ENCOURAGING EMPATHY THROUGH HOME ECONOMICS 
AND THE BUDDY PROJECT: AN ACTION RESEARCH INQUIRY

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Abstract

This study is primarily concerned with the development of empathy and caring behaviors among a group of high school students in the context of a Home Economics class. The significance of this research is reflected in the weakened social fabric of modern day life and the call for rebuilding a caring community -- a civil society.

Motivated by studies conducted in classrooms on this topic and the need for an educational response in preparing this generation of youth for living in a caring community, this study seeks to deepen our understanding around the central research question: Can the Home Economics curriculum serve as a vehicle to encourage empathic and caring behavior?

This study draws principally on the work of Noddings (1984), Eisenberg (1992) and Baumeister and Leary (1995) that provides a theoretical framework for the development of empathy and caring. It is in the intersection of theory and implementation and practice that The Buddy Project, and this study, is located. High school students in a Home Economics class were partnered with kindergarten children. They were engaged in a series of structured learning tasks designed to promote pro-social behavior over a five month period.

Action research (classroom research) was the mode of inquiry selected for investigating the effects of participation in The Buddy Project. This study involved three cycles of inquiry and reflective practice. Throughout, the writer (researcher) collected, analyzed and interpreted an array of qualitative data that informed the ensuing cycle of planning (task design), action (observing) and reflection (interpretation/ theory
construction). The data included images (photography), student response journals, student narratives garnered through semi-structured interviews, student questionnaire, and the writer’s field notes/journals. A predetermined framework for the data collection was not assumed, rather, the data were analyzed to note emergent and recurring themes. Clearly discernable patterns emerged, generating a theory upon analysis of the data.

Among the findings, the following are especially noteworthy. Through participating in the Buddy Project the students perceived of themselves as becoming better people; they became more caring and giving toward others; they saw themselves as role models for the youngsters in their charge; and they came to a better understanding of the child within -- the child they once were. Further, students can reflect critically and identify within themselves the development of empathy and caring behavior.

The findings lead to the conclusion that empathy and caring behavior as reflected above, can be taught and learned. Critical features of instruction in the Home Economics classroom include the intentional and purposeful design of structured learning engagements for the high school students, and the on-going (one-on-one) partnering with kindergarten children. Opportunities for the partners to get to know one another, teacher modeling of praise and encouragement (i.e. “catch them being good”), and identifying and focusing on empathic and caring behaviors through shared readings of children’s literature can lead to the development of empathy and caring among high school Home Economics students.
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DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this thesis to Joan Rose, a most amazing kindergarten teacher, who helped inspire this project and who touched the lives of many of my students over the years. She is a teacher who truly exemplifies empathic behavior to her students and I am grateful for her as a role model to my students.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement and Orienting Questions

What is empathy? Why is empathy important? How does empathy develop? Empathy, in simple terms, is the ability to try to understand how someone else feels. Showing empathy and caring towards others builds trust and care and is a positive trait to instill in children.

As stated in the British Columbia (B.C.) Performance Standards (2000), one of the goals of education is to enhance the social development of youth, to instill in them a sense of responsibility. Many educators today are concerned about the question of moral and ethical education and whether our schools can and should act as agents for social reconstruction (Noddings, 1994). In past years our education system has rewarded mainly academic achievement and has not been as concerned about social behavior. Educators are asking about the lack of attention to morality and care. Over the past decade, the school system has increasingly seen a move towards educating the whole person—in a way that is intellectually, physically, emotionally and socially. The recent B.C Performance Standards (2000) emphasize this. As an educator, I have often wondered if we can create more caring students. Can we help students to empathize with their fellow classmates and with younger children? Can we encourage concern for our fellow human? Teaching to the whole person helps us be more effective teachers, provide relevant curriculum, and thereby provide better caregivers in the future.

Our rapidly changing society is placing many strains on Canadian families. Family structures are more fluid, families are smaller, more couples choose not to have children,
there are more one-parent families, more divorces and more quasi-legal marriages (Vanier Institute, 1994). Many young people growing up in small or single-child families today no longer have experience in caring for young children. These changes are indicating a need to provide educational opportunities for young people to understand these changes and how they are impacted by them. The Home Economics Family Studies curriculum has an educative and preventative mission. As a school subject, Home Economics claims to help young people to optimize living in their current familial and personal relationships and to plan well for their future relationships and families. It helps them to plan and live satisfying and quality lives (Peterat & Dezwart, 1996). If it can help students develop empathy, students will become more socially responsible, contributing members of our society.

The curriculum guides and the resources available such as textbooks, videos and various print material are adequate to teach the courses to a satisfactory level. However, I felt as an educator there was something missing. Consequently, as part of my Family Studies courses, I developed a project involving grade eleven and twelve students having direct contact with children in a kindergarten class. The project came to be called the Buddy Project. The initial purpose of this project was to help senior secondary Home Economics students study child development and learn about this development through observation of and interaction with real children. It involved spending time with a kindergarten child doing various activities together such as reading, crafts and games. However, as time progressed, I began to see additional benefits to this, beyond the students’ learning about child development. I began to notice that the students developed
a “bond” with their younger buddy. Through this bond they seemed to show more care and concern for them.

It is my belief that through the experience gained by the students’ involvement in the Buddy Project, the students become more caring towards others. The purpose of this research was to investigate the Buddy Project to understand the ways in which grade 11 and 12 students can learn to show empathy and caring towards others.

In exploring the Buddy Project, the following specific questions guided the research. The central question of this study was:

How can the Home Economics curriculum serve as a vehicle to encourage caring and empathic behavior?

The following questions elaborate on the central question:

Is there an attitude or behavioral change towards the children?

Do the senior high school students see themselves as role models?

In what ways do senior high school students show their understanding of empathy?

1.2 Significance of The Study

Curriculum developers have defended the need for education about families for over a hundred years. Brown (1980) lists the following as some examples of problems facing families about which students should be educated:

- Recognizing its (the family’s) own significance as a social institution
- Becoming critically aware of the individual’s need for lasting nurturant relationships with others
• Realizing the significance of culture and the importance of critical transmission of the culture to children
• Regaining and maintaining a major role in the socialization of children
• Realizing the significance of communicative action in the family and in social processes outside the family. (Brown, 1980)

Now, over twenty years later, there is an even greater need for education about family and human relationships. The key values of care, concern, connectiveness, and nurturance are often referred to as prerequisites to dealing with the practical problems of living in a global world. From these points you can see that home economics is the ideal area of education to teach empathy and caring.

1.3 Rationale

Home Economics/Family Studies makes a unique contribution to the education of young people. It focuses on the nature and challenges of our daily lives in relationship with other peoples, to social systems, and to material resources. It is unique in teaching about human relationships and families. Home Economics provides young people with the opportunity to consider daily living problems prior to their actual encounter and thus develops their ability to respond as individuals in society (Peterat, 1996).

There is also a distinct need for more experiential learning in the educational system and there has been a renewed interest in practical learning experiences. In the current curriculum guidelines (IRPs-Instructional Resource Packages) students are encouraged to be active learners, to take responsibility for their learning, to develop critical thinking and to be reflective. Relevant curriculum that is implemented in a way that is attuned to its audience is much more likely to achieve these intentions.
Investigation into the meaning of the practical has been researched in recent years. Hultgren (1990) considers the practical in curriculum as fostering the development and practice of attitudes, behaviors and skills of interdependence, responsibility, critical thought and reflection in a modern and complex society. In researching the meaning of practical experiences in home economics, McCaffery (1993) also concluded that to “let go” and transfer some of the control of learning to the students was pedagogically the “good” thing to do. She discovered through students’ reflections that the curriculum ‘came alive’ for the students and that they used the skills in “real life”. McCaffery states that educators need to become more aware of these opportunities and engage students in curriculum that combines both the productive and the practical.

Home economics courses achieve this in many ways. The Buddy Project within a Family Studies or Human Services class is an example of an opportunity for the students to have the curriculum ‘come alive’. The “hands on” experience the students gain working with the young children is very valuable, and whether or not they learn empathy, they gain experience beyond the theoretical knowledge of child development.

**National Post** (Sept 8, 2001) recently published the results of a poll taken amongst Canadians about their expectations of the education system. Canadians expressed a strong desire for the system to teach children character education, focusing on teaching values, respect, and good citizenship. The poll of nearly 800 respondents conducted by COMPAS Inc., stated that 23% believe the main function of schools is to promote citizenship and character-building. One third felt that the purpose of education should be to help students prepare for work and only 17% felt the most important purpose is to encourage intellectual growth and a desire for learning (**National Post**, 2001). From this
poll it appears that the general public agrees with what the researchers are claiming. It is an expectation from Canadian society that our school system provide opportunities to promote good character and citizenship, and this is seen as more important than encouraging intellectual growth.

1.4 Research Strategy

The classroom is a desirable setting for an inquiry into the development of empathy and caring behaviors among high school aged students. In a naturalistic setting such as the classroom, it is possible to observe and investigate the impact of curriculum and instructional design and practice on student behavioral outcomes. While the literature is replete with theoretical studies on the nature and characteristics of empathy and caring, little research has been conducted in the mainstream classroom itself on the possibilities of developing these attributes in our learners. The form of curriculum inquiry chosen for this study was that of classroom research or action inquiry. The researcher worked in partnership with a kindergarten teacher for the duration of the spring semester, 2002.

Classroom research, or action/inquiry research has a number of objectives. Primarily, it seeks to implement solutions to practical problems in the classroom. Understanding the processes at work in the teaching-learning-teaching cycle, and the features of innovations in curriculum which appear to facilitate growth in our students are the major objectives. Understanding can lead to better-informed practice – praxis. Personal and professional growth among the participants (i.e. the teachers in the collaborating team) in action research is an important outcome. Theory, problem and practice become closely interwoven in a cyclical pattern whereby the dynamism of emergent problems direct the research (Zeichner, 2001).
Classroom research demands in-depth involvement of the researcher if understanding of the context of the growth we hope to note is the objective. This realization has important implications for the kinds of data which will be collected, analyzed and interpreted in the quest for full understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The key method is the keeping of extensive field notes including description, anecdotes, preliminary analysis, interpretation and questions. These notes allow the researcher to consider the phenomena under investigation with some detachment. In effect, they permit a meta-analysis by the researcher when he or she chooses to reflect back on the experience and synthesize the data collected in the classroom.

In addition to the field notes and journal that I kept, I also photographed the students in action with the kindergarten students. The students' response journals, and open ended questionnaires given to the students at completion of the project, complete the data set. These were analyzed to identify emergent themes in an on-going recursive manner that would drive the study and the work of teaching forward in a spiral fashion. Further details pertaining to action research may be found in Chapter 3, Methodology.

1.5 Definitions

This study is primarily concerned with the development of empathy through the Buddy Project. Empathy is a multi-faceted construct that is manifest in a variety of actions that are central to the interpretive work of the researcher. In the paragraphs that follow, an attempt is made to clarify and to assist the reader in understanding later sections of this report, when student behaviors are construed to be empathetic by the researcher.
In this study empathy is defined as identifying with, and feeling other people's concerns. Empathy, then, is an abstract idea. We might think of it as best popularized and explained in the lyrics of the 1970's Elvis Presley song, Walk a Mile in My Shoes: “if I could be you, and you could be me for one hour ...”.

It suggests relationship. Empathetic actions within a relationship might include the following:

- Perspective taking: “If I were you ....”
- Active and attentive listening
- Sharing
- Patience
- Giving
- Honesty
- Trust
- Kindness

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) examines topics related to the cultivation and benefits of empathy, and links empathy to caring. In broad strokes, perhaps it is enough to understand at this point that empathy is inferred (by the researcher) through actions and behaviors that demonstrate a willingness to work in the direction of developing the kind of relationship that can lead to imagining, “if I could be you”.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature on empathy and caring, which are often linked in the literature. This review includes the following areas:

1. The commonalities and characteristics of empathy and caring behavior.
2. Empathy and caring: acquired or taught?
3. The development and expression of empathy and caring.
5. Restatement/refinement of the orienting question.

2.1 Commonalities and Characteristics of Empathy and Caring

One cannot explain empathy, any more than one can explain memory or imagination, although one can investigate its parameters (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). Currently much of the work on empathy is being done in social, developmental, and clinical psychology.

In addition to psychological perspectives there are also philosophical views, as evidenced by the existentialist Martin Heidegger. Heidegger (1962) described caring as the very being of human life. His use of the term is very broad, including an “attitude of solicitousness toward other living beings, a concern to do things meticulously, the deepest existential longings, fleeting moments of concern, and all the burdens and woes that belong to human life” (Noddings, 1992, p.15). In Heidegger’s perspective, people are immersed in care; it is the inherent nature of life. On the other hand, Noddings (1992) argues that a caring relation is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between
two human beings: a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for. In order for the relation to be properly called caring, the part of either carer or the cared-for must develop a connection, that is, a relationship.

The desire to be cared for or to feel connected to others is almost certainly a universal human characteristic. Not everyone wants to be cuddled or fussed over, but everyone wants to be received, to elicit a positive response. Cool and formal people want others to respond to them with respect and some sort of acknowledgement. Warm, informal people often appreciate hugs. Most individuals appreciate a person who knows when to hug and when to stand apart. In schools, all children want to be cared about and to feel significant. They do not want to be treated like numbers. When we understand that most individuals want to be cared about and that there is no 'recipe' for caring, we see how important individual attention is. Caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors.

While Noddings focuses on the importance of one's ability to care and one's ability to receive caring, Mayeroff (1971) examines how an individual benefits from being the "carer". Mayeroff states that to care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help one grow and actualize oneself. Caring then, leads to individuals' fulfillment. The meaning of caring is not to be confused with such meanings as wishing well, liking, comforting and maintaining, or simply having an interest in what happens to another. Also, it is not an isolated feeling or a momentary relationship; nor is it simply a matter of wanting to care for a person. Caring, as helping another grow and actualize himself, is a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development, in the same way that
friendship can only emerge in time through mutual trust and a deepening and qualitative transformation of the relationship (Mayeroff, 1971).

Noddings (1984) emphasizes caring as "relation", because individuals in our society tend to think of caring as a virtue, therefore an individual attribute. She disagrees with this but acknowledges that people have different capacities for caring, that is, for entering into caring relations as well as for attending to objects and ideas. For Heidegger, care is inevitable; all aware human beings care. It is the mark of being human. Noddings argues that we often confuse the forms of caring and suppose caring to be a unitary capacity that transfers easily from one domain to another. However, not everyone develops the capacity to care for others in the way described above. Evidence abounds that people can attain high levels of intellectuality and remain insensitive to living beings. Consider the Nazi high command as an example.

Caring for ideas and objects is different from caring for people and other living things (Noddings, 1992). She states that in a society apparently devoted to planned obsolescence, our children have few opportunities to care lovingly for old furniture, dishes, or even new bicycles. Harry Broudy (1972) calls this "enlightened cherishing". This kind of caring produces fine objects and requires special care of them. It can be argued that the care of many tools and instruments is a waste of time because they are so easily replaced. But one wonders how long a throwaway society can live harmoniously with the natural environment.
2.2 Empathy and Caring: Acquired or Taught?

How, then, do people develop the capacity for caring? Caring can elicit and nurture certain qualities that, when combined with other valuable traits, makes a person more compassionate. Deep caring, whether about things or people, often draws upon our reserves of patience and persistence, and in testing our patience and persistence strengthens them (Blustein, 1991). Blustein states that caring can also display and teach a sort of humility that enables us to recognize and appreciate the world and others for what they are. In other words, caring behavior develops one’s empathic nature.

Noddings believes that caring can be taught. She contends that the aim of all education must be maintenance and enhancement of caring. She says that we as teachers do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating caring relations with them. If we want people to approach moral life prepared to care, we need to provide opportunities for them to gain skills in care giving and, more important, to develop the characteristic attitudes described earlier. Noddings states that if we decide that the capacity to care is as much a mark of personhood as reason or rationality, then we will want to find ways to increase this capacity. Just as we now think it is important for girls as well as boys to have mathematical experience, so we should want both boys and girls to have experience in caring. As Noddings states, caring experiences do not just happen; we have to plan for them. As young people learn how to discern and accept care, they can gradually learn to care for others. Noddings believes that moral education from the perspective of an ethic of caring has four major components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings, 1984). Modeling is important in most schemes of moral education, but in caring it is vital. She says that we have to show how to care in our own relations with
cared-fors. If we want people to approach moral life prepared to care, we need to provide opportunities for them to gain skills in care giving and, more important, to develop the characteristic attitudes described earlier.

Thus, the review of the literature on empathy and caring has shown that it is a very important component worthy of emphasis in the education system. If we had to pick a logical setting in which to guide children toward caring about, empathizing with, and helping other people, it would be a place where they would regularly come into contact with their peers and where learning is already taking place. The school is such an obvious choice that one wonders how it could be that the active encouragement of prosocial values and behavior plays such a minor part in classrooms. It is sometimes said that moral concerns and social skills should be taught at home. No one in the field of education or child development would disagree. The problem is that such instruction, along with nurturing and warmth, someone to model altruism, and opportunities to practice caring for others, are found in only certain out-of-school experiences of students and not in all homes. The school should provide what some children will not get otherwise. In any case, there is no conceivable danger in providing these values and experiences in both home and school environments. Encouragement from more than one source to develop empathic relationships is a highly desirable form of redundancy.

2.3 The Development and Expression of Empathy and Caring

Most of us are naturally protective and tender with children. Even tough male teenagers have been known to respond to children with tenderness. In some schools, educators have begun to match potential high school dropouts with elementary school
children who need academic help. As these young people help children with schoolwork, they begin to realize their own potential and the value of education. By teaching, they too, are learning empathy (Salz & Trubowitz, 1992).

Noddings (1992) lists many reasons for involving teenagers in the lives of younger children. First, raising children is one of the most significant tasks any adult undertakes, and it requires adequate preparation. Second, teenagers need to be confirmed in their budding altruism. They naturally have enormous self-interest, but they also have the capacity to be deeply concerned for others, and schools rarely give them a chance to practise the skills needed to develop this capacity. Third, she states that we need the services of energetic and altruistic teenagers. We should make this need more widely recognized and urge young people to respond generously. She further suggests that high schools should restructure curriculum to make a part of each day directly devoted to themes of care. Clearly, Noddings implies that the development of caring relates to fostering belonging in society.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) believe that the need to belong is directly linked with feeling cared about. They propose that the need to belong has two main features. First, people need frequent personal contacts or interactions with others. Ideally, these interactions would be positive, but it is mainly important that the majority be free from conflict and negative affect. Second, people need to perceive that there is an interpersonal bond or relationship marked by stability, concern and continuation into the foreseeable future. This aspect provides a relational context for one’s interactions with another person, and so the perception of the bond is essential for satisfying the need to belong. When compared with essentially identical interactions with other people with whom one
is not connected, a strictly behavioral record might reveal nothing special or rewarding about these interactions. Yet an interaction with a person in the context of an ongoing relationship is subjectively different from and often more rewarding than an interaction with a stranger or casual acquaintance. To satisfy the need to belong, the person must believe that the other cares about his or her welfare and likes him or her. Simply knowing that a bond exists may be emotionally reassuring, yet it would not provide a full sense of belonging if one person does not interact with the other. Thus, we view the need to belong as something more with either a need for affiliation or a need for intimate attachment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Several other studies suggest how little it takes (other than frequent contact) to create social attachments and friendships. Empirical evidence confirms the intuitive importance of friendship. A long, well-established line of research indicates that youngsters who are rejected by their peers (i.e., who do not have friends) and no one to care suffer negative life consequences (Haslett & Samter, 1997). Thus, the need to belong is inextricably linked with people's ability to care.

2.4 The Benefits of Empathy and Caring.

Empathy and caring seem to be integral parts of character development. Lickona (1991) endorses Noddings' (1992) emphasis on the importance of combining the school setting with the active development of caring attributes. The British Columbia (B.C.) Ministry of Education recently developed the B.C. Performance Standards (2000), a document outlining a series of performance standards and expectations that support ongoing instruction and assessment in the classroom. These were developed for voluntary use in B.C. schools but are highly encouraged by the Ministry of Education to be used by
teachers. There are four key areas of learning outlined in the document: reading, writing, numeracy and social responsibility. The standards focus exclusively on performance assessment. In performance assessment students are asked to apply the skills and concepts they have learned to complete complex, realistic tasks. Within the key area of social responsibility, one of the observed qualities that is to be encouraged in both senior students and kindergarten to grade three is that of showing empathy.

Lickona (1991) outlines numerous reasons why our society is asking for schools to take on a more active role in teaching values. He states that there is a growing conviction that “schools cannot be ethical bystanders at a time when our society is in deep moral trouble” (p. 24). Rather, he says that “schools must do what they can to contribute to the character of the young and the moral health of the nation” (p. 24). “Character does not function in a vacuum; it functions in a social environment” (Lickona, 1991, p.63). Lickona outlines three components of good character: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Empathy is an important component of moral feeling. Lickona states that when students learn something about each other, it’s easier for a teacher to develop the aspect of moral community -- students respecting, affirming, and caring about each other. He says it is a matter of their developing empathy.

Lickona (1991) believes that building a classroom community around group norms of respect and caring is the best way to forestall peer cruelty. He states that schools can and should foster students’ caring attitudes and active citizenship beyond the classroom. This will occur when schools give students opportunities to establish face-to-face helping relationships such as class buddies and cross-age tutoring. He claims educating students to care about others ultimately means educating them in social justice.
We sometimes speak as if caring did not require knowledge, as if caring for someone were simply a matter of good intentions or warm regard. But in order to care, we must understand the other’s needs and we must be able to respond appropriately to them. To care for someone, one must know many things. One must know who the other is, what his or her powers and limitations are, what his or her needs are, and what is conducive to his or her growth. One must know how to respond to his or her needs, and what one’s own powers and limitations are. What we know in caring, we know in different ways. We know some things explicitly and some things implicitly. To know explicitly is to be able to put what we know into words; by contrast, to know implicitly is to be unable to articulate it. We know more about a good friend than we can verbalize. Caring, then, includes explicit and implicit knowledge and is, therefore, difficult to research and evaluate.

Mayeroff (1971) states that patience is an important ingredient in caring. One enables the other to grow in his or her own time and in his own way. Patience is not waiting passively for something to happen, but is a kind of participation with the other in which we give fully of ourselves. The person who cares is patient because he believes in the growth of the other. In addition to being patient with the other, one must also be patient with oneself.

Caring and empathy require continuity, and it is impossible if the other is continually being replaced; the other must remain constant, for caring is a developmental process. Friendship is a relationship in depth that takes its own time to develop. In a meaningful relationship, caring is mutual; each cares for the other and caring becomes contagious.
My caring for the other helps activate his caring for me; and similarly his caring for me helps activate my caring for him, it “strengthens” me to care for him (Mayeroff, 1971).

To care for another person, one must be able to understand his world as if one were inside it. One must want to see with his eyes what his world is like to him and how he sees himself. Instead of merely looking at him in a detached way from the outside, as if he were a specimen, one must be able to be with him in his world, perceiving his world in order to sense what life is like for him, what he is striving to be, what he requires to grow. In caring for another person we can be said to be basically with him in his world, in contrast to simply knowing about him from the outside (Mayeroff, 1971). Mayeroff outlines the major ingredients of caring: patience, honesty, trust, humility, hope and courage.

One reason for the considerable interest in empathy and related constructs is the assumption of many psychologists and philosophers that empathy mediates prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). The general finding in the relevant research is that empathy is positively related to prosocial behavior, which corresponds to Lickona’s definition of “good character” and “moral community”. Numerous researchers have argued that an effective way to enhance children’s prosocial responding, reduce aggression, and promote social skills is to use child-rearing techniques that emphasize the perspectives of other people and to empathize with them. Eisenberg (1989) states that the research frequently outlines the importance of promoting empathy in the socialization of prosocial behavior. She claims that caregivers can promote positive behaviors and values in children not only through their own interactions but also by influencing school curricula. She emphasizes the benefits of peers serving as role models of helpfulness and
caring. An example is training students as peer counsellors and peer mediators. Schools and teachers can instill prosocial values and behaviors in children on a school-wide basis, if they are motivated to do so, she states.

Schulman and Mekler (1985) suggest that there are three foundation stones of moral development: 1) internalizing parental standards of right and wrong, 2) developing empathic reactions, and 3) acquiring personal standards. They also suggest a number of methods for encouraging children to develop empathic reactions. For example, they suggest drawing a child's attention to people's feelings, or asking him to imagine how he would feel in their place. Also, a child's empathy for other people's feelings can be developed by reminding him of similar experiences in his own life.

In conclusion, we know that children learn values and specific behaviors from family members, peers, and teachers, as well as from the media and other societal institutions. Children learn from observing others' behaviors and from the values, attitudes, and cognitions communicated to them. Example and practise in the context of real relationships are a powerful combination in developing caring. Although there is much to learn about prosocial behavior and its development, the importance of learning empathy cannot be ignored. The education system must look to ways to provide opportunities to teach and model empathy whenever possible. What is reinforced through the school system in terms of caring and empathy can have positive repercussions for the greater community.
2.5 Restatement and Refinement of the Orienting Questions

The review of the literature points to the idea that empathy and caring can be taught, and that curriculum reform may foster these qualities among our students. Key features of empathy and caring include:

- The centrality of relationship
- The need for continuity and stability of the relationship

Further, the research identifies characteristics of instructional practices that will promote empathy and caring behaviors. These include modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation.

The gap in the literature pertains to direct, explicit instruction of empathy by way of carefully designed learning tasks and the concomitant feedback and encouragement linked to "catching them being good". Secondly, further thought needs to be given to the nature of the relationships (partnerships) that can be structured to promote empathy and caring.

The orienting questions, then, can be refined to focus on the intentional and purposeful planning that goes well beyond the suggestion that exposure alone will suffice for students to take the risks required to become increasingly more empathetic. The main question remains, but through the literature the elaborating questions place an emphasis on the learning tasks.

- How can the Home Economics curriculum, and the Buddy Project, serve as a vehicle to encourage empathy and caring?
• What **types of learning tasks** must I design to offer the structure needed for my students to become more empathetic and caring?

• What is the **nature of the relationship** (partnership) I need to plan for the students that will promote empathy and caring?

As a consequence of planning, strategic partnering and intentional task design this research will focus on signs of increasing empathy by high school students involved in a Buddy Project. Specifically I will focus on three questions: Is there an attitude or behavioral change in the high school students toward children? Do the high school students see themselves as role models? In what ways do they demonstrate their understanding of empathy?
3.1 Background To The Buddy Project

To help the reader understand how the Buddy Project came to be a research project, I will explain how it began. In 1989, while I was on a parental leave for one year, my temporary replacement created a community involvement project to have one of my classes sew a few puppets for the kindergarten class at the elementary school adjacent to our school. The kindergarten teacher, Joan Rose, loved the idea, and when I returned to my position, she approached me about doing other activities together. One such activity was with the Foods class, making cookies with the kindergarten students. We continued to do these few activities together for two more years.

An interesting observation the child psychologist, Jean Piaget, made about adolescents that ties their cognition to that of younger children concerns "egocentricity". Egocentricity is usually associated with pre-operational thought. However, Piaget defined egocentrism broadly as an inability to de-center and proposed that adolescents demonstrate their own form of centration (Wadsworth, 1971). Adolescence is a time when young people are trying to leave childhood behind and adopt adult roles, an attempt that often results in extreme self-consciousness and inner focus. In deciding to implement a buddy project, one of my original goals was to help my high school students to be less self-centered and look beyond themselves. Mrs. Rose also felt that this interaction would help her five year old students to look beyond their own small world, since this age level also tends to be self-centered.
Then in 1992, I introduced to our Home Economics program a new, British Columbia Ministry of Education designed career preparation course called Human Services 11. It was a course focused on the study of child development, as preparation for students pursuing careers in early childhood education. While teaching this course, I saw an even greater potential for the involvement of the kindergarten class. Mrs. Rose and I continued to combine some activities, but it was still limited to only a few times per semester. By 1998, we decided to take the project to a more involved level. Along with increasing the number of interactions the buddies had, we made a more concerted effort to match the senior secondary school students with a specific buddy. Previously, we had randomly matched them according to whoever was there that day. Thus, the kindergarten student would have different buddies some days. This regular matching seemed to make the interactions more meaningful and the attendance of the senior high school students improved to almost 100%. The more interactions we had, the more the high school students asked for them. This to us, as teachers, was a very positive sign that the project had some benefit. In 1999 we also implemented some interaction with both buddies and residents in the senior citizens home nearby. This proved to be very successful, and the feedback from the seniors and our students was very positive.

During the 2000/2001 school year the Human Services class again worked with the kindergarten, but on a more frequent basis. They were “paired up” with a specific buddy and from this, a relationship developed. I also added the project in my Family Studies course as well. Also, photos were taken of their interactions and the high school students were asked to reflect in their journals about their experiences. Thus, the buddy idea
progressed over the years from a single activity to a more detailed and refined project, which still continues to grow and change.

To help the reader understand how the Buddy Project is carried out, a description of a typical day is as follows: A typical buddy interaction day finds the senior students checking in with the high school teacher and then walking as a group to the elementary school one block away. The kindergarten class awaits their arrival and the Human Services buddies and Kindergarten buddies greet each other.

One of the teachers (usually the kindergarten teacher) describes and gives the instructions, goals, and objectives for the day’s lessons, to the whole group. For example, the activity for the day may be patterns and sequencing using circles, rectangles and squares. The matched buddies then proceed to carry out the various activities at the designated “stations” or areas. When extra time permits, the buddies might read together or play an interactive educational game together. When the time is over, approximately one hour, the high school students say goodbye and walk back to the high school as a group with their teacher. Back in class, the high school students then fill in a “reflection” about the activities and experiences of the day. At the bottom of their activity sheet for each day there is a small space for their reflective comments about their day with their buddy. An example can be found on page 35.

3.2 Action Research Inquiry

Action research occurs in a variety of forms. Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart and Zuber-Skerritt (1991) offer a broad definition: “Action research is a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve
the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" (p. 3). Others describe action research as “sustained attention” to some aspect of practice, or “systematic intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work” (Pine, 1992, p. 657). Holly (1991) states “the process of action research is the process of experiential learning” (p. 44). Ripley and Hart (1989) summarize the notions embedded in action research:

As opposed to more traditional forms of research, action research requires that the researcher become actively involved in the research not simply as a passive observer, but as an active participant in what is going on with the research. It is the objective of action research projects to make something better. Therefore, the focus of any action research project must be upon reflective action, upon the doing, as opposed to simply observing and learning. (p. 31)

In an education setting action research is research which involves educators collaborating to identify, research, reflect upon, discuss and report on a question they have about teaching practices or theory. It often, though not necessarily, takes place in a school classroom. The researchers may try to explain what causes certain outcomes, a positivist view; they may be conducting research to understand what is happening in a given situation, an interpretivist view. Or they may do praxis research with the goal of changing practice to contribute to a more equitable social order, a critical view (Lather, 1986; McCutcheon and Jung, 1990). The intent of action research is to bridge the “gap” between theory and practice so that both can be enriched.

Action research follows a pattern of reflecting, planning, acting, reflecting, and re-planning that is known as the spiral cycle (Tripp, 1990). This is the model that I have chosen to use as the structure to guide my research. This cycle involves taking action (i.e. teaching, planning), observing/ documenting outcomes, experiences and events;
analyzing (reflecting), deciding what action to take (re-thinking), and finally deciding how to modify the action based on the assessment (re-planning). Lomax wrote this about action research:

Action research is a way of defining and implementing relevant professional development. It is able to harness forms of collaboration and participation that are part of our professional rhetoric but are rarely effective in practice…(it)… starts small with a single committed person focusing on his/her practice. It gains momentum through the involvement of others as collaborators. It spreads as individuals reflect on the nature of their participation, and the principle of shared-ownership of practice is established. It can result in the formation of a self-critical community; extended professionals in the best sense of the term.( p. 10 )

Home economics research and practice are inherently social practices. They are conducted in human, social relationships and thus unavoidably contain ethical and moral dilemmas. Action research is a descriptor for methodologies of inquiry into our practice (Peterat, 1997). When we ask ourselves a question such as, ‘How can I improve what I am doing?’ it is a true form of professional development.

Action research and inquiry is an open-ended process that is generative in nature. It is tentative, fluid and constructivist. In a problem posing cycle of planning, action and reflection, the work of the researcher is to create knowledge and understanding. Perhaps the two most important skills the researcher needs are the ability to interpret truthfully and to engage in reflection, using these to inform the ensuing cycle of planning, action and reflection.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources related to the guiding question(s) that direct the inquiry. Multiple data sources and multiple perspectives address concerns related to the subjectivity and biases of the researcher/participant in the work of interpreting observed student behaviors. Together they work in the direction of
ensuring a trustworthy and truthful interpretation, and increase the credibility of the researcher’s work.

In this study the data set consists of photographic images, the teacher-researcher’s field notes and journal writings, student surveys, student reflective journals, and student questionnaires. Together they provide a rich portraiture of the construct of empathy: the focus of this inquiry.

3.3 Study Participants

The sample for the study was 26 students enrolled in the Home Economics Human Services 11 class at a senior secondary school in a small outlying community of 33,000 near a larger center of 100,000 people. The course ran a full semester from February 1st to June 30th, 2002. There were 26 students, 24 females and 2 males ages 17-19, in grades 11 and 12. All of the students selected the course as an elective in their timetable, as it is not mandatory. Mrs. Foster and I established a schedule of student interaction times (see appendix A).

The students had an opportunity to accept or decline participation in the study through the consent form and their agreement was not known to me. To prevent coercion of students I had students return their consent form to a third party, a certified education assistant staff member at the Elementary School. Eligibility for the study was determined by the following: parental consent form submitted, and regular attendance on buddy interaction days. The high school students and the kindergarten students were given the consent forms during the first two weeks of February, 2002. All of the students’ reflective journals were used as data since the third party reported that none had declined to participate. At the end of the course, six high school students were purposefully selected
from the eligible participants, to be interviewed, based on involvement and interest in the project.

3.4 Research Design

The following graphic demonstrates the framework of the cyclical pattern I have chosen to structure my research. The first cycle leads into the second cycle, which leads into the third cycle. Observation is paired with the action phase and the data gathering is ongoing. Upon saturation of data the writing takes place.
3.5 Data Collection

In order to investigate the problem, the following methods of data collection were used: a) my observations of students, and the kindergarten teacher’s observations as told to me were recorded in my field notes of the interactions, b) interviews of high school students, and c) student writings in reflective journals.

The main sources of data were: a) after each kindergarten visit, the students documented their thoughts in their own reflective journals, b) interviews lasting approximately 15 minutes each, with six high school students were conducted at the end of the course (early June, 2002) to examine photos of their interaction with their buddy, and to determine their recognition of their development of empathy and caring, c) my journal/field notes in which I document planning sessions with the kindergarten teacher, planning with students, comments and reflections of the kindergarten teacher, and my observations of students in planning and in interviews, and d) photographs (images) of the interactions taken by the researcher and student assistant. Photos taken by myself and a student assistant during the semester were shown to the students when interviewed, in order to help them recall situations and observe their interaction with their buddies.

3.6 Course Description

Human Services 11 is an elective course in the Home Economics program that introduces students to the subject of child development and helps them appreciate its relevance to their lives. After introducing students to the importance of studying children and parenting, the course focuses on the development from conception through age six. Development not only includes physical maturation, but also an understanding of how
emotional, social, and intellectual development are fostered and hindered. The course provides perspective on the importance of childhood, the influence of the family on a child's development, the responsibilities of those who care for children, and the challenges of teen parenthood.

Although child care is often studied as a one-to one interaction between caregiver and child, in reality, this interaction more often takes place within a broader environment. Through discussion, explanation, case studies, and activities the course helps students think about such issues as: How can children be helped to feel that they are valuable members of the family? What is the importance of sibling and family relationships? How can family members work together to solve problems? Students find these learning experiences applicable not only to the study of child development but also to their own experiences as family members.

Because child care demands some of the most important decisions a person will ever have to make, these activities simulate situations where assorted factors are involved in the making of a decision. Students have the chance to practice their critical thinking skills as well as apply their common sense, then discuss the options available and weigh the decisions of others. This practice is a preliminary "dry run" at the real life events that they may encounter in their lives.

Throughout the semester a variety of teaching methods are used. Various topics are discussed, and case studies and examples from the course textbook The Developing Child (Brisbane, 1994) are used to bring the concepts to life. For example, the case studies from the student text containing photos illustrate positive parenting skills, and provide practical, interesting ways to help students become more confident and effective as
caregivers. The case studies present ideas for spending “quality time” with children as well as suggestions for guiding behavior in a positive way, and class discussions evolve around the photos found in the textbook.

Observation and participation are two of the most valuable tools for the study of child development and parenting. Before the students begin working with the kindergarten children in the Buddy Project, they are taught the basic principles of observation and participation. Important points stressed include objectivity, appropriate behavior and confidentiality. Students are shown ways to observe and participate with children, and how to record their observations.

Since the participating group of high school students was six students larger than the kindergarten classes of 20, six of the kindergarten students had two senior students assigned to them. The “extras” interacted as a threesome for 4 weeks. I then assigned one senior buddy to the morning kindergarten buddy to be their “main buddy”. The other senior student was assigned the afternoon kindergarten buddy as their “main buddy”. The second senior student then became an “assistant”, and an observer as well. This helped them have a continuous relationship with one little buddy. This intervention helped to encourage the senior students to develop their observation skills. This, however would only be needed for large classes (if there were more than two extra high school students than kindergarten students). Usually Human Services class sizes are not large.
3.7 Analysis of Data

The data were analyzed to examine whether the pedagogical practices encouraged empathy and caring in the high school students. I used triangulation and collaboration from which to build understanding by using the perspectives of the high school students, the kindergarten teacher, and my own reflections and observations. From examining the data and reflecting on events and practices, I decided on questions and interventions that shaped each successive research cycle.

In order to fully examine my teaching practices within the buddy project I divided the time frame into three cycles:

- Cycle #1 - February 4 - March 14
- Cycle #2 - March 14 - April 16
- Cycle #3 - April 24 - June 07

For each cycle I used the following action research framework: each cycle had a plan (the goals for the buddy project), an action (how I carried out the plan), the observations (what I observed and what my students observed and reflected in their journals), and my reflections (what I learned) based upon what occurred during that cycle. The results of the first cycle helped shape my plan for the second cycle, and the results from the second cycle shaped the plan for the third and final cycle. At the completion, six students were interviewed to discuss their experiences and learnings in the Buddy Project.
3.8 Limitations and Strengths of the Study

The limitations and strengths of action research that focuses on qualitative work are inherent to this methodological approach. Because the sample sizes are small and the research focuses on the particularity of situated context – one classroom – questions of generalizability of the findings arise. Further, because the teacher is an active participant in all phases of planning, action and reflection, questions of teacher objectivity arise with regards to the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

On the other hand, the classroom provides the ideal and most naturalistic setting for studying the phenomenon of developing empathy. Interactions among the students are not contrived, as they might be in a laboratory or other controlled setting. While the interactions are designed and structured for the purposes of the study, they are nevertheless authentic, genuine and spontaneous.

The researcher is acutely aware of this tension: the pull in each direction in engaging in this type of inquiry. To offset the challenge of subjectivity and researcher bias, triangulation was used to provide multiple perspectives, thus shedding light from various directions on the question at hand. Secondly, careful and extensive use of field notes have been helpful in creating distance -- a stepping back -- from my work as a teacher and the task of interpreting the observed student behaviors. Field notes are a kind of metacognitive audit trail, or an estrangement device, that allow the researcher to revisit the work at hand with detachment. It allows a study of the study. The goal has been to provide the reader with a trustworthy and truthful account of encouraging empathy in the Home Economics classroom.
CHAPTER 4

CYCLES OF ACTION RESEARCH

4.1 Getting to Know Each Other (Cycle 1, February 4- March 14, 2002)

4.1.1 Plan

Mrs. Foster, and I met ahead of time on February 4 to plan activities and discuss ways that we could match the buddies for two classes. There were 20 kindergarten students and 26 high school students, so the 6 extra high school students joined in with a partner for the morning class and had their own buddy for the afternoon class. We prepared activities that would meet the criteria for both the kindergarten curriculum and the high school curriculum. We planned kindergarten visits for the high school students on February 8, 18, and 26, and on March 4 and 14.

Upon arrival at the kindergarten classroom each interaction day, the Human Services 11 students were given an outline of our instructions to follow for each task to complete with their buddy. Verbal instructions were given to get them started on the activities. From then on the buddies worked on their own and Mrs. Foster and I supervised and observed until it was time to leave.

My plan for the first cycle was to allow opportunities for the buddies to get to know each other. Specific tasks were performed during each visit to the kindergarten and the activities gave the buddies a chance to talk to each other and to get to know one another in a friendly, non-threatening way. My observations focused on watching for the change in attitude or behavior towards children, their awareness of being a role model, and their demonstration of an understanding of empathy (the elaborating questions).
4.1.2. Action

February 8 and 18 consisted of the following activity:

Dear Buddies,

You are a new group of buddies and so the little buddies may be nervous or shy. Please take a few minutes to introduce yourself and tell two interesting things about yourself. Then ask your little buddy to introduce him/herself and tell two things about themselves. Today is our ‘DAY 100. We are celebrating the fact that we have been in school for 100 days! Today we will be working through some math, reading and cooking activities. Please remember not to give your buddy the answer but instead help them figure it out.

Task #1 Take a number chart and the objects your buddy brought to a quiet spot in the classroom. Put the chart down and as you point to the number have your buddy put down an object beside the chart and say the number. When you get to 20 ask your buddy how many are in the row. Then count in tens to 100 showing each row. Ask your buddy-did you bring 100 objects? (paper clips, elastics, etc)

Task #2 Find a red and blue crayon and colour the number chart with them. Shade all the numbers that end in 5 red and in 0 blue. Count by 5s as you go along.

Task #3 Get a paper strip and 10 stickers to make a 100 day crown, complete with the jewels. Help your buddy print 10 on the crown. Staple the ends together to fit your buddy and have them wear it.

Task #4 Take your buddy to the cooking station. Print what kind of a tart your buddy would like beside his/her name. Help your buddy fill the tart and put it on the cookie sheet.

Task #5 Find your buddies poem book and help your buddy read the words by having him/her read it to you if they can. Help them when needed and have them echo it back.

Share information about yourself and get to know your little buddy. Today I learned the following about my buddy ________________________________

Figure 2. Instruction Sheet For High School Buddies, February 8 and 18.

The bottom of the instruction sheet contained a small space for the high school buddies to record their reflection for the day. The students filled this in directly after the activity or as homework, if it was too rushed that day. Since the students
had two different buddies (morning and afternoon) they filled in a reflection for each. Every two weeks I collected their journals to read over their comments. I also collected them at the end of the semester as data.

Dear Buddies,

We are about to start a theme on dinosaurs. To help us become completely immersed in our topic, we need to create some art work and begin as paleontologists.

Project #1 Straw Dinosaur Skeleton
Glue the dinosaur pattern to heavy paper. Show your buddy how to measure the straw against the bones to know where to cut the straw. Put the white glue on the pattern for the little buddy and have them glue the straws onto the pattern. It will look like a skeleton. As you glue, talk about the different types of dinosaurs, and the different types of bones - skull, rib, tail, leg, neck, etc.

Project #2 Fossil
Give your buddy some plasticene and have them make a flat pancake shape. You are going to take some real bones and carefully press the shape into it to make an impression. Quickly measure a scoop of plaster of paris, mix with water and pour it into the mold. Explain to your buddy that this is the way paleontologists in labs get molds of real dinosaur bones.

Project #3 Dinosaur Egg
Go to the paint station and help your buddy paint two dinosaur eggs. They are to make both eggs the same.

Project #4 Questionnaire
Find a spot in the room to discuss the questions with your buddy. You need to print as neatly as possible the answers your little buddy gives. Talk to each other about your lives when you have extra time.

Figure 3. Instruction Sheet for Buddy Days March 4 & 14

Since the visits were approximately twice per week, we had two or three regular classes between to study the Human Services course topics. When back in the high school classroom I followed up with lessons that related to our activities with the kindergarten students. For example, in this cycle I lectured for a short time on topics such as differences in personalities of children, the benefits of studying child development, and what can we learn from observing children. Then in small groups we brainstormed and discussed “What makes a good parent?” Another day we discussed in small groups and as a class, the importance of ‘play’ to a child’s development. We watched an educational
video on child development. We also discussed the various types of families and I emphasized that many children come from differing backgrounds. These lessons are all integral parts of the home economics curriculum. The lessons helped the students to understand the importance of the kindergarten interactions and how relevant this contact with small children was in this course.

4.1.3 Observations

Most students were generally keen to get involved with the kindergarten students. In the first week of class a number of students asked “When are we starting buddies?” This indicated to me many had some form of interest in working with children. I asked the students to write in their journals what they were expecting from the project. I also surveyed them as to how much contact with children they had prior to taking the Human Services course. Since my plan was to provide opportunities for the students to get to know each other, during the first kindergarten visit, I watched for their initial reactions with each other, in terms of body language, conversations (or lack of) taking place between them, and generally any signs of interaction. Then I observed and noted any changes that took place between buddies. The little buddies were very shy and a little nervous the first day. They began to open up a little and talk more as early as the second day. Some of the little buddies even recognized their big buddies the second time, and this came as a surprise to some of my students that the little buddies actually remembered them.

Some students were more communicative than others. I particularly noticed one high school student who started off with little or no interaction with his little buddy. Within
three interactions I observed a noticeable change. I chose to focus on Bill (a pseudonym), one of the grade 11 students, who was not showing any noticeable empathy in our first interaction. He was very complacent and disinterested. He also expressed to me and to a few other classmates around him, that he was “not that interested in working with little kids”. From the eyes of an experienced teacher, I saw him as a student who possibly had a tough exterior as his “cover”. I was fairly certain there was some softness underneath that could be coaxed out of him.

My observation in journal notes February 8, 2002:

Bill was a grade 11 boy age 17 who was having difficulty in school. He lived at home with his mother.

Bill was a clever fellow, but out of school drug use caused him to lose his motivation in school. He was having trouble attending regularly. Bill told me he took this course because he needed the credits towards graduation. At first he was not interested in participating and only attended “because he had to”. Mrs. Joster and I matched Bill with a little five year old boy, feeling it would be better than with a girl. My first observations were that he was not interacting with his little buddy,

Illustration 4.1a Bill and Andrew (first interactions)
As three or four more interactions took place I began to notice that Bill was taking an active interest in his little buddy, talking more often, and sitting in a more cooperative, positive manner with him. Bill's buddy began to look forward to his visits and they seemed to form a good relationship.
Unfortunately Bill had to move to Vancouver at the end of March 2002 to live with his father, (because his mother was unable to handle his difficult behavior). As a result, I was unable to follow through with interviewing him about the positive change I had noticed in his classroom behavior. His little buddy expressed disappointment that Bill moved away. Mrs. Foster and I talked to his little buddy and he was re-assigned to another big buddy.

At the end of the first cycle I felt the students had had a reasonable length of time (six visits) with a young child to get to know them and gain some insight into their little world.

An integral part of my data was information gained from the students’ journals. In many cases the written information they provided was very brief, but the students were able to elaborate in class discussions and in also the final interviews with me.

When we returned to the classroom after each kindergarten visitation, the students filled in a few words on the daily instruction/reflection sheet from that particular day and placed it in their journals. For example, here are the buddy day instructions for February 26, 2002 (the third visit of the high school students with their kindergarten buddies):

**Buddy Day Instructions:**

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*Task #1*

The three stories to choose from are - The Three Billy Goats Gruff, The Three Little Pigs, and Little Red Riding Hood

Once you have chosen your story, collect the story sheets. As a group colour all parts. Big buddies, make sure that your little buddy colours a part and of course, you will need to as well. You may wish to mount the characters on Popsicle sticks after they are cut out.

---
Task #2
Once all parts of the story are ready, find a spot in the class to act out your story. One of the big buddies may be the narrator. The little buddy may take a few different parts or the big buddy may. Talk about expression and changing voices for each character. You may run through the story a few times, then the little buddy may take the story parts home when you are finished so that he/she can tell it out at home.

Task #3
Collect the following materials from the coloured couches- poem book, 3 poems: 1. Humpty Dumpty, 2. Hickory Dickory Dock, #3 Little Jack Horner and a “magic finger”. Have your little buddy use the magic finger to point to the words while reading the poems to you. If they have trouble with the words help them try to sound them out. If it is too hard to sound them out, tell them the words. After they have read the poems to you, put them into their poem books.
If you finish the above three jobs, you are welcome to read a story to your little buddy, play a game with them, or work on a puzzle together.

Today I learned the following about my little buddy

Figure 4a. Buddy Day Instructions for February 26

These are some of the comments written in their journals on the bottom of the activity sheets from the first and second interactions. These comments indicated to me that the students were working at getting to know their little buddies:

My buddy was shy at first.

They are a lot smarter than I thought they would be in kindergarten!

He knew who I was and remembered my name!

Lauren is very quiet and shy; by the end of the visit she started to speak a little louder so I could hear her better.

Back in our classroom I followed up with lessons on parenting that related to our visits. I included discussions on topics such as how children’s personalities differ, what affects a child’s self esteem, the importance of play in child development and the
characteristics that make a good parent. A discussion on appropriate behavior around young children also took place. Being a good role model was emphasized.

4.1.4 Reflections

Most of the high school students seemed to look forward to the buddy days. For example, my students would stop me in the school hallway and ask when was our next buddy day going to be. They would tell me that they were looking forward to it. A few were not very interested in the planned interactions and seemed a little bored. A typical teenage response might be to stand around and want to chat with their friends instead, making plans for the weekend. This, however, only occurred a few times, which was a good indication to me that they were becoming involved. Shyness by both buddies was the most obvious trait being shown. For example, in the first two interactions the little buddies would wait quietly for their buddy to come over and pick them.

However, in the short time they had together I could begin to see some of the buddies were relaxing with each other, a little more each day. The second day some of the little buddies recognized their big buddies and went directly over to them with eagerness.

More conversation was happening, and they were making connections with each other. Some high school students were quick to form an attachment because some did not want to change their buddy when I suggested that I make a few adjustments due to a few absences. For example, Maria shared that her buddy Blake, was shy at first but after a few visits he opened up more. She shared that her buddy said several times “I love you,
you’re my best friend!!” She said that he always wanted to sit in her lap and be close.

This indicated to me that close bonds were forming and Mrs. Foster observed this as well.

Illustration 4.2. Close bonds are forming between buddies.

4.1.5 Emerging Questions

At the end of the first month Mrs. Foster and I met and discussed how the project was going. She was pleased with what she saw happening and was looking forward to my students continuing their participation. We decided to structure our activities so that they would allow maximum contact one on one with no real group activity yet. My questions that emerged from Cycle 1 and led into Cycle 2 were:

- Will the students who are less involved become more involved as time passes?
- Will my students become more caring towards others?

Mrs. Foster and I met again to design some activities that would encourage more interaction between the buddies.
4.2 Praise and Encouragement (Cycle 2, March 14 to April 16, 2002)

4.2.1 Plan

In this cycle my plan was for the students to observe the kindergarten teacher’s attitude and mannerisms with the kindergarten children (a way of observing caring and empathy) to learn ways to give praise and encouragement to their buddies (put it into practice). We planned interaction days for March 14 and 25, and April 4, 8, and 16. Mrs. Foster and I usually met weekly to plan the week’s activities to reach her goals of skill building and mine of relationship building and observing child development.

The activities for the next interactions required the high school students to listen carefully to their buddies, as they practiced simple math concepts, language and reading skills. This gave the students opportunities to offer praise and show kindness to their kindergarten buddy if they chose to.

4.2.2 Action

The following activity sheet describes the activities that took place in cycle #2 on buddy day March 25, 2002. It is an example of the instruction sheet given to guide the high school students in their activities with their kindergarten buddy:

| Buddies, |
| Today you and your little buddy will be working on some math, art, and reading projects. Please remember to GUIDE your little buddy through the task, but do not give away the answer. When they are complete, you and your little buddy can play a game, work on a puzzle, complete a language or math activity, or read a story. |
| Activity #1 |
| The kindergarten students need to understand and show different ways a number can be represented. Today we are working on the facts number 6 family. Have your little buddy colour the turtle, while you collect 6 circle stickers and cut the number 6 facts from the flash cards. When you are both done, hold up a fact. Have your little buddy read it, then show it by placing spots on the turtle on either side of the line. When you have completed all the facts, put the stickers and the math facts in an envelope. Have your little buddy put the envelope with the turtle into his/her backpack to take home. |
| Activity #2 |
Collect a paper bag and a bunny puppet sheet. Together colour, cut out, and glue the parts onto the bag. Using the puppet tell/dramatize the bunny poem “The Bunny Wiggle”. Your little buddy is working on memorization and changing voice for dramatization. Make sure the little buddy prints his/her name on the inside.

Activity #3

The bunny sewing activity will help the little buddy with patterns-in/out, hand-eye coordination, and fine motor development. Show your buddy how to thread the yarn through the hole and back up again to form a design. Watch carefully because the little buddy can easily tangle the yarn. Use crayons to add facial features to the bunny.

Activity #4

Take the poem “Red Eggs, Blue Eggs” and read a line to your buddy. Have your buddy point to each word and read it back to you. When you hit words like dotted or zigzag use a crayon to illustrate these words above the word. Then have your buddy read the words in each box and colour the egg to match. If he/she is unsure, guide them to find the words in the poem. Today I learned the following about my buddy:

Figure 5. Buddy Instruction Sheet for March 25

Again, when the grade 11 and 12 students returned to their classroom they made brief comments on the activity sheets in their journal about something they learned that day about their little buddy.

During cycle #2 on March 11, 2002 I chose to do a mid-point reflection about cycle 1 (see appendix B) and asked the students to respond in their journals to “What have you noticed about Mrs. Foster’s mannerisms/attitude with her children?” The following are a few of the comments made:

She is very kind and calm towards the children.

She takes time to listen.

Mrs. Foster talks to her children in terms they understand and in a soft, low voice.
Mrs. Foster is very encouraging, quick to give praise and tries her best to make them feel good about themselves.

She doesn't yell at the kids.

After this activity I was able to discuss in our regular class the importance of good role modeling and good parenting.

On March 25th I asked the students to respond in their student journals to the questions: What are some ways you praised your buddy today?

Some of the responses in the student's journals were:

- I really like encouraging my buddy by telling him how well he is working. I give him 'hi fives' too- he really likes it.
- Very nice to hear you use your manners!
- I showed encouragement like way to go, you can do it.
- I said things like good work and good job!
- I told my buddy she was a good colourer, that she was pretty, and that she was smart.
- You are doing better than me! Way to go!

April 4: The focus on April 4 was language arts reading activities. We started a unit on bugs and insects. The activities were: reading books, making spider handprints, tissue butterflies, and making spider webs made with yarn and glue.

April 8: The same focus from April 4 was used, but with the PM kindergarten class. The students again listened to their buddies read and they gave them positive feedback of praise and encouragement.
April 16: The focus on April 16 was safety, mathematics and cooperative game strategies. We worked through a safety program about dealing with nosebleeds, choking, and fire escape safety in the home. Time was allotted to play a board game together. Learning about rules, fairness, honesty and good sportsmanship were emphasized.

Back in the classroom between kindergarten visits we followed up with discussions that were appropriate for the activity. For example, we discussed in small groups and then as a class how children differ in their developmental abilities, and also their personalities. The high school students were able to share observations of and their experiences with their kindergarten buddy when an appropriate example and when helpful for others to understand. The contact with the kindergarten buddies helped the high school students to understand developmental tasks for children because they were able to observe them in action. During cycle 2 I asked the students to complete a second major reflection. (see appendix C).

4.2.3 Observations

On numerous occasions during Cycle 2 I observed students expressing kindness and caring to their buddies. They also were being good role models without realizing it. One observation I made March 25 was the kindness Karen (high school buddy) showed to one kindergarten buddy Kathleen, who was clearly visibly upset and crying softly because her big buddy was absent that day. Kathleen (who was paired with someone who had a buddy) immediately responded by going over to her, crouched down to her level, leaned over to her and said enthusiastically, yet gently, “I’ll be your big buddy today!” Kathleen slowly opened up and by the end of the class she was smiling (not a common occurrence for her) and had been encouraged to cheer up. Karen had made an effort to relate at the
level of the kindergarten buddy and comfort her. It made a tremendous difference to this little buddy that another big buddy offered to join her in the activities that day.

Figure 4.3. Karen comforting Kathleen

Figure 4.4. Karen and Kathleen – a changed attitude after Karen empathizing
Karen expressed to me verbally (and in her journal) that it made her feel good to help Kathleen adjust and be happy. She was proud that she was able to do it. (show true empathy).

Here are three other observations and comments I heard and recorded in my journal while the students were working with the kindergarten students.

On March 25 I observed Jason (high school buddy) and Dominique (kindergarten buddy) performing their paper puppet stories. Jason became very involved in the story they were creating with the puppets. He said to his buddy in a very high pitched voice “will you be my friend?” Dominique let out a series of happy giggles as her response. She also told Mrs. Foster how much she loved her big buddy, and that he was so crazy and funny. Because Jason is normally very self absorbed and associates with many “macho” male teenagers at school, this was a great example of a young man developing empathy.

On April 16 I noted in my journal my observations of one high school buddy saying to her kindergarten buddy:

“I made a vase in grade 3 for MY mom. It took me a really long time-I hated arts and crafts-but I spent a lot of time on it. She still has it in her bathroom. I think that’s really neat that she values it so much! Your mom probably will too.”

This indicated to me that the high school buddy was reflecting back to her childhood, interpreting the importance of that experience and then putting herself in the shoes of her little buddy. This is an excellent example of the student looking beyond herself and demonstrating empathy.
Again on April 16 I noted in my journal observing Elizabeth (high school buddy) and Becky (kindergarten buddy) saying:

“Come sit with me and we’ll make a special vase together to hold the flowers you made.” (putting her arm around her and sitting her on her lap)

Elizabeth was demonstrating to her buddy that she was important and that she cared about her.

These comments that I overheard and documented clearly exhibited to me that my students were doing their best to put themselves in their little buddies situation and forget about their own world for awhile. This is not always an easy task for a teenager.

4.2.4 Reflections

The students seemed to be relating very well to their little buddies. They were becoming more involved in this cycle and they were seeing the results of their praise and encouragement. The students were developing an understanding of the importance of positive praise and good role modeling. Activities on March 25 involved making paper bag puppets together and acting out the story as it was read. Each kindergarten child made a paper bag puppet and used it as a prop for their story. The high school buddy helped by responding to the story the kindergarten buddy had memorized.

Memorization and changing voices were emphasized. Carleen was particularly attentive towards her buddy and showed clearly that she cared about Allison’s story. Here is a photo that captured them acting out their story together. (see illustration 4.5)
Illustration 4.5. Carleen and Allison acting out a story together

Illustration 4.6. Carleen and Allison playing a game together
4.2.5 Emerging Questions

Reflecting upon the questions that emerged from cycle 1, during cycle 2 I was able to confirm that the high school students were consistently more involved in the Buddy Project than at the beginning. Upon examining the photographs and my field notes I could see that the relationships between the buddies were becoming closer. The high school students were beginning to noticeably demonstrate more empathy and caring.

After examining the activities and comments from cycle #2, the questions that emerged for me from this second cycle that would lead me into cycle 3 were:

- Will the students understand that they are learning empathy through working with the kindergarten children?
- As a teacher should I design more specific activities that will help reinforce my students show caring and empathy?
4.3 Identifying Empathy Through Literature (Cycle 3, April 24 to June 7, 2003)

4.3.1 Plan

In the third cycle I chose on my own, to introduce a new activity. I had not tried this activity before and I felt it would emphasize and reinforce the concept of empathy and possibly help both my students and the little buddies to understand more clearly what it meant to show empathy. Mrs. Foster agreed that it would be a good activity to try. The activity involved examining specific children's literature that Mrs Foster and I selected as good examples. The stories we selected had a primary focus on empathy and caring. Although the students had read together on previous occasions, the emphasis had not been on empathy. It had been on practicing reading and spending time together. We planned interaction days on April 24, May 1 and 9, and June 3, 5, and 7.

4.3.2 Action

The high school students and their kindergarten buddies selected one of the books to read together. They were then asked to identify where in the story empathy and caring were being shown. The kindergarten buddy told their high school buddy what they could and if it was difficult the high school buddy helped them recognize the empathy shown in the story. The high school students helped the kindergarten buddies describe the caring and kindness found in the stories. The high school students later wrote in their journal reflections about the interpretations they had made with the kindergarten buddies about examples of empathy and caring (see appendix D). Here are a few comments made by the
kindergarten students to their high school buddies about the stories. They were recorded in their reflections.

**Corduroy's Birthday** (Hennessy, 1997) *His friends planned a surprise party for him, and Corduroy (the bear) packed food and clothes that didn't fit him anymore to give to the children’s shelter and the food bank - this was his way of being kind and caring.*

**Baba** (Brown, 1997) *When a little girl goes for a walk her blanket unravels as she walks. She cries when there is nothing left, but her brother and sister comforted her by walking back and collecting it all back for her and fixing it. Mary (the little buddy) said that the family showed love and caring and understanding.*

**Me And Mr. Mah** (Spalding & Wilson, 1999) *A boy moved into a neighborhood and made friends with the old man next door. Mr. Mao gave him one of his Chinese boxes and when Mr Mao was in the hospital the boy visited him and drew him pictures. When Hannah read the story she recognized the empathy and said “awe, that's so nice” He is a kind boy!*

**Hansel & Gretel** (Hunia, adapter, 1993) *The brother and sister were kind to each other by the sister bringing food to him when he was locked up. Gaylene learned the importance of kindness and caring from the story.*

Generally, the students found that empathy was a “big word” for their little buddies and they did not really understand what the word meant. However when asked about caring and kindness shown in the stories they were all able to identify these situations.

4.3.3 Observations and Reflections

On April 24 I noted in my journal an incident between Natalie (high school buddy) and Brian (kindergarten buddy) (see illustration)

April 24/02 journal notes:

*Brian was a very quiet, shy little kindergarten boy who can easily go unnoticed in a group. His home life was not particularly good, with very little attention shown to him at home. He was often seen on the streets of the town of Westbank by himself or with his*
brother who is in grade 3. Natalie, Brian's high school buddy, knew his birthday was coming up and she decided on her own that he needed a little extra attention. She brought a gift for Brian for his birthday the next buddy day and took him aside in the coat room to quietly present him with the gift. He carefully unwrapped it, gave the small stuffed toy a hug and made a little grin of sheer delight. He then turned and gave Natalie a gentle hug. She was very touched by his reaction and they had a very close bond after that. She sees him places and they always give hugs and hellos, and Natalie expressed to me that she sometimes wishes she could take him home with her! She plans on maintaining contact and has offered to take him places this summer. (Natalie spent last year living on the streets in Calgary before returning to school this year). She says that she could totally empathize with his life because she had similar feelings.

Illustration 4.8. Natalie giving Brian a surprise birthday gift.
Natalie was not a particularly good student in other courses. In fact, I would sometimes hear complaints about her attitude in other classes. She just wanted to graduate, so she came back to school to finish. However, in my course Natalie became the main organizer of the final kindergarten party and was the best student at handling the games with the children. I know that this experience provided her added confidence and had a softening effect on her abrupt personality.

Illustration 4.8 and 4.9. Brian hugging the gift and then hugging Natalie.
On May 9, I described another observation between Jeremy (high school buddy) and Darren (kindergarten buddy).

Jeremy was listening to Darren read. Darren kept looking up at Jeremy for encouragement and Jeremy was saying 'good job, you can read lots of words.'

After, while outside doing the science activity in the garden, Darren saw the bike rack and said to Jeremy "My brother rode his new bike to school today. Do you want to see it?" Jeremy said "Sure! After we finish this we can." Later I was wondering whether Jeremy would remember but I overheard him say "Now show me the cool bike your brother has!"
Illustration 4.11. Darren showing Jeremy his brother’s new bike

These two boys had formed a very close bond. Jeremy was also a student who was not always successful in school, but he seemed to really enjoy this course. He made a great effort to participate and Mrs. Foster specifically remarked how much his buddies enjoyed Jeremy’s attention and sense of humour. His other little buddy said he was weird sometimes but lots of fun!

The students became very involved in their story reading. I could tell that they felt very comfortable together and the little buddies responded well to the guidance from their big buddies. Both groups found it easy to identify caring and kindness in the literature when they searched together and I feel it definitely reinforced the concept of empathy. All students that were interviewed expressed that they felt it would help to do more
examining of empathy in literature to be sure of their understanding. In the future I would set aside more opportunities to read a variety of empathic stories and Mrs. Foster agreed with this.


At the final year end party there were numerous observations by Mrs. Foster and myself of students showing caring and empathy towards their buddies or someone elses. Part of the year end party was a games session in our school’s gymnasium. The high school students planned the party and they arranged to have a huge nylon parachute to play with. The students from both classes all formed a large circle to lift the parachute up. For a few kindergarten children it was a little frightening to go under the parachute when it was lifted up. One high school student Janice, noticed that Kathleen was feeling a little uncomfortable about it. She knelt down beside her and reassured her that it would be
okay to go under the parachute. It was a very kind and thoughtful gesture of her to consider Kathleen's fears as significant, rather than brushing them off. (see illustration)

Illustration 4.13. Janice re-assuring Kathleen that it's okay to go under the parachute during the game. (demonstrating empathy)

Mrs. Foster and I both noticed that the students were very diligent about including all the children and encouraging them to have fun and be part of the group. Nicole, who was not doing well in school in other classes was particularly good at planning and carrying out the games and activities for the party. She went out of her way to help all of the children have fun. These personal observations by both myself and Mrs. Foster reinforced to us the benefits of this project. So much more was being learned than child development.

4.4 Students' Final Reflections on the Buddy Project

At the end of the semester I gave all 24 students that were involved in the Buddy Project as part of the Human Services Course a survey that consisted of four questions. I
asked them in their own words to define empathy. I asked them if they felt they had
shown empathy to their kindergarten buddy this term and to describe how they had done
this. Finally, I asked them how the Buddy Project encouraged them to show empathy and
caring (see appendix E).

4.4.1 Defining Empathy

All 24 students defined empathy adequately. All 24 students felt that they had shown
empathy to their buddies. Many expressed it in different ways, but their understanding of
the meaning of empathy was evident. Here are a few examples taken from the student’s
feedback questionnaire:

*Empathy is trying to relate to someone, understanding how they feel and more
importantly why they feel that way. It’s putting yourself in someone else’s shoes to relate
to them better.*

*Empathy is putting yourself in somebody else’s place and trying to feel what they are
feeling.*

*The caring and kindness someone shows to a person even if they haven’t experienced the
same situation.*

*Empathy is sharing of another person’s feelings or state of mind without actually going
through the same experience.*

*Empathy is a sense of understanding and sharing of another person’s feelings.*

4.4.2 Ways of Showing Empathy and Caring

After examining the survey responses, I found some commonalities in their responses
to the question “How has the buddy project encouraged you to show empathy and
caring?” Their answers were individually expressed in a comment format, however the
following common responses /notions emerged:
a) They learned to be a better person
b) They were more caring and giving towards others
c) Saw themselves as being an example or role model for them
d) Had a better understanding of how young children think and feel
e) Became more loving, willing to make an effort for someone else
f) Developed an understanding of the child they once were

Of the common responses, 11 out of 24 said that the Buddy Project helped them to be more loving and willing to make an effort to show empathy. Ten out of 24 said that it made them more caring and giving towards others. Seven out of 24 expressed that it made them aware that they are a role model to children. Seven out 24 said that it helped them to learn about themselves and be a better person. Six out of 24 said that they learned more about how children think and feel. Four out of 24 said that it made them more understanding by reflecting on the child they once were. A number of the students responded by listing several of these responses.

From the questionnaire here are a few examples of the student’s comments:

1. **They learned to be a better person:**

   “It has taught me to listen and be kind and caring towards children younger than me. It has taught me to be patient and understanding as much as I can. It will make me a better parent some day”

2. **They were more caring and giving towards others:**

   “The buddy project has encouraged me in many ways. It has helped me to be more gentle and caring towards little children, and showed me how much they are really capable of doing. It helped me to encourage my buddies more, tell them that they did well on what they did, and showed my love.”
"The buddy project encouraged me to show empathy because it showed me that by showing empathy it makes my buddy happy and makes her feel loved and important. So now I know that by showing empathy I can make people feel important and feel good about themselves"

3. They saw themselves as being an example or a role model for the children:

"The buddy project helped me to see how much I enjoy spending time with kids. I really saw how much the children watched me and I realized I was setting an example for them. It was an awesome responsibility that I enjoyed."

4. Had a better understanding of how young children think and feel:

"Since the buddy project I have noticed I have been more empathic towards my brother and sister at home. When they needed help with something from school I never used to like doing it, but now I realize that when I was their age I also needed help, so now I'm more willing to help them out."

5. Became more loving and willing to make an effort for someone else:

"It has shown me to be aware of how others are feeling, and now I know some ways to make younger kids feel special. Before the Buddy Project I didn’t get a chance to interact with kids, and I never knew that children need to feel important, and to feel smart. So when I told my buddy “good job” or “I really need you to help me” they felt good about what they were doing and made me want to do it more."

6. Developed an understanding of the child they once were:

"I think being around children reminds you of the loving and innocent person that you once were. They teach you how to be that person again and make you want to be a better person."

The above comments revealed to me that it was evident the high school students had learned to be more caring and empathic. The one student expressed clearly that she was able to put herself in her brothers' shoes more easily after this experience. One of the
novel comments not expressed by anyone else was in regards to helping others. She
expressed that “the buddy project has shown me to show empathy and caring because it
helps people through hard times”.

These comments indicated to me that their understanding of the importance of
empathy is greater from this experience. All of these personal comments verified to me
that these students are developing more empathy.

4.4.3 Student Interviews

At the end of the semester I interviewed six students to gain additional feedback
about the students’ experiences in the Buddy Project. I specifically wanted to ask if they
could observe a change in their relationship with their buddy from looking at the images
taken over the semester.(see appendix for a list of the questions asked) The interviews
took place June 17 and 18, during the week of final exams, and were approximately 15-
20 minutes each.

I asked the students a few questions regarding their interactions with their buddy, and
I asked them to examine the photos taken during class. I asked them to explain what was
happening in the photo of them to help them recall the situations. They all remembered
the activities and were able to explain the scene well. I particularly wanted to see if they
noticed a change in the buddy interaction over time. They examined the photos, and then
shared some comments:

Mary shared that her buddy, Bobbie, was shy at first but after a few visits he opened
up more. She shared that her buddy said several times “I love you; you’re my best
friend!!” She said that he always wanted to sit on her lap. She also shared with me this comment about her other buddy. “I felt WOW! This is INCREDIBLE how much this little guy looks up to me!! He really enjoyed the individual attention”. Mary said that she had become much more aware of the importance of having empathy. She said she was able to relate to her buddy better and to other children better from being a part of the buddy project. She felt more stories with empathy in them would be very good reinforcement.

Lori said she definitely learned empathy and learned to understand children better. She taught Lana to be more caring towards others, and gave the example of when they were on the playground. Someone got hurt on the slide and Lana went over and made sure they were okay. This was a noticeable change for Lana, she says. Lana gave her hugs quite often.

Illustration 4.14. Both Carleen and Jackie recognized from the photos how well Grant related to them. Putting themselves in his shoes and playing along with him helped their understanding of him.
Jackie said she learned patience from her buddy and how a child’s mind works. She feels she showed her buddy Grant that older kids like to have fun too, especially in the playground. (see illustration 4.14 of Carleen and Jackie on monkey bars.)

Jenn shared that she saw lots of buddies “connecting” throughout the buddy project. She told me that she didn’t even know what empathy was until this course and that she learned a lot. Her buddy Brian learned even more about empathy from the story book Franklin they read together and she felt more reading of empathic stories would be beneficial.

Christy found it interesting to get down to her buddy’s level and learn how to relate to him. She particularly enjoyed leading the races at the year-end party. She helped ‘pump them up’ for the games. The interviews did confirm that the students had learned a great deal about recognizing and encouraging empathy and caring.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this action research was to understand, through systematic inquiry, how the Home Economics curriculum, and in particular The Buddy Project, might encourage the development of empathy and caring among the participants: high school students and kindergarten buddies. While the work of Noddings (1984) and Baumeister and Leary (1995) for example, provided a good theoretical backdrop, the task of providing a context for empathy to develop became the focus of my work as a teacher-researcher in the classroom. Thus, while the research literature highlights the idea that empathy can be taught, this action research takes up the questions of how this might be accomplished. Making the connections from research and theory to practice and back leads to praxis: to better informed, thoughtful, reflective and intentional work on my part as the teacher. This chapter provides the reader with a summary of The Buddy Project and conclusions that can be drawn, it suggests some pedagogical implications and directions for the future of Home Economics instruction, and closes with a few concluding comments that reflect on my personal and professional growth as a consequence of engaging in this action research project.

5.1 Summary and Conclusions

The overriding question, How can The Home Economics Buddy Project encourage caring and empathic behavior?, is followed by two inquiry questions: (1) What kinds of structured learning tasks must I design in order to foster empathy?; and (2) How can I strategically partner students so that the key features of stability and continuity take
hold in supporting the development of a caring relationship? The answer to the latter question lies in the partnering of high school kids with kindergarten kids. The answer to the former question is embedded in the planning phase of each of the three cycles. One cycle informs the next, and thus, the work of planning (task design), action (observation) and reflection (interpretation/theory construction) are all dynamically interrelated elements of action research. Figure 5.1 provides a schematic overview and summary of The Buddy Project.
Figure 5.1 Summary of the Buddy Project

How Can The Buddy Project Encourage Empathy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle:</th>
<th>Cycle 1</th>
<th>Cycle 2</th>
<th>Cycle 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities within each cycle</td>
<td>Getting to know each other</td>
<td>Praise &amp; encouragement “Catching them being good”.</td>
<td>Identifying empathy through shared reading of children’s literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions emerging from each cycle</td>
<td>Will the students become more involved with the children as time passes? Will they be more caring?</td>
<td>Will the students understand that they are learning empathy? Should I design more specific activities to reinforce caring and empathy?</td>
<td>Will the students be able to transfer this knowledge and understanding of empathy to other situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning: Task Design</td>
<td>Maximize 1-1 contact rather than group activities.</td>
<td>Develop listening skills. Focused observation on kindergarten teachers' interaction.</td>
<td>Reinforcing, practicing empathy through a structured learning task. Compassion, perspective-taking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action/Observation: Observed behaviors</td>
<td>Initial resistance, shyness of both big kids and little kids.</td>
<td>Big Kids can identify kindness, patience, praise and encouragement in action. Seeing leads to doing...</td>
<td>Buddies identify and describe empathy from stories. Buddies increasingly and spontaneously demonstrate empathy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection: Interpretation, Theory Construction.</td>
<td>Relationships take effort/time to launch and solidify. The nature of the partners/relationship matters: accepting, non-judgmental.</td>
<td>Modeling is a necessary but insufficient feature of teaching empathy.</td>
<td>Relationship between Buddies is crystallizing. This is the key feature of empathy. A deepening, qualitative transformation of individuals. Learning for living and giving in a caring community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FINDINGS:
- Students are becoming more loving, giving, and caring.
- They are becoming “better people”, and good role models
- Better understanding of how children think and feel.
- Developed an understanding of the child they once were
- More willing to make an effort for someone else

From practice to praxis
Informed, Reflective and Intentional

REMAINING QUESTION: How can I strategically partner students to encourage empathy?
The following conclusions salient to the questions at hand emerge from this overview. Firstly, direct, explicit instruction about empathy and caring by way of structured task design appears to have had the intended effects: there is a qualitative transformation in the students’ demonstrated behaviors that are interpreted and understood to reflect these attributes. The behavior goes well beyond naming and identifying, and includes the spontaneous and authentic gestures of sharing, giving, showing patience and kindness, listening, offering praise and encouragement, for example – behaviors identified as characteristics of empathy and caring. High school students are also able to recognize and identify the development of empathy and caring in themselves, and think of themselves as becoming better people and better role models.

Secondly, is the value of experiential learning. It would appear that these high school students can develop understanding best through lived experiences. It is in the doing of something (making it concrete) that the embedded abstract construct (i.e. empathy) takes hold, becomes internalized and understood in a way that the students can become metacognitively aware of and capable of reflection. This harkens back to the egocentrism – the inability to de-center -- that is characteristic of pre-operational thought of kindergarten students, and in a sense, the high school students as well. By forcing each partner to consider the “other” through the task design, each is forced to de-center and focus on the development of the relationship.

Finally, a durable and stable relationship is central to the development of empathy and caring. For the high school students, this kind of relationship has often eluded them in life thus far for a variety of reasons: lack of opportunity, lack of success in previous
attempts, lack of attributes of caring and empathy that nurtures and cultivates these relationships, lack of ability to act on an abstraction like "empathy" and hence to enjoy its benefits. Partnering high school students with kindergarten students was a strategy designed to mitigate the effects of previous failures, and it appears to have been successful.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

While The Buddy Project offers a particularity – an example – of an initiative that is deemed successful in realizing the goals of encouraging pro-social behaviors among high school students and kindergarten children, there are possibilities for the generalizable. Many aspects of The Buddy Project can readily be adopted or adapted in other teaching and learning settings where Home Economics is offered. The complexities of class size, a conveniently located kindergarten program, willing collaborative teaching partners, stability of student enrolment throughout the term, to be sure, must be taken into account before launching an initiative such as this one. But these considerations seem minor, when compared to the benefits of The Buddy Project.

At the very least, what Home Economics teachers can take from this project is the need to design learning tasks that will directly engage students in empathy and caring behaviors. Mere exposure to the opportunities for this action alone does not suffice to realize these curricular goals. The Buddy Project is rich with suggestions for learning tasks that provide the scaffolded supports that these students appear to require in order to succeed. Home Economics, is by its nature, replete with opportunities for experiential
learning. The Buddy Project once again highlights this as fundamental in the learning needs of our students.

Lastly, as educators, we need to think of ways that we can strategically make connections between our students and an “other” ... one who is open, trusting, non judgmental, unconditionally accepting and giving. Young children immediately come to mind, but the developmentally delayed, the elderly, and even caring for pets (perhaps from the local SPCA, animal rehabilitation center, the zoo) come to mind as possibilities.

5.3 Concluding Comments and Reflections

Perhaps it is in the minute details of situated context -- the particular -- that epiphany occurs. Those moments of “catching them being good” ... those images of students becoming increasingly more of themselves are the impressions of The Buddy Project that will last. There are also those moments of rare insight that have been captured on film, that have taught me the value of intentionality in planning, the importance of experiential learning and lived experiences, and the centrality of relationship as transformative forces in the lives of teenagers. Up to now, many of them have not been very successful in enjoying the benefits that stable relationships bring to enrich our lives. As the relationships between The Buddies deepened, it became more clear in the actions of the participants that trust and a sense of belonging may have a profound impact on the daily lives of those involved: most of life is “just showing up”.

Simply knowing that they would be missed by the kindergarten students was impetus enough for improved attendance in Home Economics class, a further benefit noted.
Action research has a further impact, however. The researcher, as an active participant is transformed as well. Deepening insight into my work in the classroom has been a journey of professional development unmatched. I have grown to be more critically aware of the impact I can have upon the lives of the students I teach. I have felt a renewed responsibility for the learning that takes place in the classroom, and not just the mere delivery of material. It has caused be to be more reflective of my teaching practices and to reach out and encourage my students to be more reflective. By allowing students the opportunity to reflect, it helps them to see that learning is a life-long process, that there is a purpose to learning. This particularly applies to the students who were not normally successful in school. Action research has also given me a deeper and richer understanding of how teenagers think and feel. It has given me a fresh appreciation for them. Finally, it has helped me, as an educator and as a member in the community, to be more empathic and caring. For all of us, The Buddy Project leaves us being better people for having engaged in some way and at some level ...
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hunia, F. (1993 adapter) Hansel & Gretel. Leicester, ENG. Ladybird Publisher


Appendix A:

SCHEDULE OF KINDERGARTEN INTERACTION TIMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE- MONTH OF:</th>
<th>NUMBER of CLASSROOM LESSONS (90 min each)</th>
<th>NUMBER of KINDERGARTEN INTERACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FEBRUARY</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCH</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APRIL</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUNE</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCHEDULE OF PLANNED DATES OF INTERACTION TIMES:

Morning Kindergarten class 9:00-10:20am

Afternoon Kindergarten class 12:00-1:15pm

February 18 12:00pm  April 16 9:00am
February 26 9:00am   April 18, 12:00pm
February 28 12:00pm  April 24, 12:00pm
March 4 9:00 am      May 1, 12:00pm
March 14 9:00 am     May 9, 9:00am
March 25 12:00pm     June 3, 9:00am
April 4 9:00am       June 5, 12:00pm
April 8 12:00pm      June 7, 9:00am
Appendix B:

Student Reflection For Journal (about Cycle 1)

Kindergarten Buddies Reflection March 11, 2002

1. What activities have you been doing with your buddies up to this point?

2. You have been learning ABOUT your buddy up to this point. What do you think you are learning from your experience with your buddy so far?

3. What have you noticed (observed) about Mrs. Fosters mannerisms and attitude with her children?
Appendix C

Student Reflection Questions For Journal (about Cycle 2)

KINDERGARTEN BUDDY REFLECTION (FOR STUDENT JOURNAL)
March 25, 2002

1. What are some different ways you praised your buddy today?

2. What does praise do for a child?

3. How did your buddy respond?

4. Why is it important in parenting or caregiving?
Appendix D:

MAJOR REFLECTION (during Cycle 3) May 30 and June 3, 2002

TODAY'S ACTIVITY: ENCOURAGING EMPATHY THROUGH LITERATURE

1. Name the title of your story: ________________________________

2. Give a brief description of the plot of the story you read with your buddy:

3. Ask your little buddy to tell you what they think having “empathy” means:

4. From the story you read together, ask your buddy to identify WHERE in the story they saw caring and empathy being shown. Give specific examples please.

5. Do you feel your buddy understands what having empathy means? Why or why not?

6. How will and understanding of a characteristic such as empathy help your buddy in the near future?
Appendix E

Feedback On Buddy Project

FINAL COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ON THE BUDDY PROJECT

Name:_______

1. In your own words, define "empathy".

2. Do you feel you have shown empathy to your buddy this semester? If so, how?

3. How has the buddy project encouraged you to show empathy and caring?

4. Do you think the buddy project was beneficial to the Human Services course? Should it be implemented in other schools?
Appendix F

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Upon examining the photos, describe what is happening in the pictures.

2. How has your relationship with your buddy changed since the beginning of the semester?

3. Do you see a change in your interaction from the earlier photos to the later ones?

4. Do you see empathy being demonstrated in the photos?