I certainly care about the students and what is best for them.” Professors in this group described that they made long-term investments in students that directly benefit the students and others.

Professor Carson believed that “it is critically important that students are really aware that you have an interest, not only in transferring information to them, but in their lives as well.” The professors had a long-term developmental view and desired to see their students grow and be successful. Professor Mitchell mentioned, “I look at it from the students’ perspective, in terms of what is going to benefit them most in the long-run.” In addition, Professor White had a “strong interest in seeing students learn and being very motivated to see them succeed personally.” She described that the best thing about teaching was “seeing the students perform and helping them understand what becomes of professions. This is the best time of the year because all of our students...are all going out to their internships, they are just so excited, you know, and like everything they have been looking for is there now. They’re actually going into hospitals and start working with patients and they are on a real high and I think that is pretty exciting.” Professor Carson shared that his greatest joys were “seeing the students contributing to society.” This group of professors shared that they valued developing students by creating
personal relationships with them through learning together in a community that was inclusive, engaging students with cognitive and affective support, and connecting personally with students.

Creating context: Learning together in an inclusive community.

Professors focused on creating an environment that emphasized community—learning together where every individual contributes to the environment. The inclusive community facilitates co-dependent learning, regards individuals’ needs, and builds on students’ input and consideration. Professor Parks commented, “They have to instill in the students a team concept that we are going to do this. Not I am going to give you something and you’re going to be more wonderful because of it.” Professor Doud stressed a mutual learning environment, “My attitude is that I’m not the expert; they are not the novices. That we are proceeding together to try to acquire some enhanced understanding of this subject and it’s relationship to other subjects. It’s all in valuing individual students’ experiences and their intellectual development as young professionals, too.” His colleague in environmental sciences concurred that “I am helping and it feels like we are going on this journey together…we are on this journey of learning together.” Another professor of applied technology systems (Parks) added to this element, “There has to be, a cliché to say, rapport, and I don’t like that word at all. They have to know that you are truly interested in their learning. I think you have to let the students know that you enjoy what you’re doing and you enjoy them.” The professors’ focus on creating a community of learners did not overlook individual students. A human nutrition professor (White) shared, “I am personally interested in each one of them, like I really try and develop a relationship with each student.” These professors shared that the community was beyond the classroom as an animal science professor (Carson) said, “…also be there for other aspects of their lives,” such as career information, personal problems, or personal successes.
Professors believed it is important to create an environment that facilitates co-dependent learning. A plant sciences professor (Carpenter) has her class “set the grade scale the first week.” Together, the students with guiding input from the professor, they prioritize the assignments they will be graded on. An animal sciences professor (Hanson) shared, “Now part of that is that I am a warm, friendly guy. I like to talk. I like to visit. I’m sincere, I think, when I listen to students. So they’re comfortable. But at the same time, you can be depending. You know, it’s like when a student would say, ‘I love my mom or I love my dad because they would always be there for me.’ And I said, ‘Were they serious in their rearing of you?’ ‘Well, yeah, but that’s part of the rules.’” Professor Hanson believes that “good teachers are the same way. They engage students. They’re conversant and never assume the position that you’re lecturing and they’re supposed to listen. I think that is the worst kind of college professor, is just to be that way.” Professor Pardo shared that he tries to make students comfortable by talking to every student at least once a week. “I feel like I am wasting their time and they are wasting mine if I don’t do that. They are comfortable with coming and talking to me about anything. They know that I am here for them.” A professor in environmental design discussed his approach at making students feel comfortable by “being patient and going slow. Staying in touch with them and connecting with them and using my observation skills to tell me where I am at and often asking them a lot of questions.”

Professors described that they developed students by learning together with regard for their personal interests and needs. This group of professors focused on creating community by seeing from individuals’ perspectives. A professor of plant sciences (Carpenter) shared, “I think one is liking students. Having them know that I’m with them, I want them to succeed. If they are failing for any reasons, I want to know about it and want to understand it from their point of
view. I still try very hard to have empathy with them.” A human nutrition professor (White) added, “I try and try and empathize with where they are in their learning needs and make sure the material is relevant to them. I am motivated to see where each student is and help meet their needs that point in time based on what they are trying to do. I just kind of just try and relate to how I remember feeling as a student and difficult concepts for me.” A plant science professor (Mitchell) gave individual consideration of his students’ personal needs. “I do try and take a student view of things. Students come to me and tell me that they are feeling sick on the day of the exam or something. I try and help as much as I can. There are a lot of things going on in their lives. I give them some breaks.”

The professors built on individual consideration regarding students’ interests and needs. Although the professors described having an enthusiasm for teaching the subject matter, they acknowledged that students’ interests and needs were more important than the content. Some examples illustrate that students’ affect are critical components of learning together. An applied technology systems professor (Parks) emphasized, “The best thing about teaching is getting them [students] excited about learning. I don’t care what the content is. Content is irrelevant. It’s getting excited about learning.” For the next example, a professor of animal sciences (Hanson) shared, “Probably the most meaningful lecture I ever gave was the day after 9/11 and students came in confused…what do we think, who do we contact, stuff like that and we just talked. Being willing to just stop whatever the moment is and it didn’t matter what cows ate that day.”

Another professor (Parks) added that including student input is important in being responsive to students. “And then after class, ask them, ‘How’d I do? I’m new at this. We’re going to work on this together.’ And I think that will cause improvement. And don’t be afraid to try different things. If you’re not having fun, they’re not having fun.” An environmental
design professor (Webber) tries to “be in the moment” with his students by “trying to understand where they are” and “not be of in my own pleasure zone of enjoying talking about this information.” He clearly articulated in mentally preparing himself for his classes by slowing himself down through meditation and not thinking about the next research grant or faculty meeting when he is teaching. Rather, professors should “actually being in the classroom with students while you are in the classroom with your students.”

Teaching knowledge: Engaging students with cognitive and affective support.

Professors described that they developed students through engagement that focused on student support, authentic learning experiences, instruction conversations, and student assessment for learning opportunities. The students “have to be engaged”, commented Professor Parks, “And that’s the teacher’s job to get them engaged. They can be engaged in the classroom during lecture, they can be engaged outside of the classroom in the hall, they can be engaged in the laboratory, they can be engaged at home doing homework. And you have to be effective in all those arenas if you’re going to get them to really learn.” One could get a sense that these professors were so focused on student development that they may have subsumed to lower expectations to accommodate student needs. This was not the case.

These professors clearly articulated engagement as providing students, both affective and cognitive support, to help them understand and apply challenging concepts in authentic applications. Professor Parks emphasized, “They have to be active and engaged. I think the examples you use to teach concepts have to be real—they have to be authentic. You have to connect them to what they already know. They have to be real and authentic. If it’s not real and contrived, they’re going to pick up on it that it’s contrived and they are not going to learn it.” In doing so, the professors were keenly aware of the students’ affect and motivation. The
professors described that it was their responsibility to guide students in learning the concepts. Professor Parks explained, “The affective nature is the connection I make to students. I don’t care if they like the way I am doing it. Learning is hard and they have to know that it is hard. I need to make that affective connection. They need to know that I care about their learning. They need to know that I’m trying to connect, that I’m trying to make it real and authentic for them. They need to know that. They need to know that I’m going to work as hard or harder than they do in order to learn it. They don’t have to like it.” Professor Doud added, “I think we have the responsibility to challenge them that way and I think we also have the responsibility to show them how to do it. And so model and give them practice a time or two before you turn them loose.” Professor Doud continued by saying that thinking “is the only thing that is important. Content certainly isn’t. I know that I would get a lot of flack from my colleagues about that. They think they’ve got to cover this much material and I don’t believe that.”

These professors engaged in instructional conversations with students in the classroom. This helped the professors gauge students’ understanding and cognitive development. They made pedagogical adjustments as they constantly monitored student progress. Professors described engagement through dialogue. An animal science professor (Hanson) used stories and current events in his classroom discussions. “I can engage most students in some kind of [current] event that applies to what subject matter we’re doing with some kind of pathway.” Professor Webber finds ways to engage his students. He shows them visual landscape designs and asks them to describe things back to him and asking them to actually create those key concepts. He strives to engage students through multiple ways to get the ideas across, yet he described of being consciously mindful of the students during this classroom dialogue. Likewise, Professor Mitchell engaged his students by “putting his students on the spot and ask
them what and why. Once they have it, they have it. Until they are put on the spot, they really
don’t get it most of the time. Repetition and putting them on the spot is key. I never embarrass
them though. I always try and help them if they have troubles. When they give me a wrong
answer, we discuss it and why it is wrong.” Professor Carpenter uses a peer learning approach to
engage students. The students “develop scenarios that they present and we discuss things. We
give them some guidance on how to lead a discussion and have structure, goals, and things like
that. They do a lot of that. A lot of times in the classes I teach, you’d walk in and I wouldn’t be
teaching at all.”

The professors shared that they created learning opportunities that actively engaged
students to think, solve problems, and make decisions. Professor Carson said, “My whole career
has been teaching kids how to make decisions.” He teaches his students to make decisions by
putting them in authentic laboratory settings to solve problems. “Students that are actively
engaged in experimentation and getting into a situation and carrying through—that is all about
learning.”

The professors understood the complexity of doing such tasks and explained how they
provided structure and scaffolding for students to practice solving authentic tasks. Most
critically, they focused on the student’s development, not the content. Professor Parks
commented, “I think that an exemplary teacher has to think about how students learn and I’m not
talking about learning styles.” He believes that the teacher plays an important role in helping
students learn concepts. “I work as much as I can in the conceptual domain. I think that’s really,
really important to get the students to form concepts.” Professor Doud added, “I am really into
the process by which people engage in the intellectual capacity to sustain the liveliness of mind
and thought, so that when confronted with whatever circumstances occur, which are largely
unpredictable. They have practiced enough of these skills with some confidence to end up solving that particular problem, that day, knowing that here’s how you approach it and maybe I don’t know this anymore or that, but I know how to go about changing that.”

Some professors described how they create student opportunities to learn concepts through practice. Professor Parks, in particular, shared how he engages students to practice. “They have to practice. They have to be given time for rehearsal. I’m thinking homework is very, very valuable. I think busy work is absurd. I will give them an assignment and I will tell them, ‘I want you to spend no more than 15 minutes on this assignment. If you can’t solve this in 15 minutes, you’re missing something, and you’re spinning your wheels. So I want you to quit.’ Well, they’re shocked when I tell them I don’t want them to spend more than 15 minutes on it, and most of them will spend 15 minutes on it. And what that does is give me 15 minutes of highly focused time, rather than an hour of spinning their wheels.” The students come to class to show the professor their roadblocks, then together they knock down the roadblock and the students try the problem again that night. “Because I want them to be focused, that I want them to work, I’m not going to give the busy work.” This is a key idea. Engagement is focused, attentive learning.

Although the professors in both groups nearly unanimously agreed that grading was the worst thing about teaching, a couple professors used grading as a tool to engage students, both affectively and cognitively, in their courses. If Professor Parks sees that if a majority of the students are having difficulty with a particular item on a quiz, he will give them scaffolding and use his quiz as a teaching tool. He says, “Hey guys, take a look at #5. Here’s what #5 is about. Now, let’s look at where’s the roadblock here?’ And I’ll actually walk them through part of the solution so they can get through the rest of them and they say, ‘Oh, yeah, I see, I see.’ Because
then my quiz also becomes a teaching tool and there is nothing wrong with that if I’m trying to enhance student learning. Why should it be a problem? And now, of course, I don’t do that one every question of every quiz.” The professor saw that it was his responsibility to help his students because they obviously did not learn the content the item was testing. Professor Mitchell also allows student choice and consideration in grading. “I give them the opportunity to drop the lowest quiz grade or weight their grades and tests differently. I think they enjoy that part of it.”

Motives and satisfiers: Connecting personally with students.

The professors described that connecting personally was all about establishing individual relationships with students. Professors wanted to be available to students, had sincere interests in students, and invested time to develop relationships that lasted well beyond the course. This distinction that set this group of professors apart from the other group was their focus on connecting with and developing students rather than teaching and student learning. “The other best thing about teaching is knowing that you might have some impact and that comes from connecting to the students as much as it comes from teaching the students.” (Parks) Teachers need to “really have the desire to develop a relationship with your students. I don’t know if that is personality based or not. We have all seen teachers that have had that feel that is a stay back and don’t get close to me kind of feeling. I want to be there and want to be there to help. I think you get a much more attentive ear when they know you actually care about them.” (Carson) This group of professors developed relationships with their students based on parental views, time displacement, mentoring, and long-term relationships.

Wanting to be there and help students appeared to relate to several professors’ experiences as parents. Professor Carpenter expressed having parental ownership of her
students. “It’s like being a parent. You watch your daughters and you see things through their eyes and you’d forgotten and they see them for the first time and all of sudden you re-live that excitement and it comes back to you. It’s a lot like that. They’re not my kids, but they are my kids.” Another seasoned professor with experiences of raising children seemed to see life through his son’s perspective. Professor Hanson described a unique experience he had when his son was a student in his course. His experience was rejuvenating in two ways. First, Professor Hanson said he felt the pressure to perform his best “because one of the people I think the most of in the world is sitting right there kind of evaluating me.” In addition, perhaps these well-seasoned professors see the bigger picture that students have lot of other things going on in their lives. Professor Hanson mentioned, “You eventually learn that students’ lives are busy and believe it or not, your class might not be most important. I am willing to work with students, bend a little if they have different test times, quiz times, paper times.”

“Someone who is an exemplary teacher has to be connected to the student,” shared Professor Parks, “The student has to believe that the teacher is sincerely interested in student’s learning.” This sincere interest in students’ learning was described as being manifested by spending time thinking how they could best develop their students and also developing personal relationships with students. First, professors took time to think about how they could develop their students cognitively as teachers. An environmental design professor (Webber) commented, “Take the time to connect with your students. The challenge is not in how much material you can cover, that is just wrong. The challenge is in developing as rich and detailed cognitive structure and maps—that is most important to cover.” Professor Parks added, “There is no question that I’m enthusiastic about what I do and I spend a great deal of time thinking about
how [the students] are going to perceive it, how they are going to remember it, and how they are going to form concepts about it.”

Next, professors took time to develop relationships with their students. These professors appeared to have rewarding experiences with their students. Professor Carpenter exemplified this best, “I enjoy the students, I enjoy, they’re in a really great time of life. The world is so new and fun for them to be here in college and see things they’ve never experienced before and have the opportunity to do things they’ve never done before.” She continued, “I want them to know me as a person. Some of them don’t, and I respect that, the ones that want to fade in, don’t want to stand out, that’s okay, that’s their style. I don’t want to embarrass them or make them feel like they have to.” Professor Carpenter illustrated her style with a story, “One of my best stories out of [my course], I have them fill out a survey on the first day of class—background, major, why they’re taking the class. One year, I was going through [the surveys], and I got to one and it said glass blowing. I thought, this kid is pulling my leg. Like 10 forms down, there was another one. I went to the catalogue, and we do have a major in glass blowing on campus, which I had never heard of. So, two guys, I figured well they have to be sitting next to each other cause they obviously know each other. The next class I watched the kids come in, second class of the semester. Two guys sat in the back that look [fine arts] type. You know what I mean? Artistic-type. I went up to them and said, ‘Which of you is Mark?’ They just looked at me, their jaws dropped and I said, “Well, tell me about this glass blowing major.’ They both aced the course and they both came in and talked to me about it all the time. I think it was because I knew who they were. You know who the students are and you try to make it more personal. It was fun. That’s one thing I really believe, if you set high standards, students will try to achieve them.”
This professor illustrated how she connected with students personally in a large classroom of 200 students.

Exemplary teachers “have to be professional and ethical. And if they are professional and ethical, students pick up on that very, very quickly.” Professor Parks appeared to want to develop relationships with his students based on respect and trust. Students who respected and trusted their professors on a personal level appeared to see them as mentors. A couple professors described connecting personally with students through a mentor role. Professor Hanson believed what made him different from other college professors was being “open, friendly, interested in students, always willing to talk to them. I have a tremendous traffic of students in here asking for advice.” Professor Parks explained his relationships with students. “One of the biggest things is establishing a connection with students. And I am not talking about being their friends. That is the furthest thing in the world that I am from them. They have enough friends. They do not need me as a friend. I would like for them to think of me as a mentor, not as a friend—someone they could ask question to. Not necessarily me having the right answers.”

These professors were interested in establishing personal relationships with students outside of class that would last beyond the length of the course. “Some of the things you do outside of the classroom are important, too.” Professor Mitchell attended student club activities so that students get to see him in other settings than the classroom. The greatest joys for Professor Pardo have been “students coming in and we are making life-long relationships and influences.” A noted story that exemplifies long-term relationships between a professor and his students was shared by Professor Parks. He mentioned that he gets 10-15 wedding invitations a year. Although he cannot attend most of them, he went to one of his former student’s wedding because it was the third son in the family he had taught. He said, “there’s a connective there.”
These guys, I love them, they know I love them, and they love me. I had a student send me 25 digital pictures of his little girl. That makes me feel really good. Those are the affective strokes that I get as a teacher—knowing that I’ve connected with the students. Now that’s not content dependent. I’ve connected with students. They know I care. I spend time with students outside of class. In fact, probably too much time. Professionally, that could have an impact because I don’t have enough time to write as much as I want to write. And writing and grants are very important. If I want to be really, really good, I want to use my teaching effectiveness as a manifestation of my scholarship, that is very difficult to do in a research institution.”

Discussion and Educational Importance

The exemplary teaching professors expressed (explicitly and implicitly; generally and specifically) that they cared about teaching and learning. This conclusion supported previous studies that found professors value teaching (Knapper, 1997; Leslie, 2002) and effective teachers care (Archer, 1994; Basow, 2000; Knapper; Palmer, 1998). As such, exemplary teaching professors in this study described their wisdom of practice based on an ethical and moral commitment (Shulman, 2003). Three conceptual themes emerged out of two groups of professors regarding the professors’ roles of creating a context for learning, roles of teaching knowledge, and motives and satisfiers as teachers. The model that emerged was aligned with the first ethical responsibility of teaching professors. Professors need to know the content to be learned, their students, and the best methods to foster learning (McKeachie, 2002).

The professors’ wisdom of practice emerged into two groups of conceptualizations of pedagogical care: (a) caring about student learning, and (b) caring for student development. The first group’s conceptualization of pedagogical care was instrumental. The second group’s conceptualization of pedagogical care was relational. Although the two groups of professors
espoused that they cared about students, learning, teaching and content, observations and interviews with their students would truly determine if they cared for students (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Based on the evidence of wisdom of practice, professors who cared for student development were more aligned with Mayeroff’s (1971) and Noddings’ (1984, 1992) concepts of care. Tenably, professors who cared for student development were caring teachers.

Distinct differences emerged in how the two groups of professors described care in their wisdom of practice. The professors had various degrees of embracing the second ethical responsibility of professors—respect students as individuals (McKeachie, 2002). The professors described their interpersonal relations within the context of the classroom based on nonverbal actions, comments, accessibility, and attentiveness of classroom climate. First, professors who had an instrumental conceptualization of pedagogical care focused on creating a context for students to feel comfortable and responsible for their learning. This group of professors were interested in their students and encouraged a safe, supportive classroom environment (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996a), yet they focused on a climate of fairness and individual responsibility (Walsh & Maffei, 1994). Professors with a relational conceptualization of pedagogical care focused on learning together by creating a community of learning that extended beyond the context of the classroom. These professors described being engrossed in individual students (Noddings, 1984). They saw their students as unique individuals who created the context for learning, which was embraced as a community of learners (Noddings, 1984; Smith, 2000; Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996b)

Second, the professors focused on the learning process and student-centered instruction (Noddings, 1984, 1992; Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996a, 1996b), yet they were different in how they described their role in the process. The first group of professors who had an instrumental
conceptualization of pedagogical care described their role of teaching knowledge as a facilitator of thinking methods and activities to apply concepts. Their role as facilitator helped them to engage students to actively learn the content and apply concepts. The second group of professors who had a relational conceptualization of pedagogical care described their role of teaching knowledge as engaging students and being keenly aware of their development to provide cognitive and affective support. These professors were also facilitators, but their focus was on developing students through engagement. These professors expressed “being with” their students through focus attention, both, physically and mentally, within and outside of the classroom. They tried to see teaching, learning, and living through the minds of their students, and they shared that they spent time developing pedagogical content knowledge so that they could better develop their students. Above all, they “learned together” with their students, and placed more value on the student than the content. These professors described caring that was aligned with Noddings’ (1984) concept of a caring teacher—being engrossed in their students and displacing their motive energy to develop their students as individuals.

Third, the professors’ greatest joys provided evidence of engrossment and motivational displacement, which was reflected as their motives and satisfiers. All of the professors shared positive experiences that motivated them as teachers (Walsh & Maffei, 1994). Instrumental caring professors in the first group described their motives and satisfiers as being connecting with students as learners through teaching and content. These professors cared about learning, teaching, content, and students. “Seeing the light bulb come on” was what motivated this group of professors to teach. They were engrossed with student learning, thinking, and satisfaction within the context of the course. Few professors shared that their relationships with students continued after their courses ended. They expressed that they worked hard and displaced their
motive energy for students to learn (Smith, 2000). However, the professors were mixed in their motives and satisfiers. Some cared about student learning and students. Some cared about their teaching and how they taught the content. Clearly, these professors cared about teaching and learning, and desired to improve to more effectively teach students—the educational imperative (Shulman, 2003). Therefore, these professors had an instrumental conceptualization of pedagogical care focused on caring about student learning.

Relational caring professors in the second group not only cared about teaching and student learning, they cared most for students. They discussed caring through modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation (Noddings, 1984). They described being acutely aware of students learning and development, and provided cognitive structure and affective support so that their students developed a sense of efficacy in learning new concepts and tasks (Noddings, 1984). These professors were engrossed in developing mutual personal relationships with students. They were more relational in their approach as teachers and continued their relationships with students after their courses ended, often described as students reciprocating (Noddings, 1984, 1992). It appeared that these professors made themselves accessible to students to nurture personal relationships, especially 6 of the 8 professors had 20 or more years of experience in higher education. These professors described situations that they apparently confirmed students through inclusion (Noddings, 1984). Therefore, these professors had relational conceptualizations of pedagogical care focused on caring for student development.

The study of exemplary teachers is intended to help professors reflect on and improve their practice (Angelo, 1996). This model of how professors’ described care through the wisdom of practice may be a useful tool to help professors reflect on how they interact and develop relationships with their students. Inevitably, the effectiveness question will be raised: Which
Pedagogical caring is more effective? Although this study did not have the evidence to answer this question, perhaps there is a place for both types of professors—“caring about student learning” and “caring for student development.” Promotion and tenure plays an important part in how much time professors are willing to invest in teaching and students. Although pedagogical caring take time, there were more untenured professors who were in the “caring about student learning” group. This may indicate that instrumental pedagogical care is a more manageable approach or perhaps it could be based on faculty development. Untenured professors may not be able to invest the time to “connect personally” with students because of time restraints, perhaps they can focus on “learning together” and “engaging students through cognitive and affective support” to help cultivate a more relational, developmental approach.

Further research studies should investigate practice, student experiences, student outcomes, and student differences. Observations of faculty interactions with students should be conducted, both, in and outside of the classroom to see if faculty perform as described in their wisdom of practice. Do instrumental and relational pedagogical care look and feel different? Do they yield different outcomes? Students should be interviewed to determine if these professors truly cared and how the students described their experiences with these professors. Do students perform better for professors who care for student learning versus student development? Do students respond differently based on personality, cultural background, gender, or epistemological beliefs? Further analysis should be conducted with the triangulated evidence to determine if there are any hierarchical, ordered, or nested relationships among the professors’ practice and their students.

Caring professors. Is this an oxymoron? These exemplary teaching professors give us hope that professors can be caring.
References


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Correspondence concerning this article should be address to Neil Knobloch, Department of Human and Community Development, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Email: nknobloc@uiuc.edu

Endnotes

1. The term “exemplary” was used to identify and refer to selected participants. The researchers did not want the terms to interfere the intent of seeking the best teachers in the college. The most outstanding teachers in the college using a recognition-based selection process described below. The professors were the top 26 in the college based on the selection criteria used by the researchers. This approximately the top 10% of teaching faculty in the college.

2. The terms professor, teacher, college teacher, and teaching faculty were used interchangeably.

3. The case included tenure-track teaching professors in a college of agriculture, food, and natural resources. Nontenure-track instructors and academic professionals were not included because they do not face the same research, teaching, and outreach expectations.
4. The selection process was based on student nominations through undergraduate club leaders. Therefore, a limitation of the study was that teachers who taught undergraduate courses and advised undergraduate student organizations were more likely to be nominated by students than those who taught graduate courses.

5. The instructional ratings were listed on a public university website. It is considered an incomplete list because teachers have the option to be listed if they receive a 4.5 out of a 5.0 scale as an instructor. Most faculty chose to be on the list.

6. The college’s associate dean of academic programs provided the list of award recipients in the college.

7. The proportion of faculty chosen by departments to form the purposive sample was based on undergraduate student enrollment in each department.